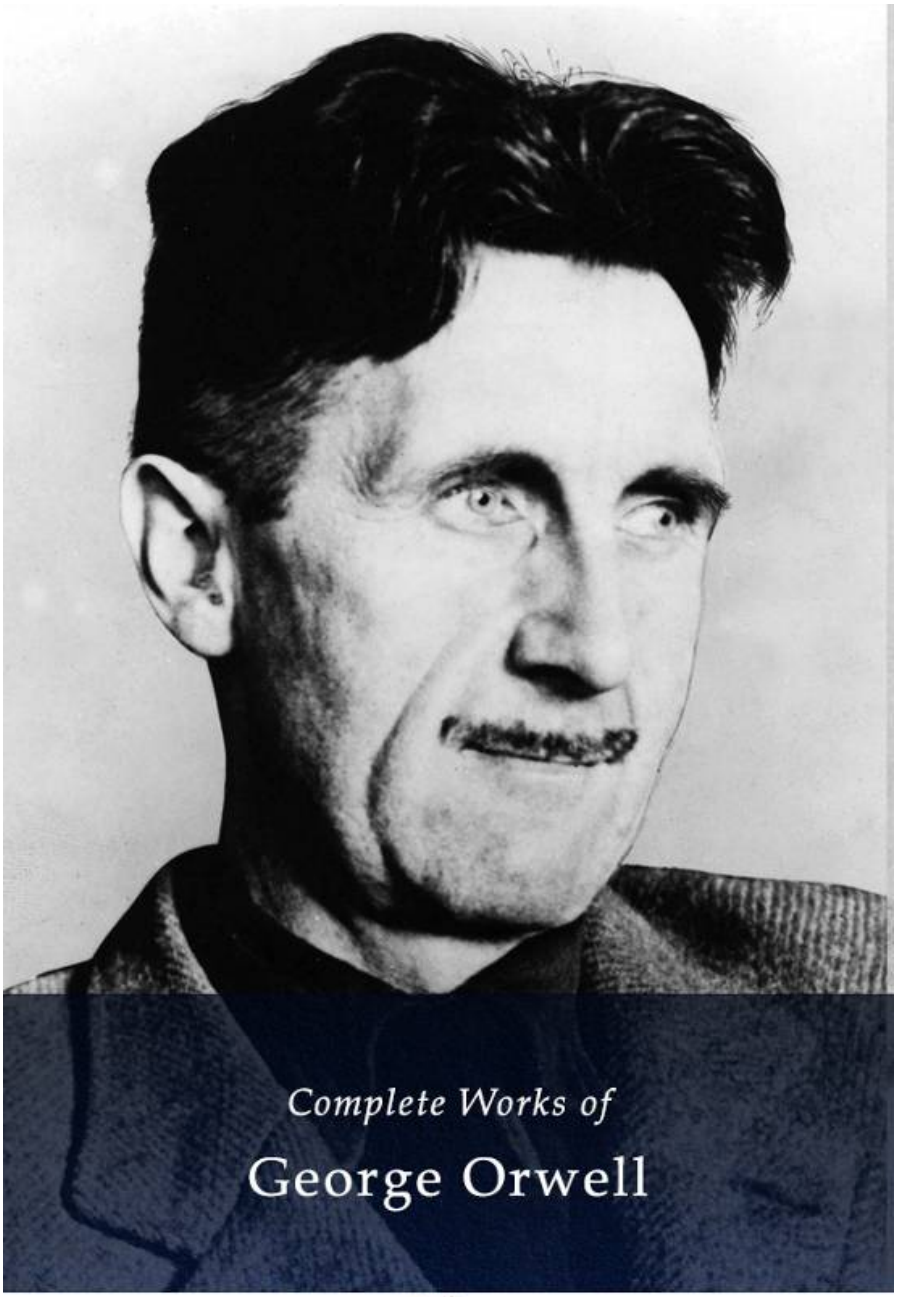

Complete Works of

George Orwell

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Series Three

The Complete Works of

GEORGE ORWELL

(1903–1950)

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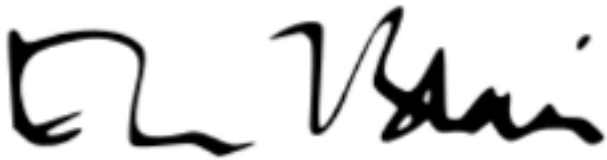

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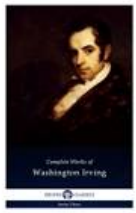

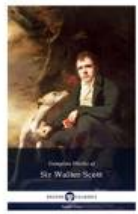

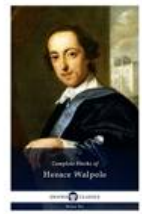

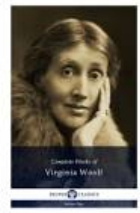

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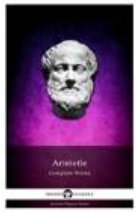

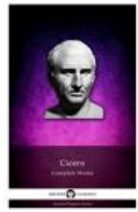

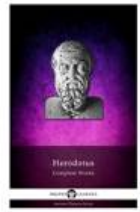

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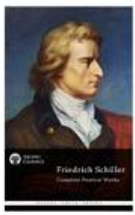

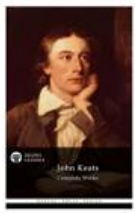

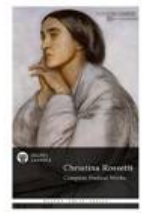

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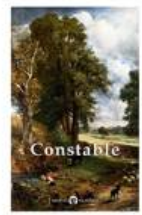

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The Complete Works of

GEORGE ORWELL

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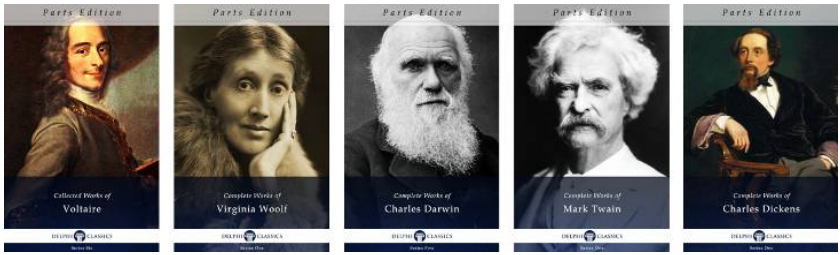

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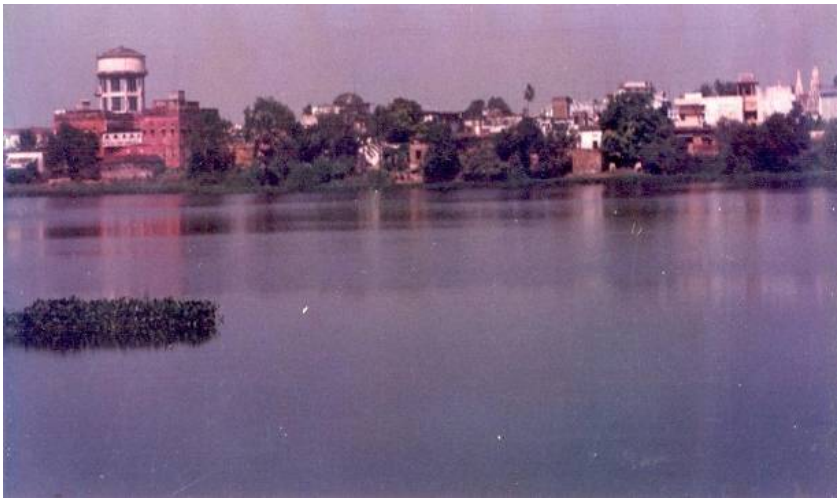
The Novels



Motihari, Bihar, in North-East India — where Eric Blair (known world-wide by his pen name George Orwell) was born. His great-grandfather Charles Blair was a wealthy country gentleman in Dorset who married Lady Mary Fane, daughter of Thomas Fane, 8th Earl of Westmorland, and had income as an absentee landlord of plantations in Jamaica.

Orwell as a baby

Orwell as a young man

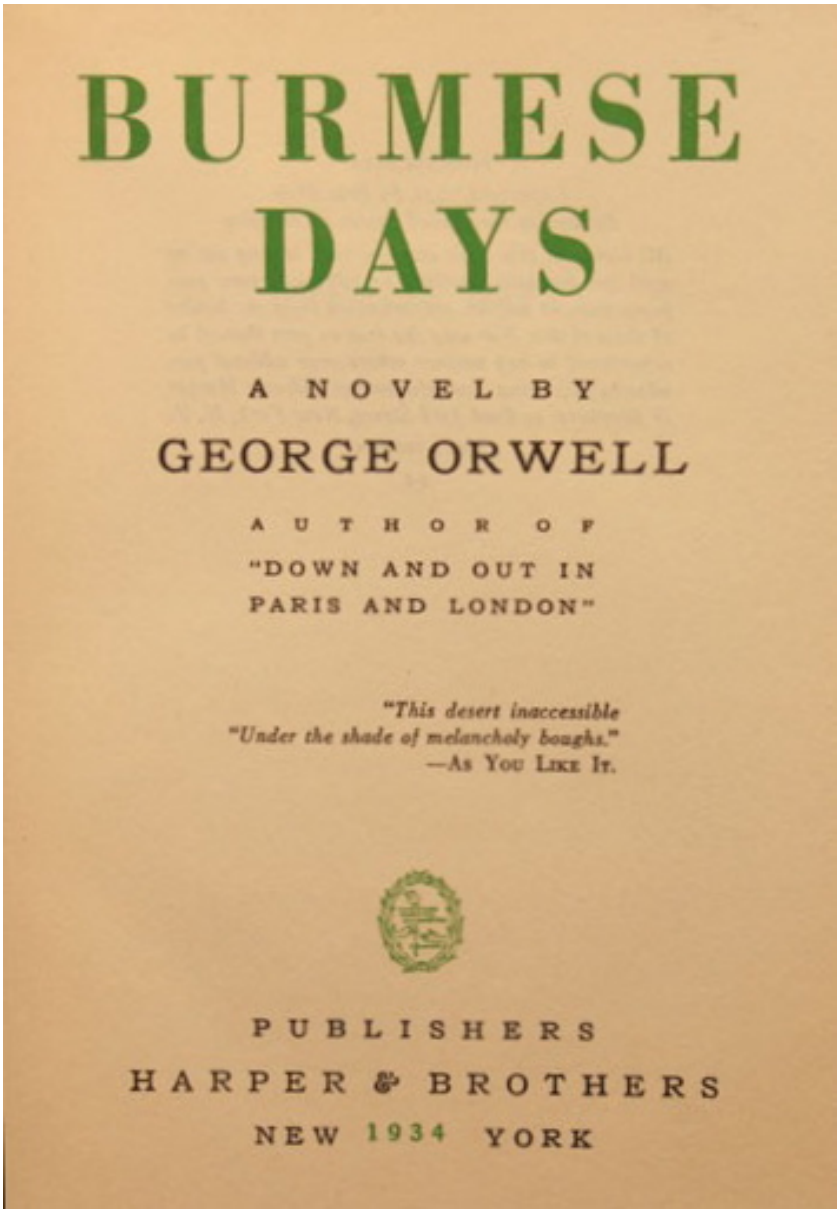
BURMESE DAYS

Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days,* was published by Harper and Brothers in 1934 in the USA. Due to concerns about possible libellous content in the depiction of certain characters, the novel was not published until the following year in the UK. The work is a scathing attack on colonial life in Burma during the British occupation. The novel is centred on John Flory, a thirty five year old teak merchant, who has become disillusioned with colonial life and the attitudes of his fellow Europeans towards Burma and its people. Flory has a great appreciation of Burmese culture and longs to meet a female companion that shares his views and values. When Elizabeth Lackersteen, the orphaned niece of the timber firm manager, arrives on the scene, Flory believes she is the answer to his desires. Elizabeth possesses none of the qualities or values that Flory wishes in a partner and yet he deceives himself, falls in love and pursues her.

Orwell explores the issues of imperialism, racism and the notion of personal identity in *Burmese Days*. Flory is trapped between his admiration for Burmese culture and dislike of colonial rule, as well as his attachment to English traditions and expectations. He persists in his pursuit of Elizabeth because she fulfils the role of wife that is expected for an English woman and is what society deems a suitable partner for an English gentleman. While Flory is critical of European racism towards the indigenous population, he is content to have a Burmese mistress, but would never consider it appropriate to marry a non- European.

Orwell had spent five years during the 1920's as a police officer in Burma. He had witnessed the nature and impact of imperialism and the horror of the exploitation of the people by colonial rulers. The idea of a minority being dominated and exploited by a ruling class, and the subjugation of the individual in society is a theme that is repeated in Orwell's later works. These ideas reach a horrifying conclusion in the dystopian masterpiece *Nineteen- Eighty Four.* In *Burmese Days*, Orwell reveals how this oppressive organisation of

society benefits no one, the ruled are denied freedom and individuals in the ruling class are encouraged to become dehumanised. It is through this type of environment that identity is lost and atrocities committed.



The title page of the first edition

Orwell's police regiment in Burma

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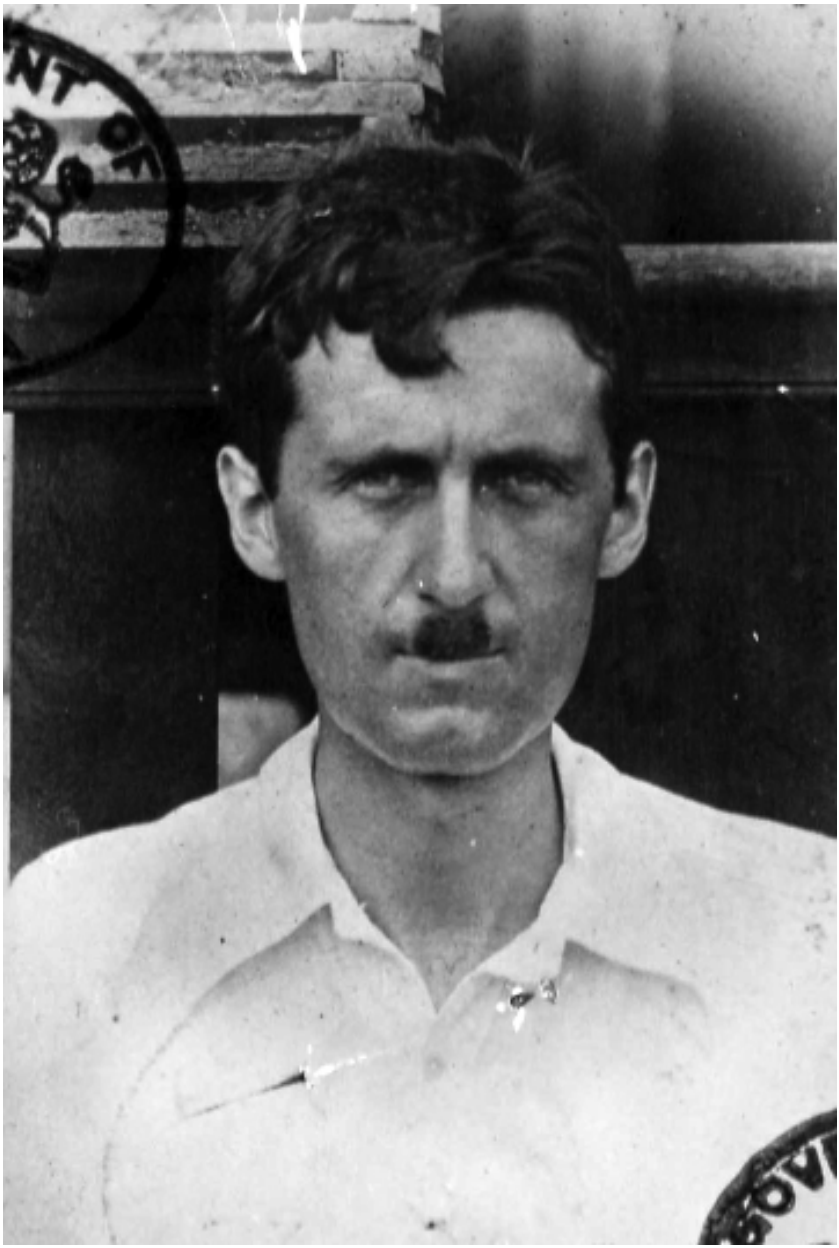


Orwell pictured in a passport photo during his Burma years

Chapter 1

‘This desert inaccessible
Under the shade of melancholy boughs’
As you like it.

U Po Kyin, Sub-divisional Magistrate of Kyauktada, in Upper Burma, was sitting in his veranda. It was only half past eight, but the month was April, and there was a closeness in the air, a threat of the long, stifling midday hours. Occasional faint breaths of wind, seeming cool by contrast, stirred the newly drenched orchids that hung from the eaves. Beyond the orchids one could see the dusty, curved trunk of a palm tree, and then the blazing ultramarine sky. Up in the zenith, so high that it dazzled one to look at them, a few vultures circled without the quiver of a wing.

Unblinking, rather like a great porcelain idol, U Po Kyin gazed out into the fierce sunlight. He was a man of fifty, so fat that for years he had not risen from his chair without help, and yet shapely and even beautiful in his grossness; for the Burmese do not sag and bulge like white men, but grow fat symmetrically, like fruits swelling. His face was vast, yellow and quite unwrinkled, and his eyes were tawny. His feet — squat, high-arched feet with the toes all the same length — were bare, and so was his cropped head, and he wore one of those vivid Arakanese longyis with green and magenta checks which the Burmese wear on informal occasions. He was chewing betel from a lacquered box on the table, and thinking about his past life.

It had been a brilliantly successful life. U Po Kyin’s earliest memory, back in the eighties, was of standing, a naked pot-bellied child, watching the British troops march victorious into Mandalay. He remembered the terror he had felt of those columns of great beef-fed men, red-faced and red-coated; and the long rifles over their shoulders, and the heavy, rhythmic tramp of their boots. He had taken to his heels after watching them for a few minutes. In his childish way he had grasped that his own people were no match for this race of giants. To fight on the side of the British, to become a

parasite upon them, had been his ruling ambition, even as a child.

At seventeen he had tried for a Government appointment, but he had failed to get it, being poor and friendless, and for three years he had worked in the stinking labyrinth of the Mandalay bazaars, clerking for the rice merchants and sometimes stealing. Then when he was twenty a lucky stroke of blackmail put him in possession of four hundred rupees, and he went at once to Rangoon and bought his way into a Government clerkship. The job was a lucrative one though the salary was small. At that time a ring of clerks were making a steady income by misappropriating Government stores, and Po Kyin (he was plain Po Kyin then: the honorific U came years later) took naturally to this kind of thing. However, he had too much talent to spend his life in a clerkship, stealing miserably in annas and pice. One day he discovered that the Government, being short of minor officials, were going to make some appointments from among the clerks. The news would have become public in another week, but it was one of Po Kyin's qualities that his information was always a week ahead of everyone else's. He saw his chance and denounced all his confederates before they could take alarm. Most of them were sent to prison, and Po Kyin was made an Assistant Township Officer as the reward of his honesty. Since then he had risen steadily. Now, at fifty-six, he was a Sub-divisional Magistrate, and he would probably be promoted still further and made an acting Deputy Commissioner, with Englishmen as his equals and even his subordinates.

As a magistrate his methods were simple. Even for the vastest bribe he would never sell the decision of a case, because he knew that a magistrate who gives wrong judgments is caught sooner or later. His practice, a much safer one, was to take bribes from both sides and then decide the case on strictly legal grounds. This won him a useful reputation for impartiality. Besides his revenue from litigants, U Po Kyin levied a ceaseless toll, a sort of private taxation scheme, from all the villages under his jurisdiction. If any village failed in its tribute U Po Kyin took punitive measures — gangs of dacoits attacked the village, leading villagers were arrested on false charges, and so forth — and it was never long before the amount was paid up. He also shared the proceeds of all the larger-sized robberies

that took place in the district. Most of this, of course, was known to everyone except U Po Kyin's official superiors (no British officer will ever believe anything against his own men) but the attempts to expose him invariably failed; his supporters, kept loyal by their share of the loot, were too numerous. When any accusation was brought against him, U Po Kyin simply discredited it with strings of suborned witnesses, following this up by counter-accusations which left him in a stronger position than ever. He was practically invulnerable, because he was too fine a judge of men ever to choose a wrong instrument, and also because he was too absorbed in intrigue ever to fail through carelessness or ignorance. One could say with practical certainty that he would never be found out, that he would go from success to success, and would finally die full of honour, worth several lakhs of rupees.

And even beyond the grave his success would continue. According to Buddhist belief, those who have done evil in their lives will spend the next incarnation in the shape of a rat, a frog or some other low animal. U Po Kyin was a good Buddhist and intended to provide against this danger. He would devote his closing years to good works, which would pile up enough merit to outweigh the rest of his life. Probably his good works would take the form of building pagodas. Four pagodas, five, six, seven — the priests would tell him how many — with carved stonework, gilt umbrellas and little bells that tinkled in the wind, every tinkle a prayer. And he would return to the earth in male human shape — for a woman ranks at about the same level as a rat or a frog — or at best as some dignified beast such as an elephant.

All these thoughts flowed through U Po Kyin's mind swiftly and for the most part in pictures. His brain, though cunning, was quite barbaric, and it never worked except for some definite end; mere meditation was beyond him. He had now reached the point to which his thoughts had been tending. Putting his smallish, triangular hands on the arms of his chair, he turned himself a little way round and called, rather wheezily:

'Ba Taik! Hey, Ba Taik!'

Ba Taik, U Po Kyin's servant, appeared through the beaded curtain of the veranda. He was an under-sized, pock-marked man

with a timid and rather hungry expression. U Po Kyin paid him no wages, for he was a convicted thief whom a word would send to prison. As Ba Taik advanced he shikoed, so low as to give the impression that he was stepping backwards.

'Most holy god?' he said.

'Is anyone waiting to see me, Ba Taik?'

Ba Taik enumerated the visitors upon his fingers: 'There is the headman of Thitpingyi village, your honour, who has brought presents, and two villagers who have an assault case that is to be tried by your honour, and they too have brought presents. Ko Ba Sein, the head clerk of the Deputy Commissioner s office, wishes to see you, and there is Ali Shah, the police constable, and a dacoit whose name I do not know. I think they have quarrelled about some gold bangles they have stolen. And there is also a young village girl with a baby.'

'What does she want?' said U Po Kyin.

'She says that the baby is yours, most holy one.'

'Ah. And how much has the headman brought?'

Ba Taik thought it was only ten rupees and a basket of mangoes.

'Tell the headman,' said U Po Kyin, 'that it should be twenty rupees, and there will be trouble for him and his village if the money is not here tomorrow. I will see the others presently. Ask Ko Ba Sein to come to me here.'

Ba Sein appeared in a moment. He was an erect, narrow-shouldered man, very tall for a Burman, with a curiously smooth face that recalled a coffee blancmange. U Po Kyin found him a useful tool. Unimaginative and hardworking, he was an excellent clerk, and Mr Macgregor, the Deputy Commissioner, trusted him with most of his official secrets. U Po Kyin, put in a good temper by his thoughts, greeted Ba Sein with a laugh and waved to the betel box.

'Well, Ko Ba Sein, how does our affair progress? I hope that, as dear Mr Macgregor would say' — U Po Kyin broke into English— '"eet ees making perceptible progress"?'

Ba Sein did not smile at the small joke. Sitting down stiff and long-backed in the vacant chair, he answered:

'Excellently, sir. Our copy of the paper arrived this morning. Kindly observe.'

He produced a copy of a bilingual paper called the Burmese Patriot. It was a miserable eight-page rag, villainously printed on paper as bad as blotting paper, and composed partly of news stolen from the Rangoon Gazette, partly of weak Nationalist heroics. On the last page the type had slipped and left the entire sheet jet black, as though in mourning for the smallness of the paper's circulation. The article to which U Po Kyin turned was of a rather different stamp from the rest. It ran:

In these happy times, when we poor blacks are being uplifted by the mighty western civilization, with its manifold blessings such as the cinematograph, machine-guns, syphilis, etc., what subject could be more inspiring than the private lives of our European benefactors? We think therefore that it may interest our readers to hear something of events in the up-country district of Kyauktada. And especially of Mr Macgregor, honoured Deputy Commissioner of said district.

Mr Macgregor is of the type of the Fine Old English Gentleman, such as, in these happy days, we have so many examples before our eyes. He is 'a family man' as our dear English cousins say. Very much a family man is Mr Macgregor. So much so that he has already three children in the district of Kyauktada, where he has been a year, and in his last district of Shwemyo he left six young progenies behind him. Perhaps it is an oversight on Mr Macgregor's part that he has left these young infants quite unprovided for, and that some of their mothers are in danger of starvation, etc., etc., etc.

There was a column of similar stuff, and wretched as it was, it was well above the level of the rest of the paper. U Po Kyin read the article carefully through, holding it at arm's length — he was long-sighted — and drawing his lips meditatively back, exposing great numbers of small, perfect teeth, blood-red from betel juice.

'The editor will get six months' imprisonment for this,' he said finally.

'He does not mind. He says that the only time when his creditors leave him alone is when he is in prison.'

'And you say that your little apprentice clerk Hla Pe wrote this article all by himself? That is a very clever boy — a most promising boy! Never tell me again that these Government High Schools are a waste of time. Hla Pe shall certainly have his clerkship.'

‘You think then, sir, that this article will be enough?’

U Po Kyin did not answer immediately. A puffing, labouring noise began to proceed from him; he was trying to rise from his chair. Ba Taik was familiar with this sound. He appeared from behind the beaded curtain, and he and Ba Sein put a hand under each of U Po Kyin’s armpits and hoisted him to his feet. U Po Kyin stood for a moment balancing the weight of his belly upon his legs, with the movement of a fish porter adjusting his load. Then he waved Ba Taik away.

‘Not enough,’ he said, answering Ba Sein’s question, ‘not enough by any means. There is a lot to be done yet. But this is the right beginning. Listen.’

He went to the rail to spit out a scarlet mouthful of betel, and then began to quarter the veranda with short steps, his hands behind his back. The friction of his vast thighs made him waddle slightly. As he walked he talked, in the base jargon of the Government offices — a patchwork of Burmese verbs and English abstract phrases:

‘Now, let us go into this affair from the beginning. We are going to make a concerted attack on Dr Veraswami, who is the Civil Surgeon and Superintendent of the jail. We are going to slander him, destroy his reputation and finally ruin him for ever. It will be rather a delicate operation.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘There will be no risk, but we have got to go slowly. We are not proceeding against a miserable clerk or police constable. We are proceeding against a high official, and with a high official, even when he is an Indian, it is not the same as with a clerk. How does one ruin a clerk? Easy; an accusation, two dozen witnesses, dismissal and imprisonment. But that will not do here. Softly, softly, softly is my way. No scandal, and above all no official inquiry. There must be no accusations that can be answered, and yet within three months I must fix it in the head of every European in Kyauktada that the doctor is a villain. What shall I accuse him of? Bribes will not do, a doctor does not get bribes to any extent. What then?’

‘We could perhaps arrange a mutiny in the jail,’ said Ba Sein. ‘As superintendent, the doctor would be blamed.’

‘No, it is too dangerous. I do not want the jail warders firing their

rifles in all directions. Besides, it would be expensive. Clearly, then, it must be disloyalty — Nationalism, seditious propaganda. We must persuade the Europeans that the doctor holds disloyal, anti-British opinions. That is far worse than bribery; they expect a native official to take bribes. But let them suspect his loyalty even for a moment, and he is ruined.'

'It would be a hard thing to prove,' objected Ba Sein. 'The doctor is very loyal to the Europeans. He grows angry when anything is said against them. They will know that, do you not think?'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said U Po Kyin comfortably. 'No European cares anything about proofs. When a man has a black face, suspicion IS proof. A few anonymous letters will work wonders. It is only a question of persisting; accuse, accuse, go on accusing — that is the way with Europeans. One anonymous letter after another, to every European in turn. And then, when their suspicions are thoroughly aroused— ' U Po Kyin brought one short arm from behind his back and clicked his thumb and finger. He added: 'We begin with this article in the Burmese Patriot. The Europeans will shout with rage when they see it. Well, the next move is to persuade them that it was the doctor who wrote it.'

'It will be difficult while he has friends among the Europeans. All of them go to him when they are ill. He cured Mr Macgregor of his flatulence this cold weather. They consider him a very clever doctor, I believe.'

'How little you understand the European mind, Ko Ba Sein! If the Europeans go to Veraswami it is only because there is no other doctor in Kyauktada. No European has any faith in a man with a black face. No, with anonymous letters it is only a question of sending enough. I shall soon see to it that he has no friends left.'

'There is Mr Flory, the timber merchant,' said Ba Sein. (He pronounced it 'Mr Porley'.) 'He is a close friend of the doctor. I see him go to his house every morning when he is in Kyauktada. Twice he has even invited the doctor to dinner.'

'Ah, now there you are right. If Flory were a friend of the doctor it could do us harm. You cannot hurt an Indian when he has a European friend. It gives him — what is that word they are so fond of? — prestige. But Flory will desert his friend quickly enough when

the trouble begins. These people have no feeling of loyalty towards a native. Besides, I happen to know that Flory is a coward. I can deal with him. Your part, Ko Ba Sein, is to watch Mr Macgregor's movements. Has he written to the Commissioner lately — written confidentially, I mean?'

'He wrote two days ago, but when we steamed the letter open we found it was nothing of importance.'

'Ah well, we will give him something to write about. And as soon as he suspects the doctor, then is the time for that other affair I spoke to you of. Thus we shall — what does Mr Macgregor say? Ah yes, "kill two birds with one stone". A whole flock of birds — ha, ha!'

U Po Kyin's laugh was a disgusting bubbling sound deep down in his belly, like the preparation for a cough; yet it was merry, even childlike. He did not say any more about the 'other affair', which was too private to be discussed even upon the veranda. Ba Sein, seeing the interview at an end, stood up and bowed, angular as a jointed ruler.

'Is there anything else your honour wishes done?' he said.

'Make sure that Mr Macgregor has his copy of the Burmese Patriot. You had better tell Hla Pe to have an attack of dysentery and stay away from the office. I shall want him for the writing of the anonymous letters. That is all for the present.'

'Then I may go, sir?'

'God go with you,' said U Po Kyin rather abstractedly, and at once shouted again for Ba Taik. He never wasted a moment of his day. It did not take him long to deal with the other visitors and to send the village girl away unrewarded, having examined her face and said that he did not recognize her. It was now his breakfast time. Violent pangs of hunger, which attacked him punctually at this hour every morning, began to torment his belly. He shouted urgently:

'Ba Taik! Hey, Ba Taik! Kin Kin! My breakfast! Be quick, I am starving.'

In the living-room behind the curtain a table was already set out with a huge bowl of rice and a dozen plates containing curries, dried prawns and sliced green mangoes. U Po Kyin waddled to the table, sat down with a grunt and at once threw himself on the food. Ma Kin, his wife, stood behind him and served him. She was a thin

woman of five and forty, with a kindly, pale brown, simian face. U Po Kyin took no notice of her while he was eating. With the bowl close to his nose he stuffed the food into himself with swift, greasy fingers, breathing fast. All his meals were swift, passionate and enormous; they were not meals so much as orgies, debauches of curry and rice. When he had finished he sat back, belched several times and told Ma Kin to fetch him a green Burmese cigar. He never smoked English tobacco, which he declared had no taste in it.

Presently, with Ba Taik's help, U Po Kyin dressed in his office clothes, and stood for a while admiring himself in the long mirror in the living-room. It was a wooden-walled room with two pillars, still recognizable as teak-trunks, supporting the roof-tree, and it was dark and sluttish as all Burmese rooms are, though U Po Kyin had furnished it 'Ingaleik fashion' with a veneered sideboard and chairs, some lithographs of the Royal Family and a fire-extinguisher. The floor was covered with bamboo mats, much splashed by lime and betel juice.

Ma Kin was sitting on a mat in the corner, stitching an ingyi. U Po Kyin turned slowly before the mirror, trying to get a glimpse of his back view. He was dressed in a gaungbaung of pale pink silk, an ingyi of starched muslin, and a paso of Mandalay silk, a gorgeous salmon-pink brocaded with yellow. With an effort he turned his head round and looked, pleased, at the paso tight and shining on his enormous buttocks. He was proud of his fatness, because he saw the accumulated flesh as the symbol of his greatness. He who had once been obscure and hungry was now fat, rich and feared. He was swollen with the bodies of his enemies; a thought from which he extracted something very near poetry.

'My new paso was cheap at twenty-two rupees, hey, Kin Kin?' he said.

Ma Kin bent her head over her sewing. She was a simple, old-fashioned woman, who had learned even less of European habits than U Po Kyin. She could not sit on a chair without discomfort. Every morning she went to the bazaar with a basket on her head, like a village woman, and in the evenings she could be seen kneeling in the garden, praying to the white spire of the pagoda that crowned the town. She had been the confidante of U Po Kyin's intrigues for

twenty years and more.

'Ko Po Kyin,' she said, 'you have done very much evil in your life.'

U Po Kyin waved his hand. 'What does it matter? My pagodas will atone for everything. There is plenty of time.'

Ma Kin bent her head over her sewing again, in an obstinate way she had when she disapproved of something that U Po Kyin was doing.

'But, Ko Po Kyin, where is the need for all this scheming and intriguing? I heard you talking with Ko Ba Sein on the veranda. You are planning some evil against Dr Veraswami. Why do you wish to harm that Indian doctor? He is a good man.'

'What do you know of these official matters, woman? The doctor stands in my way. In the first place he refuses to take bribes, which makes it difficult for the rest of us. And besides — well, there is something else which you would never have the brains to understand.'

'Ko Po Kyin, you have grown rich and powerful, and what good has it ever done you? We were happier when we were poor. Ah, I remember so well when you were only a Township Officer, the first time we had a house of our own. How proud we were of our new wicker furniture, and your fountain-pen with the gold clip! And when the young English police-officer came to our house and sat in the best chair and drank a bottle of beer, how honoured we thought ourselves! Happiness is not in money. What can you want with more money now?'

'Nonsense, woman, nonsense! Attend to your cooking and sewing and leave official matters to those who understand them.'

'Well, I do not know. I am your wife and have always obeyed you. But at least it is never too soon to acquire merit. Strive to acquire more merit, Ko Po Kyin! Will you not, for instance, buy some live fish and set them free in the river? One can acquire much merit in that way. Also, this morning when the priests came for their rice they told me that there are two new priests at the monastery, and they are hungry. Will you not give them something, Ko Po Kyin? I did not give them anything myself, so that you might acquire the merit of doing it.'

U Po Kyin turned away from the mirror. The appeal touched him a little. He never, when it could be done without inconvenience, missed a chance of acquiring merit. In his eyes his pile of merit was a kind of bank deposit, everlastingly growing. Every fish set free in the river, every gift to a priest, was a step nearer Nirvana. It was a reassuring thought. He directed that the basket of mangoes brought by the village headman should be sent down to the monastery.

Presently he left the house and started down the road, with Ba Taik behind him carrying a file of papers. He walked slowly, very upright to balance his vast belly, and holding a yellow silk umbrella over his head. His pink paso glittered in the sun like a satin praline. He was going to the court, to try his day's cases.

Chapter 2

At about the time when U Po Kyin began his morning's business, 'Mr Porley' the timber merchant and friend of Dr Veraswami, was leaving his house for the Club.

Flory was a man of about thirty-five, of middle height, not ill made. He had very black, stiff hair growing low on his head, and a cropped black moustache, and his skin, naturally sallow, was discoloured by the sun. Not having grown fat or bald he did not look older than his age, but his face was very haggard in spite of the sunburn, with lank cheeks and a sunken, withered look round the eyes. He had obviously not shaved this morning. He was dressed in the usual white shirt, khaki drill shorts and stockings, but instead of a topi he wore a battered Terai hat, cocked over one eye. He carried a bamboo stick with a wrist-thong, and a black cocker spaniel named Flo was ambling after him.

All these were secondary expressions, however. The first thing that one noticed in Flory was a hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down his left cheek, from the eye to the corner of the mouth. Seen from the left side his face had a battered, woebegone look, as though the birthmark had been a bruise — for it was a dark blue in colour. He was quite aware of its hideousness. And at all times, when he was not alone, there was a sidelongness about his movements, as he manoeuvred constantly to keep the birthmark out of sight.

Flory's house was at the top of the maidan, close to the edge of the jungle. From the gate the maidan sloped sharply down, scorched and khaki-coloured, with half a dozen dazzling white bungalows scattered round it. All quaked, shivered in the hot air. There was an English cemetery within a white wall half-way down the hill, and near by a tiny tin-roofed church. Beyond that was the European Club, and when one looked at the Club — a dumpy one-storey wooden building — one looked at the real centre of the town. In any town in India the European Club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain. It was doubly so in this case, for it was the proud boast

of Kyauktada Club that, almost alone of Clubs in Burma, it had never admitted an Oriental to membership. Beyond the Club, the Irrawaddy flowed huge and ochreous glittering like diamonds in the patches that caught the sun; and beyond the river stretched great wastes of paddy fields, ending at the horizon in a range of blackish hills.

The native town, and the courts and the jail, were over to the right, mostly hidden in green groves of peepul trees. The spire of the pagoda rose from the trees like a slender spear tipped with gold. Kyauktada was a fairly typical Upper Burma town, that had not changed greatly between the days of Marco Polo and 1910, and might have slept in the Middle Ages for a century more if it had not proved a convenient spot for a railway terminus. In 1910 the Government made it the headquarters of a district and a seat of Progress — interpretable as a block of law courts, with their army of fat but ravenous pleaders, a hospital, a school and one of those huge, durable jails which the English have built everywhere between Gibraltar and Hong Kong. The population was about four thousand, including a couple of hundred Indians, a few score Chinese and seven Europeans. There were also two Eurasians named Mr Francis and Mr Samuel, the sons of an American Baptist missionary and a Roman Catholic missionary respectively. The town contained no curiosities of any kind, except an Indian fakir who had lived for twenty years in a tree near the bazaar, drawing his food up in a basket every morning.

Flory yawned as he came out of the gate. He had been half drunk the night before, and the glare made him feel liverish. 'Bloody, bloody hole!' he thought, looking down the hill. And, no one except the dog being near, he began to sing aloud, 'Bloody, bloody, bloody, oh, how thou art bloody' to the tune of 'Holy, holy, holy, oh how Thou art holy ' as he walked down the hot red road, swishing at the dried-up grasses with his stick. It was nearly nine o'clock and the sun was fiercer every minute. The heat throbbed down on one's head with a steady, rhythmic thumping, like blows from an enormous bolster. Flory stopped at the Club gate, wondering whether to go in or to go farther down the road and see Dr Veraswami. Then he remembered that it was 'English mail day' and the newspapers would have arrived. He went in, past the big tennis screen, which

was overgrown by a creeper with starlike mauve flowers.

In the borders beside the path swaths of English flowers — phlox and larkspur, hollyhock and petunia — not yet slain by the sun, rioted in vast size and richness. The petunias were huge, like trees almost. There was no lawn, but instead a shrubbery of native trees and bushes — gold mohur trees like vast umbrellas of blood-red bloom, frangipanis with creamy, stalkless flowers, purple bougainvillea, scarlet hibiscus and the pink Chinese rose, bilious-green crotons, feathery fronds of tamarind. The clash of colours hurt one's eyes in the glare. A nearly naked mali, watering-can in hand, was moving in the jungle of flowers like some large nectar-sucking bird.

On the Club steps a sandy-haired Englishman, with a prickly moustache, pale grey eyes too far apart, and abnormally thin calves to his legs, was standing with his hands in the pockets of his shorts. This was Mr Westfield, the District Superintendent of Police. With a very bored air he was rocking himself backwards and forwards on his heels and pouting his upper lip so that his moustache tickled his nose. He greeted Flory with a slight sideways movement of his head. His way of speaking was clipped and soldierly, missing out every word that well could be missed out. Nearly everything he said was intended for a joke, but the tone of his voice was hollow and melancholy.

'Hullo, Flory me lad. Bloody awful morning, what?'

'We must expect it at this time of year, I suppose,' Flory said. He had turned himself a little sideways, so that his birthmarked cheek was away from Westfield.

'Yes, dammit. Couple of months of this coming. Last year we didn't have a spot of rain till June. Look at that bloody sky, not a cloud in it. Like one of those damned great blue enamel saucepans. God! What'd you give to be in Piccadilly now, eh?'

'Have the English papers come?'

'Yes. Dear old Punch, Pink'un and Vie Parisienne. Makes you homesick to read 'em, what? Let's come in and have a drink before the ice all goes. Old Lackersteen's been fairly bathing in it. Half pickled already.'

They went in, Westfield remarking in his gloomy voice, 'Lead on,

Macduff.' Inside, the Club was a teak-walled place smelling of earth-oil, and consisting of only four rooms, one of which contained a forlorn 'library' of five hundred mildewed novels, and another an old and mangy billiard-table — this, however, seldom used, for during most of the year hordes of flying beetles came buzzing round the lamps and littered themselves over the cloth. There were also a card-room and a 'lounge' which looked towards the river, over a wide veranda; but at this time of day all the verandas were curtained with green bamboo chicks. The lounge was an unhomelike room, with coco-nut matting on the floor, and wicker chairs and tables which were littered with shiny illustrated papers. For ornament there were a number of 'Bonzo' pictures, and the dusty skulls of sambhur. A punkah, lazily flapping, shook dust into the tepid air.

There were three men in the room. Under the punkah a florid, fine-looking, slightly bloated man of forty was sprawling across the table with his head in his hands, groaning in pain. This was Mr Lackersteen, the local manager of a timber firm. He had been badly drunk the night before, and he was suffering for it. Ellis, local manager of yet another company, was standing before the notice-board studying some notice with a look of bitter concentration. He was a tiny wiry-haired fellow with a pale, sharp-featured face and restless movements. Maxwell, the acting Divisional Forest Officer, was lying in one of the long chairs reading the Field, and invisible except for two large-boned legs and thick downy forearms.

'Look at this naughty old man,' said Westfield, taking Mr Lackersteen half affectionately by the shoulders and shaking him. 'Example to the young, what? There but for the grace of God and all that. Gives you an idea what you'll be like at forty.'

Mr Lackersteen gave a groan which sounded like 'brandy'.

'Poor old chap,' said Westfield, 'regular martyr to booze, eh? Look at it oozing out of his pores. Reminds me of the old colonel who used to sleep without a mosquito net. They asked his servant why and the servant said: "At night, master too drunk to notice mosquitoes; in the morning, mosquitoes too drunk to notice master." Look at him — boozed last night and then asking for more. Got a little niece coming to stay with him, too. Due tonight, isn't she, Lackersteen?'

‘Oh, leave that drunken sot alone,’ said Ellis without turning round. He had a spiteful Cockney voice. Mr Lackersteen groaned again, ‘ —— the niece! Get me some brandy, for Christ’s sake.’

‘Good education for the niece, eh? Seeing uncle under the table seven times a week. Hey, butler! Bringing brandy for Lackersteen master!’

The butler, a dark, stout Dravidian with liquid, yellow-irised eyes like those of a dog, brought the brandy on a brass tray. Flory and Westfield ordered gin. Mr Lackersteen swallowed a few spoonfuls of brandy and sat back in his chair, groaning in a more resigned way. He had a beefy, ingenuous face, with a toothbrush moustache. He was really a very simple-minded man, with no ambitions beyond having what he called ‘a good time’. His wife governed him by the only possible method, namely, by never letting him out of her sight for more than an hour or two. Only once, a year after they were married, she had left him for a fortnight, and had returned unexpectedly a day before her time, to find Mr Lackersteen, drunk, supported on either side by a naked Burmese girl, while a third up-ended a whisky bottle into his mouth. Since then she had watched him, as he used to complain, ‘like a cat over a bloody mousehole’. However, he managed to enjoy quite a number of ‘good times’, though they were usually rather hurried ones.

‘My Christ, what a head I’ve got on me this morning,’ he said. ‘Call that butler again, Westfield. I’ve got to have another brandy before my missus gets here. She says she’s going to cut my booze down to four pegs a day when our niece gets here. God rot them both!’ he added gloomily.

‘Stop playing the fool, all of you, and listen to this,’ said Ellis sourly. He had a queer wounding way of speaking, hardly ever opening his mouth without insulting somebody. He deliberately exaggerated his Cockney accent, because of the sardonic tone it gave to his words. ‘Have you seen this notice of old Macgregor’s? A little nosegay for everyone. Maxwell, wake up and listen!’

Maxwell lowered the Field. He was a fresh-coloured blond youth of not more than twenty-five or six — very young for the post he held. With his heavy limbs and thick white eyelashes he reminded one of a cart-horse colt. Ellis nipped the notice from the board with a

neat, spiteful little movement and began reading it aloud. It had been posted by Mr Macgregor, who, besides being Deputy Commissioner, was secretary of the Club.

'Just listen to this. "It has been suggested that as there are as yet no Oriental members of this club, and as it is now usual to admit officials of gazetted rank, whether native or European, to membership of most European Clubs, we should consider the question of following this practice in Kyauktada. The matter will be open for discussion at the next general meeting. On the one hand it may be pointed out" — oh, well, no need to wade through the rest of it. He can't even write a notice without an attack of literary diarrhoea. Anyway, the point's this. He's asking us to break all our rules and take a dear little nigger-boy into this Club. DEAR Dr Veraswami, for instance. Dr Very-slimy, I call him. That WOULD be a treat, wouldn't it? Little pot-bellied niggers breathing garlic in your face over the bridge-table. Christ, to think of it! We've got to hang together and put our foot down on this at once. What do you say, Westfield? Flory?'

Westfield shrugged his thin shoulders philosophically. He had sat down at the table and lighted a black, stinking Burma cheroot.

'Got to put up with it, I suppose,' he said. 'B — s of natives are getting into all the Clubs nowadays. Even the Pegu Club, I'm told. Way this country's going, you know. We're about the last Club in Burma to hold out against 'em.'

'We are; and what's more, we're damn well going to go on holding out. I'll die in the ditch before I'll see a nigger in here.' Ellis had produced a stump of pencil. With the curious air of spite that some men can put into their tiniest action, he re-pinned the notice on the board and pencilled a tiny, neat 'B. F.' against Mr Macgregor's signature— 'There, that's what I think of his idea. I'll tell him so when he comes down. What do YOU say, Flory?'

Flory had not spoken all this time. Though by nature anything but a silent man, he seldom found much to say in Club conversations. He had sat down at the table and was reading G. K. Chesterton's article in the London News, at the same time caressing Flo's head with his left hand. Ellis, however, was one of those people who constantly nag others to echo their own opinions. He repeated his question, and

Flory looked up, and their eyes met. The skin round Ellis's nose suddenly turned so pale that it was almost grey. In him it was a sign of anger. Without any prelude he burst into a stream of abuse that would have been startling, if the others had not been used to hearing something like it every morning.

'My God, I should have thought in a case like this, when it's a question of keeping those black, stinking swine out of the only place where we can enjoy ourselves, you'd have the decency to back me up. Even if that pot-bellied greasy little sod of a nigger doctor IS your best pal. *I* don't care if you choose to pal up with the scum of the bazaar. If it pleases you to go to Veraswami's house and drink whisky with all his nigger pals, that's your look-out. Do what you like outside the Club. But, by God, it's a different matter when you talk of bringing niggers in here. I suppose you'd like little Veraswami for a Club member, eh? Chipping into our conversation and pawing everyone with his sweaty hands and breathing his filthy garlic breath in our faces. By god, he'd go out with my boot behind him if ever I saw his black snout inside that door. Greasy, pot-bellied little — !' etc.

This went on for several minutes. It was curiously impressive, because it was so completely sincere. Ellis really did hate Orientals — hated them with a bitter, restless loathing as of something evil or unclean. Living and working, as the assistant of a timber firm must, in perpetual contact with the Burmese, he had never grown used to the sight of a black face. Any hint of friendly feeling towards an Oriental seemed to him a horrible perversity. He was an intelligent man and an able servant of his firm, but he was one of those Englishmen — common, unfortunately — who should never be allowed to set foot in the East.

Flory sat nursing Flo's head in his lap, unable to meet Ellis's eyes. At the best of times his birthmark made it difficult for him to look people straight in the face. And when he made ready to speak, he could feel his voice trembling — for it had a way of trembling when it should have been firm; his features, too, sometimes twitched uncontrollably.

'Steady on,' he said at last, sullenly and rather feebly. 'Steady on. There's no need to get so excited. *I* never suggested having any

native members in here.'

'Oh, didn't you? We all know bloody well you'd like to, though. Why else do you go to that oily little babu's house every morning, then? Sitting down at table with him as though he was a white man, and drinking out of glasses his filthy black lips have slobbered over — it makes me spew to think of it.'

'Sit down, old chap, sit down,' Westfield said. 'Forget it. Have a drink on it. Not worth while quarrelling. Too hot.'

'My God,' said Ellis a little more calmly, taking a pace or two up and down, 'my God, I don't understand you chaps. I simply don't. Here's that old fool Macgregor wanting to bring a nigger into this Club for no reason whatever, and you all sit down under it without a word. Good God, what are we supposed to be doing in this country? If we aren't going to rule, why the devil don't we clear out? Here we are, supposed to be governing a set of damn black swine who've been slaves since the beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the only way they understand, we go and treat them as equals. And you silly b — s take it for granted. There's Flory, makes his best pal a black babu who calls himself a doctor because he's done two years at an Indian so-called university. And you, Westfield, proud as Punch of your knock-kneed, bribe-taking cowards of policemen. And there's Maxwell, spends his time running after Eurasian tarts. Yes, you do, Maxwell; I heard about your goings-on in Mandalay with some smelly little bitch called Molly Pereira. I suppose you'd have gone and married her if they hadn't transferred you up here? You all seem to LIKE the dirty black brutes. Christ, I don't know what's come over us all. I really don't.'

'Come on, have another drink,' said Westfield. 'Hey, butler! Spot of beer before the ice goes, eh? Beer, butler!'

The butler brought some bottles of Munich beer. Ellis presently sat down at the table with the others, and he nursed one of the cool bottles between his small hands. His forehead was sweating. He was sulky, but not in a rage any longer. At all times he was spiteful and perverse, but his violent fits of rage were soon over, and were never apologized for. Quarrels were a regular part of the routine of Club life. Mr Lackersteen was feeling better and was studying the illustrations in La Vie Parisienne. It was after nine now, and the

room, scented with the acrid smoke of Westfield's cheroot, was stifling hot. Everyone's shirt stuck to his back with the first sweat of the day. The invisible chokra who pulled the punkah rope outside was falling asleep in the glare.

'Butler!' yelled Ellis, and as the butler appeared, 'go and wake that bloody chokra up!'

'Yes, master.'

'And butler!'

'Yes, master?'

'How much ice have we got left?'

''Bout twenty pounds, master. Will only last today, I think. I find it very difficult to keep ice cool now.'

'Don't talk like that, damn you— "I find it very difficult!" Have you swallowed a dictionary? "Please, master, can't keeping ice cool" — that's how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk English too well. I can't stick servants who talk English. D'you hear, butler?'

'Yes, master,' said the butler, and retired.

'God! No ice till Monday,' Westfield said. 'You going back to the jungle, Flory?'

'Yes. I ought to be there now. I only came in because of the English mail.'

'Go on tour myself, I think. Knock up a spot of Travelling Allowance. I can't stick my bloody office at this time of year. Sitting there under the damned punkah, signing one chit after another. Paper-chewing. God, how I wish the war was on again!'

'I'm going out the day after tomorrow,' Ellis said. 'Isn't that damned padre coming to hold his service this Sunday? I'll take care not to be in for that, anyway. Bloody knee-drill.'

'Next Sunday,' said Westfield. 'Promised to be in for it myself. So's Macgregor. Bit hard on the poor devil of a padre, I must say. Only gets here once in six weeks. Might as well get up a congregation when he does come.'

'Oh, hell! I'd snivel psalms to oblige the padre, but I can't stick the way these damned native Christians come shoving into our church. A pack of Madrassi servants and Karen school-teachers. And then those two yellow-bellies, Francis and Samuel — they call

themselves Christians too. Last time the padre was here they had the nerve to come up and sit on the front pews with the white men. Someone ought to speak to the padre about that. What bloody fools we were ever to let those missionaries loose in this country! Teaching bazaar sweepers they're as good as we are. "Please, sir, me Christian same like master." Damned cheek.'

'How about that for a pair of legs?' said Mr Lackersteen, passing La Vie Parisienne across. 'You know French, Flory; what's that mean underneath? Christ, it reminds me of when I was in Paris, my first leave, before I married. Christ, I wish I was there again!'

'Did you hear that one about "There was a young lady of Woking"?' Maxwell said. He was rather a silent youth, but, like other youths, he had an affection for a good smutty rhyme. He completed the biography of the young lady of Woking, and there was a laugh. Westfield replied with the young lady of Ealing who had a peculiar feeling, and Flory came in with the young curate of Horsham who always took every precaution. There was more laughter. Even Ellis thawed and produced several rhymes; Ellis's jokes were always genuinely witty, and yet filthy beyond measure. Everyone cheered up and felt more friendly in spite of the heat. They had finished the beer and were just going to call for another drink, when shoes creaked on the steps outside. A booming voice, which made the floorboards tingle, was saying jocosely:

'Yes, most distinctly humorous. I incorporated it in one of those little articles of mine in Blackwood's, you know. I remember, too, when I was stationed at Prome, another quite — ah — diverting incident which— '

Evidently Mr Macgregor had arrived at the Club. Mr Lackersteen exclaimed, 'Hell! My wife's there,' and pushed his empty glass as far away from him as it would go. Mr Macgregor and Mrs Lackersteen entered the lounge together.

Mr Macgregor was a large, heavy man, rather past forty, with a kindly, puggy face, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles. His bulky shoulders, and a trick he had of thrusting his head forward, reminded one curiously of a turtle — the Burmans, in fact, nicknamed him 'the tortoise'. He was dressed in a clean silk suit, which already showed patches of sweat beneath the armpits. He greeted the others with a

humorous mock-salute, and then planted himself before the notice-board, beaming, in the attitude of a schoolmaster twiddling a cane behind his back. The good nature in his face was quite genuine, and yet there was such a wilful geniality about him, such a strenuous air of being off duty and forgetting his official rank, that no one was ever quite at ease in his presence. His conversation was evidently modelled on that of some facetious schoolmaster or clergyman whom he had known in early life. Any long word, any quotation, any proverbial expression figured in his mind as a joke, and was introduced with a bumbling noise like 'er' or 'ah', to make it clear that there was a joke coming. Mrs Lackersteen was a woman of about thirty-five, handsome in a contourless, elongated way, like a fashion plate. She had a sighing, discontented voice. The others had all stood up when she entered, and Mrs Lackersteen sank exhaustedly into the best chair under the punkah, fanning herself with a slender hand like that of a newt.

'Oh dear, this heat, this heat! Mr Macgregor came and fetched me in his car. SO kind of him. Tom, that wretch of a rickshaw-man is pretending to be ill again. Really, I think you ought to give him a good thrashing and bring him to his senses. It's too terrible to have to walk about in this sun every day.'

Mrs Lackersteen, unequal to the quarter-mile walk between her house and the Club, had imported a rickshaw from Rangoon. Except for bullock-carts and Mr Macgregor's car it was the only wheeled vehicle in Kyauktada, for the whole district did not possess ten miles of road. In the jungle, rather than leave her husband alone, Mrs Lackersteen endured all the horrors of dripping tents, mosquitoes and tinned food; but she made up for it by complaining over trifles while in headquarters.

'Really I think the laziness of these servants is getting too shocking,' she sighed. 'Don't you agree, Mr Macgregor? We seem to have no AUTHORITY over the natives nowadays, with all these dreadful Reforms, and the insolence they learn from the newspapers. In some ways they are getting almost as bad as the lower classes at home.'

'Oh, hardly as bad as that, I trust. Still, I am afraid there is no doubt that the democratic spirit is creeping in, even here.'

‘And such a short time ago, even just before the war, they were so NICE and respectful! The way they salaamed when you passed them on the road — it was really quite charming. I remember when we paid our butler only twelve rupees a month, and really that man loved us like a dog. And now they are demanding forty and fifty rupees, and I find that the only way I can even KEEP a servant is to pay their wages several months in arrears.’

‘The old type of servant is disappearing,’ agreed Mr Macgregor. ‘In my young days, when one’s butler was disrespectful, one sent him along to the jail with a chit saying “Please give the bearer fifteen lashes”. Ah well, eheu fugaces! Those days are gone for ever, I am afraid.’

‘Ah, you’re about right there,’ said Westfield in his gloomy way. ‘This country’ll never be fit to live in again. British Raj is finished if you ask me. Lost Dominion and all that. Time we cleared out of it.’

Whereat there was a murmur of agreement from everyone in the room, even from Flory, notoriously a Bolshie in his opinions, even from young Maxwell, who had been barely three years in the country. No Anglo-Indian will ever deny that India is going to the dogs, or ever has denied it — for India, like Punch, never was what it was.

Ellis had meanwhile unpinned the offending notice from behind Mr Macgregor’s back, and he now held it out to him, saying in his sour way:

‘Here, Macgregor, we’ve read this notice, and we all think this idea of electing a native to the Club is absolute— ‘ Ellis was going to have said ‘absolute balls’, but he remembered Mrs Lackersteen’s presence and checked himself— ‘is absolutely uncalled for. After all, this Club is a place where we come to enjoy ourselves, and we don’t want natives poking about in here. We like to think there’s still one place where we’re free of them. The others all agree with me absolutely.’

He looked round at the others. ‘Hear, hear!’ said Mr Lackersteen gruffly. He knew that his wife would guess that he had been drinking, and he felt that a display of sound sentiment would excuse him.

Mr Macgregor took the notice with a smile. He saw the ‘B. F.’ pencilled against his name, and privately he thought Ellis’s manner

very disrespectful, but he turned the matter off with a joke. He took as great pains to be a good fellow at the Club as he did to keep up his dignity during office hours. 'I gather,' he said, 'that our friend Ellis does not welcome the society of — ah — his Aryan brother?'

'No, I do not,' said Ellis tartly. 'Nor my Mongolian brother. I don't like niggers, to put it in one word.'

Mr Macgregor stiffened at the word 'nigger', which is discountenanced in India. He had no prejudice against Orientals; indeed, he was deeply fond of them. Provided they were given no freedom he thought them the most charming people alive. It always pained him to see them wantonly insulted.

'Is it quite playing the game,' he said stiffly, 'to call these people niggers — a term they very naturally resent — when they are obviously nothing of the kind? The Burmese are Mongolians, the Indians are Aryans or Dravidians, and all of them are quite distinct— '

'Oh, rot that!' said Ellis, who was not at all awed by Mr Macgregor's official status. 'Call them niggers or Aryans or what you like. What I'm saying is that we don't want to see any black hides in this Club. If you put it to the vote you'll find we're against it to a man — unless Flory wants his DEAR pal Veraswami,' he added.

'Hear, hear!' repeated Mr Lackersteen. 'Count on me to blackball the lot of 'em.'

Mr Macgregor pursed his lips whimsically. He was in an awkward position, for the idea of electing a native member was not his own, but had been passed on to him by the Commissioner. However, he disliked making excuses, so he said in a more conciliatory tone:

'Shall we postpone discussing it till the next general meeting? In the meantime we can give it our mature consideration. And now,' he added, moving towards the table, 'who will join me in a little — ah — liquid refreshment?'

The butler was called and the 'liquid refreshment' ordered. It was hotter than ever now, and everyone was thirsty. Mr Lackersteen was on the point of ordering a drink when he caught his wife's eye, shrank up and said sulkily 'No.' He sat with his hands on his knees, with a rather pathetic expression, watching Mrs Lackersteen swallow a glass of lemonade with gin in it. Mr Macgregor, though he signed

the chit for drinks, drank plain lemonade. Alone of the Europeans in Kyauktada, he kept the rule of not drinking before sunset.

'It's all very well,' grumbled Ellis, with his forearms on the table, fidgeting with his glass. The dispute with Mr Macgregor had made him restless again. 'It's all very well, but I stick to what I said. No natives in this Club! It's by constantly giving way over small things like that that we've ruined the Empire. The country's only rotten with sedition because we've been too soft with them. The only possible policy is to treat 'em like the dirt they are. This is a critical moment, and we want every bit of prestige we can get. We've got to hang together and say, "WE ARE THE MASTERS, and you beggars — "' Ellis pressed his small thumb down as though flattening a grub — '"you beggars keep your place!"'

'Hopeless, old chap,' said Westfield. 'Quite hopeless. What can you do with all this red tape tying your hands? Beggars of natives know the law better than we do. Insult you to your face and then run you in the moment you hit 'em. Can't do anything unless you put your foot down firmly. And how can you, if they haven't the guts to show fight?'

'Our burra sahib at Mandalay always said,' put in Mrs Lackersteen, 'that in the end we shall simply LEAVE India. Young men will not come out here any longer to work all their lives for insults and ingratitude. We shall just GO. When the natives come to us begging us to stay, we shall say, "No, you have had your chance, you wouldn't take it. Very well, we shall leave you to govern yourselves." And then, what a lesson that will teach them!'

'It's all this law and order that's done for us,' said Westfield gloomily. The ruin of the Indian Empire through too much legality was a recurrent theme with Westfield. According to him, nothing save a full-sized rebellion, and the consequent reign of martial law, could save the Empire from decay. 'All this paper-chewing and chit-passing. Office babus are the real rulers of this country now. Our number's up. Best thing we can do is to shut up shop and let 'em stew in their own juice.'

'I don't agree, I simply don't agree,' Ellis said. 'We could put things right in a month if we chose. It only needs a pennyworth of pluck. Look at Amritsar. Look how they caved in after that. Dyer

knew the stuff to give them. Poor old Dyer! That was a dirty job. Those cowards in England have got something to answer for.'

There was a kind of sigh from the others, the same sigh that a gathering of Roman Catholics will give at the mention of Bloody Mary. Even Mr Macgregor, who detested bloodshed and martial law, shook his head at the name of Dyer.

'Ah, poor man! Sacrificed to the Paget M.P.s. Well, perhaps they will discover their mistake when it is too late.'

'My old governor used to tell a story about that,' said Westfield. 'There was an old havildar in a native regiment — someone asked him what'd happen if the British left India. The old chap said— '

Flory pushed back his chair and stood up. It must not, it could not — no, it simply should not go on any longer! He must get out of this room quickly, before something happened inside his head and he began to smash the furniture and throw bottles at the pictures. Dull boozing witless porkers! Was it possible that they could go on week after week, year after year, repeating word for word the same evil-minded drivel, like a parody of a fifth-rate story in Blackwood's? Would none of them EVER think of anything new to say? Oh, what a place, what people! What a civilization is this of ours — this godless civilization founded on whisky, Blackwood's and the 'Bonzo' pictures! God have mercy on us, for all of us are part of it.

Flory did not say any of this, and he was at some pains not to show it in his face. He was standing by his chair, a little sidelong to the others, with the half-smile of a man who is never sure of his popularity.

'I'm afraid I shall have to be off,' he said. 'I've got some things to see to before breakfast, unfortunately.'

'Stay and have another spot, old man,' said Westfield. 'Morning's young. Have a gin. Give you an appetite.'

'No, thanks, I must be going. Come on, Flo. Good-bye, Mrs Lackersteen. Good-bye, everybody.'

'Exit Booker Washington, the niggers' pal,' said Ellis as Flory disappeared. Ellis could always be counted on to say something disagreeable about anyone who had just left the room. 'Gone to see Very-slimy, I suppose. Or else sloped off to avoid paying a round of drinks.'

‘Oh, he’s not a bad chap,’ Westfield said. ‘Says some Bolshie things sometimes. Don’t suppose he means half of them.’

‘Oh, a very good fellow, of course,’ said Mr Macgregor. Every European in India is ex-officio, or rather ex-colore, a good fellow, until he has done something quite outrageous. It is an honorary rank.

‘He’s a bit TOO Bolshie for my taste. I can’t bear a fellow who pals up with the natives. I shouldn’t wonder if he’s got a lick of the tar-brush himself. It might explain that black mark on his face. Piebald. And he looks like a yellow-belly, with that black hair, and skin the colour of a lemon.’

There was some desultory scandal about Flory, but not much, because Mr Macgregor did not like scandal. The Europeans stayed in the Club long enough for one more round of drinks. Mr Macgregor told his anecdote about Prome, which could be produced in almost any context. And then the conversation veered back to the old, never-palling subject — the insolence of the natives, the supineness of the Government, the dear dead days when the British Raj WAS the British Raj and please give the bearer fifteen lashes. This topic was never let alone for long, partly because of Ellis’s obsession. Besides, you could forgive the Europeans a great deal of their bitterness. Living and working among Orientals would try the temper of a saint. And all of them, the officials particularly, knew what it was to be baited and insulted. Almost every day, when Westfield or Mr Macgregor or even Maxwell went down the street, the High School boys, with their young, yellow faces — faces smooth as gold coins, full of that maddening contempt that sits so naturally on the Mongolian face — sneered at them as they went past, sometimes hooted after them with hyena-like laughter. The life of the Anglo-Indian officials is not all jam. In comfortless camps, in sweltering offices, in gloomy dakbungalows smelling of dust and earth-oil, they earn, perhaps, the right to be a little disagreeable.

It was getting on for ten now, and hot beyond bearing. Flat, clear drops of sweat gathered on everyone’s face, and on the men’s bare forearms. A damp patch was growing larger and larger in the back of Mr Macgregor’s silk coat. The glare outside seemed to soak somehow through the green-chicked windows, making one’s eyes ache and filling one’s head with stuffiness. Everyone thought with

malaise of his stodgy breakfast, and of the long, deadly hours that were coming. Mr Macgregor stood up with a sigh and adjusted his spectacles, which had slipped down his sweating nose.

'Alas that such a festive gathering should end,' he said. 'I must get home to breakfast. The cares of Empire. Is anybody coming my way? My man is waiting with the car.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Mrs Lackersteen; 'if you'd take Tom and me. What a relief not to have to walk in this heat!'

The others stood up. Westfield stretched his arms and yawned through his nose. 'Better get a move on, I suppose. Go to sleep if I sit here any longer. Think of stewing in that office all day! Baskets of papers. Oh Lord!'

'Don't forget tennis this evening, everyone,' said Ellis. 'Maxwell, you lazy devil, don't you skulk out of it again. Down here with your racquet at four-thirty sharp.'

'Apres vous, madame,' said Mr Macgregor gallantly, at the door.

'Lead on, Macduff,' said Westfield.

They went out into the glaring white sunlight. The heat rolled from the earth like the breath of an oven. The flowers, oppressive to the eyes, blazed with not a petal stirring, in a debauch of sun. The glare sent a weariness through one's bones. There was something horrible in it — horrible to think of that blue, blinding sky, stretching on and on over Burma and India, over Siam, Cambodia, China, cloudless and interminable. The plates of Mr Macgregor's waiting car were too hot to touch. The evil time of day was beginning, the time, as the Burmese say, 'when feet are silent'. Hardly a living creature stirred, except men, and the black columns of ants, stimulated by the heat, which marched ribbon-like across the path, and the tail-less vultures which soared on the currents of the air.

Chapter 3

Flory turned to the left outside the Club gate and started down the bazaar road, under the shade of the peepul trees. A hundred yards away there was a swirl of music, where a squad of Military Policemen, lank Indians in greenish khaki, were marching back to their lines with a Gurkha boy playing the bagpipes ahead of them. Flory was going to see Dr Veraswami. The doctor's house was a long bungalow of earth-oiled wood, standing on piles, with a large unkempt garden which adjoined that of the Club. The back of the house was towards the road, for it faced the hospital, which lay between it and the river.

As Flory entered the compound there was a frightened squawk of women and a scurrying within the house. Evidently he had narrowly missed seeing the doctor's wife. He went round to the front of the house and called up to the veranda:

'Doctor! Are you busy? May I come up?'

The doctor, a little black and white figure, popped from within the house like a jack-in-the-box. He hurried to the veranda rail, exclaimed effusively:

'If you may come up! Of course, of course, come up this instant! Ah, Mr Flory, how very delightful to see you! Come up, come up. What drink will you have? I have whisky, beer, vermouth and other European liquors. Ah, my dear friend, how I have been pining for some cultured conversation!'

The doctor was a small, black, plump man with fuzzy hair and round, credulous eyes. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles, and he was dressed in a badly fitting white drill suit, with trousers bagging concertina-like over clumsy black boots. His voice was eager and bubbling, with a hissing of the s's. As Flory came up the steps the doctor popped back to the end of the veranda and rummaged in a big tin ice-chest, rapidly pulling out bottles of all descriptions. The veranda was wide and dark, with low eaves from which baskets of fern hung, making it seem like a cave behind a waterfall of sunlight. It was furnished with long, cane-bottomed chairs made in the jail, and at one end there was a book-case containing a rather

unappetizing little library, mainly books of essays, of the Emerson-Carlyle-Stevenson type. The doctor, a great reader, liked his books to have what he called a 'moral meaning'.

'Well, doctor,' said Flory — the doctor had meanwhile thrust him into a long chair, pulled out the leg-rests so that he could lie down, and put cigarettes and beer within reach. 'Well, doctor, and how are things? How's the British Empire? Sick of the palsy as usual?'

'Aha, Mr Flory, she iss very low, very low! Grave complications setting in. Septicaemia, peritonitis and paralysis of the ganglia. We shall have to call in the specialists, I fear. Aha!'

It was a joke between the two men to pretend that the British Empire was an aged female patient of the doctor's. The doctor had enjoyed this joke for two years without growing tired of it.

'Ah, doctor,' said Flory, supine in the long chair, 'what a joy to be here after that bloody Club. When I come to your house I feel like a Nonconformist minister dodging up to town and going home with a tart. Such a glorious holiday from THEM' — he motioned with one heel in the direction of the Club— 'from my beloved fellow Empire-builders. British prestige, the white man's burden, the pukka sahib sans peur et sans reproche — you know. Such a relief to be out of the stink of it for a little while.'

'My friend, my friend, now come, come, please! That iss outrageous. You must not say such things of honourable English gentlemen!'

'You don't have to listen to the honourable gentlemen talking, doctor. I stood it as long as I could this morning. Ellis with his "dirty nigger", Westfield with his jokes, Macgregor with his Latin tags and please give the bearer fifteen lashes. But when they got on to that story about the old havildar — you know, the dear old havildar who said that if the British left India there wouldn't be a rupee or a virgin between — you know; well, I couldn't stand it any longer. It's time that old havildar was put on the retired list. He's been saying the same thing ever since the Jubilee in 'eighty-seven.'

The doctor grew agitated, as he always did when Flory criticized the Club members. He was standing with his plump white-clad behind balanced against the veranda rail, and sometimes gesticulating. When searching for a word he would nip his black

thumb and forefinger together, as though to capture an idea floating in the air.

'But truly, truly, Mr Flory, you must not speak so! Why iss it that always you are abusing the pukka sahibs, ass you call them? They are the salt of the earth. Consider the great things they have done — consider the great administrators who have made British India what it iss. Consider Clive, Warren Hastings, Dalhousie, Curzon. They were such men — I quote your immortal Shakespeare — ass, take them for all in all, we shall not look upon their like again!'

'Well, do you want to look upon their like again? I don't.'

'And consider how noble a type iss the English gentleman! Their glorious loyalty to one another! The public school spirit! Even those of them whose manner iss unfortunate — some Englishmen are arrogant, I concede — have the great, sterling qualities that we Orientals lack. Beneath their rough exterior, their hearts are of gold.'

'Of gilt, shall we say? There's a kind of spurious good-fellowship between the English and this country. It's a tradition to booze together and swap meals and pretend to be friends, though we all hate each other like poison. Hanging together, we call it. It's a political necessity. Of course drink is what keeps the machine going. We should all go mad and kill one another in a week if it weren't for that. There's a subject for one of your uplift essayists, doctor. Booze as the cement of empire.'

The doctor shook his head. 'Really, Mr Flory, I know not what it iss that hass made you so cynical. It iss so most unsuitable! You — an English gentleman of high gifts and character — to be uttering seditious opinions that are worthy of the Burmese Patriot!'

'Seditious?' Flory said. 'I'M not seditious. I don't want the Burmans to drive us out of this country. God forbid! I'm here to make money, like everyone else. All I object to is the slimy white man's burden humbug. The pukka sahib pose. It's so boring. Even those bloody fools at the Club might be better company if we weren't all of us living a lie the whole time.'

'But, my dear friend, what lie are you living?'

'Why, of course, the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them. I suppose it's a natural enough lie. But it corrupts us, it corrupts us in ways you can't imagine. There's

an everlasting sense of being a sneak and a liar that torments us and drives us to justify ourselves night and day. It's at the bottom of half our beastliness to the natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves and go on thieving without any humbug.'

The doctor, very pleased, nipped his thumb and forefinger together. 'The weakness of your argument, my dear friend,' he said, beaming at his own irony, 'the weakness appears to be, that you are NOT thieves.'

'Now, my dear doctor— '

Flory sat up in the long chair, partly because his prickly heat had just stabbed him in the back like a thousand needles, partly because his favourite argument with the doctor was about to begin. This argument, vaguely political in nature, took place as often as the two men met. It was a topsy-turvy affair, for the Englishman was bitterly anti-English and the Indian fanatically loyal. Dr Veraswami had a passionate admiration for the English, which a thousand snubs from Englishmen had not shaken. He would maintain with positive eagerness that he, as an Indian, belonged to an inferior and degenerate race. His faith in British justice was so great that even when, at the jail, he had to superintend a flogging or a hanging, and would come home with his black face faded grey and dose himself with whisky, his zeal did not falter. Flory's seditious opinions shocked him, but they also gave him a certain shuddering pleasure, such as a pious believer will take in hearing the Lord's Prayer repeated backwards.

'My dear doctor,' said Flory, 'how can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal? It's so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets. Do you suppose my firm, for instance, could get its timber contracts if the country weren't in the hands of the British? Or the other timber firms, or the oil companies, or the miners and planters and traders? How could the Rice Ring go on skinning the unfortunate peasant if it hadn't the Government behind it? The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English — or rather to gangs of Jews and Scotchmen.'

'My friend, it iss pathetic to me to hear you talk so. It iss truly

pathetic. You say you are here to trade? Of course you are. Could the Burmese trade for themselves? Can they make machinery, ships, railways, roads? They are helpless without you. What would happen to the Burmese forests if the English were not here? They would be sold immediately to the Japanese, who would gut them and ruin them. Instead of which, in your hands, actually they are improved. And while your businessmen develop the resources of our country, your officials are civilizing us, elevating us to their level, from pure public spirit. It is a magnificent record of self-sacrifice.'

'Bosh, my dear doctor. We teach the young men to drink whisky and play football, I admit, but precious little else. Look at our schools — factories for cheap clerks. We've never taught a single useful manual trade to the Indians. We daren't; frightened of the competition in industry. We've even crushed various industries. Where are the Indian muslins now? Back in the forties or thereabouts they were building sea-going ships in India, and manning them as well. Now you couldn't build a seaworthy fishing boat there. In the eighteenth century the Indians cast guns that were at any rate up to the European standard. Now, after we've been in India a hundred and fifty years, you can't make so much as a brass cartridge-case in the whole continent. The only Eastern races that have developed at all quickly are the independent ones. I won't instance Japan, but take the case of Siam— '

The doctor waved his hand excitedly. He always interrupted the argument at this point (for as a rule it followed the same course, almost word for word), finding that the case of Siam hampered him.

'My friend, my friend, you are forgetting the Oriental character. How iss it possible to have developed us, with our apathy and superstition? At least you have brought to us law and order. The unswerving British Justice and the Pax Britannica.'

'Pox Britannica, doctor, Pox Britannica is its proper name. And in any case, whom is it pax for? The money-lender and the lawyer. Of course we keep the peace in India, in our own interest, but what does all this law and order business boil down to? More banks and more prisons — that's all it means.'

'What monstrous misrepresentations!' cried the doctor. 'Are not prissons necessary? And have you brought us nothing but prissons?

Consider Burma in the days of Thibaw, with dirt and torture and ignorance, and then look around you. Look merely out of this veranda — look at that hospital, and over to the right at that school and that police station. Look at the whole uprush of modern progress!'

'Of course I don't deny,' Flory said, 'that we modernize this country in certain ways. We can't help doing so. In fact, before we've finished we'll have wrecked the whole Burmese national culture. But we're not civilizing them, we're only rubbing our dirt on to them. Where's it going to lead, this uprush of modern progress, as you call it? Just to our own dear old swinery of gramophones and billycock hats. Sometimes I think that in two hundred years all this— ' he waved a foot towards the horizon— 'all this will be gone — forests, villages, monasteries, pagodas all vanished. And instead, pink villas fifty yards apart; all over those hills, as far as you can see, villa after villa, with all the gramophones playing the same tune. And all the forests shaved flat — chewed into wood-pulp for the News of the World, or sawn up into gramophone cases. But the trees avenge themselves, as the old chap says in The Wild Duck. You've read Ibsen, of course?'

'Ah, no, Mr Flory, alas! That mighty master-mind, your inspired Bernard Shaw hass called him. It iss a pleasure to come. But, my friend, what you do not see iss that your civilization at its very worst iss for us an advance. Gramophones, billycock hats, the News of the World — all iss better than the horrible sloth of the Oriental. I see the British, even the least inspired of them, ass — ass— ' the doctor searched for a phrase, and found one that probably came from Stevenson— 'ass torchbearers upon the path of progress.'

'I don't. I see them as a kind of up-to-date, hygienic, self-satisfied louse. Creeping round the world building prisons. They build a prison and call it progress,' he added rather regretfully — for the doctor would not recognize the allusion.

'My friend, positively you are harping upon the subject of prissons! Consider that there are also other achievements of your countrymen. They construct roads, they irrigate deserts, they conquer famines, they build schools, they set up hospitals, they combat plague, cholera, leprosy, smallpox, venereal disease— '

‘Having brought it themselves,’ put in Flory.

‘No, sir!’ returned the doctor, eager to claim this distinction for his own countrymen. ‘No, sir, it wass the Indians who introduced venereal disease into this country. The Indians introduce diseases, and the English cure them. THERE iss the answer to all your pessimism and seditiousness.’

‘Well, doctor, we shall never agree. The fact is that you like all this modern progress business, whereas I’d rather see things a little bit septic. Burma in the days of Thibaw would have suited me better, I think. And as I said before, if we are a civilizing influence, it’s only to grab on a larger scale. We should chuck it quickly enough if it didn’t pay.’

‘My friend, you do not think that. If truly you disapprove of the British Empire, you would not be talking of it privately here. You would be proclaiming from the house-tops. I know your character, Mr Flory, better than you know it yourself.’

‘Sorry, doctor; I don’t go in for proclaiming from the housetops. I haven’t the guts. I “counsel ignoble ease”, like old Belial in Paradise Lost. It’s safer. You’ve got to be a pukka sahib or die, in this country. In fifteen years I’ve never talked honestly to anyone except you. My talks here are a safety-valve; a little Black Mass on the sly, if you understand me.’

At this moment there was a desolate wailing noise outside. Old Mattu, the Hindu durwan who looked after the European church, was standing in the sunlight below the veranda. He was an old fever-stricken creature, more like a grasshopper than a human being, and dressed in a few square inches of dingy rag. He lived near the church in a hut made of flattened kerosene tins, from which he would sometimes hurry forth at the appearance of a European, to salaam deeply and wail something about his ‘talab’, which was eighteen rupees a month. Looking piteously up at the veranda, he massaged the earth-coloured skin of his belly with one hand, and with the other made the motion of putting food into his mouth. The doctor felt in his pocket and dropped a four-anna piece over the veranda rail. He was notorious for his soft-heartedness, and all the beggars in Kyauktada made him their target.

‘Behold there the degeneracy of the East,’ said the doctor,

pointing to Mattu, who was doubling himself up like a caterpillar and uttering grateful whines. 'Look at the wretchedness of hiss limbs. The calves of hiss legs are not so thick ass an Englishman's wrists. Look at hiss abjectness and servility. Look at hiss ignorance — such ignorance ass iss not known in Europe outside a home for mental defectives. Once I asked Mattu to tell me hiss age. "Sahib," he said, "I believe that I am ten years old." How can you pretend, Mr Flory, that you are not the natural superior of such creatures?'

'Poor old Mattu, the uprush of modern progress seems to have missed him somehow,' Flory said, throwing another four-anna piece over the rail. 'Go on, Mattu, spend that on booze. Be as degenerate as you can. It all postpones Utopia.'

'Aha, Mr Flory, sometimes I think that all you say iss but to — what iss the expression? — pull my leg. The English sense of humour. We Orientals have no humour, ass iss well known.'

'Lucky devils. It's been the ruin of us, our bloody sense of humour.' He yawned with his hands behind his head. Mattu had shambled away after further grateful noises. 'I suppose I ought to be going before this cursed sun gets too high. The heat's going to be devilish this year, I feel it in my bones. Well, doctor, we've been arguing so much that I haven't asked for your news. I only got in from the jungle yesterday. I ought to go back the day after tomorrow — don't know whether I shall. Has anything been happening in Kyauktada? Any scandals?'

The doctor looked suddenly serious. He had taken off his spectacles, and his face, with dark liquid eyes, recalled that of a black retriever dog. He looked away, and spoke in a slightly more hesitant tone than before.

'That fact iss, my friend, there iss a most unpleasant business afoot. You will perhaps laugh — it sounds nothing — but I am in serious trouble. Or rather, I am in danger of trouble. It iss an underground business. You Europeans will never hear of it directly. In this place' — he waved a hand towards the bazaar— 'there iss perpetual conspiracies and plottings of which you do not hear. But to us they mean much.'

'What's been happening, then?'

'It iss this. An intrigue iss brewing against me. A most serious

intrigue which iss intended to blacken my character and ruin my official career. Ass an Englishman you will not understand these things. I have incurred the enmity of a man you probably do not know, U Po Kyin, the Sub-divisional Magistrate. He iss a most dangerous man. The damage that he can do to me iss incalculable.'

'U Po Kyin? Which one is that?'

'The great fat man with many teeth. Hiss house iss down the road there, a hundred yards away.'

'Oh, that fat scoundrel? I know him well.'

'No, no, my friend, no, no!' exclaimed the doctor quite eagerly; 'it cannot be that you know him. Only an Oriental could know him. You, an English gentleman, cannot sink your mind to the depth of such ass U Po Kyin. He iss more than a scoundrel, he iss — what shall I say? Words fail me. He recalls to me a crocodile in human shape. He hass the cunning of the crocodile, its cruelty, its bestiality. If you knew the record of that man! The outrages he hass committed! The extortions, the briberies! The girls he hass ruined, raping them before the very eyes of their mothers! Ah, an English gentleman cannot imagine such a character. And thiss iss the man who hass taken hiss oath to ruin me.'

'I've heard a good deal about U Po Kyin from various sources,' Flory said. 'He seems a fair sample of a Burmese magistrate. A Burman told me that during the war U Po Kyin was at work recruiting, and he raised a battalion from his own illegitimate sons. Is that true?'

'It could hardly be so,' said the doctor, 'for they would not have been old enough. But of hiss villainy there iss no doubt. And now he iss determined upon ruining me. In the first place he hates me because I know too much about him; and besides, he iss the enemy of any reasonably honest man. He will proceed — such iss the practice of such men — by calumny. He will spread reports about me — reports of the most appalling and untrue descriptions. Already he iss beginning them.'

'But would anyone believe a fellow like that against you? He's only a lowdown magistrate. You're a high official.'

'Ah, Mr Flory, you do not understand Oriental cunning. U Po Kyin hass ruined higher officials than I. He will know ways to make

himself believed. And therefore — ah, it iss a difficult business!'

The doctor took a step or two up and down the veranda, polishing his glasses with his handkerchief. It was clear that there was something more which delicacy prevented him from saying. For a moment his manner was so troubled that Flory would have liked to ask whether he could not help in some way, but he did not, for he knew the uselessness of interfering in Oriental quarrels. No European ever gets to the bottom of these quarrels; there is always something impervious to the European mind, a conspiracy behind the conspiracy, a plot within the plot. Besides, to keep out of 'native' quarrels is one of the Ten Precepts of the pukka sahib. He said doubtfully:

'What is a difficult business?'

'It iss, if only — ah, my friend, you will laugh at me, I fear. But it iss this: if only I were a member of your European Club! If only! How different would my position be!'

'The Club? Why? How would that help you?'

'My friend, in these matters prestige iss everything. It iss not that U Po Kyin will attack me openly; he would never dare; it iss that he will libel me and backbite me. And whether he iss believed or not depends entirely upon my standing with the Europeans. It iss so that things happen in India. If our prestige iss good, we rise; if bad, we fall. A nod and a wink will accomplish more than a thousand official reports. And you do not know what prestige it gives to an Indian to be a member of the European Club. In the Club, practically he ISS a European. No calumny can touch him. A Club member iss sacrosanct.'

Flory looked away over the veranda rail. He had got up as though to go. It always made him ashamed and uncomfortable when it had to be admitted between them that the doctor, because of his black skin, could not be received in the Club. It is a disagreeable thing when one's close friend is not one's social equal; but it is a thing native to the very air of India.

'They might elect you at the next general meeting,' he said. 'I don't say they will, but it's not impossible.'

'I trust, Mr Flory, that you do not think I am asking you to propose me for the Club? Heaven forbid! I know that that iss

impossible for you. Simply I wass remarking that if I were a member of the Club, I should be forthwith invulnerable— '

Flory cocked his Terai hat loosely on his head and stirred Flo up with his stick. She was asleep under the chair. Flory felt very uncomfortable. He knew that in all probability, if he had the courage to face a few rows with Ellis, he could secure Dr Veraswami's election to the Club. And the doctor, after all, was his friend, indeed, almost the sole friend he had in Burma. They had talked and argued together a hundred times, the doctor had dined at his house, he had even proposed to introduce Flory to his wife — but she, a pious Hindu, had refused with horror. They had made shooting trips together — the doctor, equipped with bandoliers and hunting knives, panting up hillsides slippery with bamboo leaves and blazing his gun at nothing. In common decency it was his duty to support the doctor. But he knew also that the doctor would never ask for any support, and that there would be an ugly row before an Oriental was got into the Club. No, he could not face that row! It was not worth it. He said:

'To tell you the truth, there's been talk about this already. They were discussing it this morning, and that little beast Ellis was preaching his usual "dirty nigger" sermon. Macgregor has suggested electing one native member. He's had orders to do so, I imagine.'

'Yes, I heard that. We hear all these things. It wass that that put the idea into my head.'

'It's to come up at the general meeting in June. I don't know what'll happen — it depends on Macgregor, I think. I'll give you my vote, but I can't do more than that. I'm sorry, but I simply can't. You don't know the row there'll be. Very likely they will elect you, but they'll do it as an unpleasant duty, under protest. They've made a perfect fetish of keeping this Club all-white, as they call it.'

'Of course, of course, my friend! I understand perfectly. Heaven forbid that you should get into trouble with your European friends on my behalf. Please, please, never to embroil yourself! The mere fact that you are known to be my friend benefits me more than you can imagine. Prestige, Mr Flory, iss like a barometer. Every time you are seen to enter my house the mercury rises half a degree.'

'Well, we must try and keep it at "Set Fair". That's about all I can do for you, I'm afraid.'

‘Even that iss much, my friend. And for that, there iss another thing of which I would warn you, though you will laugh, I fear. It iss that you yourself should beware of U Po Kyin. Beware of the crocodile! For sure he will strike at you when he knows that you are befriending me.’

‘All right, doctor, I’ll beware of the crocodile. I don’t fancy he can do me much harm, though.’

‘At least he will try. I know him. It will be hiss policy to detach my friends from me. Possibly he would even dare to spread hiss libels about you also.’

‘About me? Good gracious, no one would believe anything against ME. Civis Romanus sum. I’m an Englishman — quite above suspicion.’

‘Nevertheless, beware of hiss calumnies, my friend. Do not underrate him. He will know how to strike at you. He iss a crocodile. And like the crocodile’ — the doctor nipped his thumb and finger impressively; his images became mixed sometimes— ‘like the crocodile, he strikes always at the weakest spot!’

‘Do crocodiles always strike at the weakest spot, doctor?’

Both men laughed. They were intimate enough to laugh over the doctor’s queer English occasionally. Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, the doctor was a little disappointed that Flory had not promised to propose him for the Club, but he would have perished rather than say so. And Flory was glad to drop the subject, an uncomfortable one which he wished had never been raised.

‘Well, I really must be going, doctor. Good-bye in case I don’t see you again. I hope it’ll be all right at the general meeting. Macgregor’s not a bad old stick. I dare say he’ll insist on their electing you.’

‘Let us hope so, my friend. With that I can defy a hundred U Po Kyins. A thousand! Good-bye, my friend, good-bye.’

Then Flory settled his Terai hat on his head and went home across the glaring maidan, to his breakfast, for which the long morning of drinking, smoking and talking had left him no appetite.

Chapter 4

Flory lay asleep, naked except for black Shan trousers, upon his sweat-damp bed. He had been idling all day. He spent approximately three weeks of every month in camp, coming into Kyauktada for a few days at a time, chiefly in order to idle, for he had very little clerical work to do.

The bedroom was a large square room with white plaster walls, open doorways and no ceiling, but only rafters in which sparrows nested. There was no furniture except the big four-poster bed, with its furled mosquito net like a canopy, and a wicker table and chair and a small mirror; also some rough bookshelves, containing several hundred books, all mildewed by many rainy seasons and riddled by silver fish. A tuktoo clung to the wall, flat and motionless like a heraldic dragon. Beyond the veranda eaves the light rained down like glistening white oil. Some doves in a bamboo thicket kept up a dull droning noise, curiously appropriate to the heat — a sleepy sound, but with the sleepiness of chloroform rather than a lullaby.

Down at Mr Macgregor's bungalow, two hundred yards away, a durwan, like a living clock, hammered four strokes on a section of iron rail. Ko S'la, Flory's servant, awakened by the sound, went into the cookhouse, blew up the embers of the woodfire and boiled the kettle for tea. Then he put on his pink gaungbaung and muslin ingyi and brought the tea-tray to his master's bedside.

Ko S'la (his real name was Maung San Hla; Ko S'la was an abbreviation) was a short, square-shouldered, rustic-looking Burman with a very dark skin and a harassed expression. He wore a black moustache which curved downwards round his mouth, but like most Burmans he was quite beardless. He had been Flory's servant since his first day in Burma. The two men were within a month of one another's age. They had been boys together, had tramped side by side after snipe and duck, sat together in machans waiting for tigers that never came, shared the discomforts of a thousand camps and marches; and Ko S'la had pimped for Flory and borrowed money for him from the Chinese money-lenders, carried him to bed when he was drunk, tended him through bouts of fever. In Ko S'la's eyes

Flory, because a bachelor, was a boy still; whereas Ko S'la had married, begotten five children, married again and become one of the obscure martyrs of bigamy. Like all bachelors' servants, Ko S'la was lazy and dirty, and yet he was devoted to Flory. He would never let anyone else serve Flory at table, or carry his gun or hold his pony's head while he mounted. On the march, if they came to a stream, he would carry Flory across on his back. He was inclined to pity Flory, partly because he thought him childish and easily deceived, and partly because of the birthmark, which he considered a dreadful thing.

Ko S'la put the tea-tray down on the table very quietly, and then went round to the end of the bed and tickled Flory's toes. He knew by experience that this was the only way of waking Flory without putting him in a bad temper. Flory rolled over, swore, and pressed his forehead into the pillow.

'Four o'clock has struck, most holy god,' Ko S'la said. 'I have brought two teacups, because THE WOMAN said that she was coming.'

THE WOMAN was Ma Hla May, Flory's mistress. Ko S'la always called her THE WOMAN, to show his disapproval — not that he disapproved of Flory for keeping a mistress, but he was jealous of Ma Hla May's influence in the house.

'Will the holy one play tinnis this evening?' Ko S'la asked.

'No, it's too hot,' said Flory in English. 'I don't want anything to eat. Take this muck away and bring some whisky.'

Ko S'la understood English very well, though he could not speak it. He brought a bottle of whisky, and also Flory's tennis racquet, which he laid in a meaning manner against the wall opposite the bed. Tennis, according to his notions, was a mysterious ritual incumbent on all Englishmen, and he did not like to see his master idling in the evenings.

Flory pushed away in disgust the toast and butter that Ko S'la had brought, but he mixed some whisky in a cup of tea and felt better after drinking it. He had slept since noon, and his head and all his bones ached, and there was a taste like burnt paper in his mouth. It was years since he had enjoyed a meal. All European food in Burma is more or less disgusting — the bread is spongy stuff leavened with

palm-toddy and tasting like a penny bun gone wrong, the butter comes out of a tin, and so does the milk, unless it is the grey watery catlap of the dudh-wallah. As Ko S'la left the room there was a scraping of sandals outside, and a Burmese girl's high-pitched voice said, 'Is my master awake?'

'Come in,' said Flory rather bad temperedly.

Ma Hla May came in, kicking off red-lacquered sandals in the doorway. She was allowed to come to tea, as a special privilege, but not to other meals, nor to wear her sandals in her master's presence.

Ma Hla May was a woman of twenty-two or — three, and perhaps five feet tall. She was dressed in a longyi of pale blue embroidered Chinese satin, and a starched white muslin ingyi on which several gold lockets hung. Her hair was coiled in a tight black cylinder like ebony, and decorated with jasmine flowers. Her tiny, straight, slender body was a contourless as a bas-relief carved upon a tree. She was like a doll, with her oval, still face the colour of new copper, and her narrow eyes; an outlandish doll and yet a grotesquely beautiful one. A scent of sandalwood and coco-nut oil came into the room with her.

Ma Hla May came across to the bed, sat down on the edge and put her arms rather abruptly round Flory. She smelled at his cheek with her flat nose, in the Burmese fashion.

'Why did my master not send for me this afternoon?' she said.

'I was sleeping. It is too hot for that kind of thing.'

'So you would rather sleep alone than with Ma Hla May? How ugly you must think me, then! Am I ugly, master?'

'Go away,' he said, pushing her back. 'I don't want you at this time of day.'

'At least touch me with your lips, then. (There is no Burmese word for to kiss.) All white men do that to their women.'

'There you are, then. Now leave me alone. Fetch some cigarettes and give me one.'

'Why is it that nowadays you never want to make love to me? Ah, two years ago it was so different! You loved me in those days. You gave me presents of gold bangles and silk longyis from Mandalay. And now look' — Ma Hla May held out one tiny muslin-clad arm— 'not a single bangle. Last month I had thirty, and now all of them are pawned. How can I go to the bazaar without my bangles, and

wearing the same longyi over and over again? I am ashamed before the other women.'

'Is it my fault if you pawn your bangles?'

'Two years ago you would have redeemed them for me. Ah, you do not love Ma Hla May any longer!'

She put her arms round him again and kissed him, a European habit which he had taught her. A mingled scent of sandalwood, garlic, coco-nut oil and the jasmine in her hair floated from her. It was a scent that always made his teeth tingle. Rather abstractedly he pressed her head back upon the pillow and looked down at her queer, youthful face, with its high cheekbones, stretched eyelids and short, shapely lips. She had rather nice teeth, like the teeth of a kitten. He had bought her from her parents two years ago, for three hundred rupees. He began to stroke her brown throat, rising like a smooth, slender stalk from the collarless ingyi.

'You only like me because I am a white man and have money,' he said.

'Master, I love you, I love you more than anything in the world. Why do you say that? Have I not always been faithful to you?'

'You have a Burmese lover.'

'Ugh!' Ma Hla May affected to shudder at the thought. 'To think of their horrible brown hands, touching me! I should die if a Burman touched me!'

'Liar.'

He put his hand on her breast. Privately, Ma Hla May did not like this, for it reminded her that her breasts existed — the ideal of a Burmese woman being to have no breasts. She lay and let him do as he wished with her, quite passive yet pleased and faintly smiling, like a cat which allows one to stroke it. Flory's embraces meant nothing to her (Ba Pe, Ko S'la's younger brother, was secretly her lover), yet she was bitterly hurt when he neglected them. Sometimes she had even put love-philtres in his food. It was the idle concubine's life that she loved, and the visits to her village dressed in all her finery, when she could boast of her position as a 'bo-kadaw' — a white man's wife; for she had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's legal wife.

When Flory had done with her he turned away, jaded and

ashamed, and lay silent with his left hand covering his birthmark. He always remembered the birthmark when he had done something to be ashamed of. He buried his face disgustedly in the pillow, which was damp and smelt of coco-nut oil. It was horribly hot, and the doves outside were still droning. Ma Hla May, naked, reclined beside Flory, fanning him gently with a wicker fan she had taken from the table.

Presently she got up and dressed herself, and lighted a cigarette. Then, coming back to the bed, she sat down and began stroking Flory's bare shoulder. The whiteness of his skin had a fascination for her, because of its strangeness and the sense of power it gave her. But Flory twitched his shoulder to shake her hand away. At these times she was nauseating and dreadful to him. His sole wish was to get her out of his sight.

'Get out,' he said.

Ma Hla May took her cigarette from her mouth and tried to offer it to Flory. 'Why is master always so angry with me when he has made love to me?' she said.

'Get out,' he repeated.

Ma Hla May continued to stroke Flory's shoulder. She had never learned the wisdom of leaving him alone at these times. She believed that lechery was a form of witchcraft, giving a woman magical powers over a man, until in the end she could weaken him to a half-idiotic slave. Each successive embrace sapped Flory's will and made the spell stronger — this was her belief. She began tormenting him to begin over again. She laid down her cigarette and put her arms round him, trying to turn him towards her and kiss his averted face, reproaching him for his coldness.

'Go away, go away!' he said angrily. 'Look in the pocket of my shorts. There is money there. Take five rupees and go.'

Ma Hla May found the five-rupee note and stuffed it into the bosom of her ingyi, but she still would not go. She hovered about the bed, worrying Flory until at last he grew angry and jumped up.

'Get out of this room! I told you to go. I don't want you in here after I've done with you.'

'That is a nice way to speak to me! You treat me as though I were a prostitute.'

‘So you are. Out you go,’ he said, pushing her out of the room by her shoulders. He kicked her sandals after her. Their encounters often ended in this way.

Flory stood in the middle of the room, yawning. Should he go down to the Club for tennis after all? No, it meant shaving, and he could not face the effort of shaving until he had a few drinks inside him. He felt his scrubby chin and lounged across to the mirror to examine it, but then turned away. He did not want to see the yellow, sunken face that would look back at him. For several minutes he stood slack-limbed, watching the tuktoo stalk a moth above the bookshelves. The cigarette that Ma Hla May had dropped burned down with an acrid smell, browning the paper. Flory took a book from the shelves, opened it and then threw it away in distaste. He had not even the energy to read. Oh God, God, what to do with the rest of this bloody evening?

Flo waddled into the room, wagging her tail and asking to be taken for a walk. Flory went sulkily into the little stone-floored bathroom that gave on to the bedroom, splashed himself with lukewarm water and put on his shirt and shorts. He must take some kind of exercise before the sun went down. In India it is in some way evil to spend a day without being once in a muck-sweat. It gives one a deeper sense of sin than a thousand lecheries. In the dark evening, after a quite idle day, one’s ennui reaches a pitch that is frantic, suicidal. Work, prayer, books, drinking, talking — they are all powerless against it; it can only be sweated out through the pores of the skin.

Flory went out and followed the road uphill into the jungle. It was scrub jungle at first, with dense stunted bushes, and the only trees were half-wild mangoes, bearing little turpentiny fruits the size of plums. Then the road struck among taller trees. The jungle was dried-up and lifeless at this time of year. The trees lined the road in close, dusty ranks, with leaves a dull olive-green. No birds were visible except some ragged brown creatures like disreputable thrushes, which hopped clumsily under the bushes; in the distance some other bird uttered a cry of ‘AH ha ha! AH ha ha!’ — a lonely, hollow sound like the echo of a laugh. There was a poisonous, ivy-like smell of crushed leaves. It was still hot, though the sun was losing its glare

and the slanting light was yellow.

After two miles the road ended at the ford of a shallow stream. The jungle grew greener here, because of the water, and the trees were taller. At the edge of the stream there was a huge dead pyinkado tree festooned with spidery orchids, and there were some wild lime bushes with white waxen flowers. They had a sharp scent like bergamot. Flory had walked fast and the sweat had drenched his shirt and dribbled, stinging, into his eyes. He had sweated himself into a better mood. Also, the sight of this stream always heartened him; its water was quite clear, rarest of sights in a miry country. He crossed the stream by the stepping stones, Flo splashing after him, and turned into a narrow track he knew, which led through the bushes. It was a track that cattle had made, coming to the stream to drink, and few human beings ever followed it. It led to a pool fifty yards upstream. Here a peepul tree grew, a great buttressed thing six feet thick, woven of innumerable strands of wood, like a wooden cable twisted by a giant. The roots of the tree made a natural cavern, under which the clear greenish water bubbled. Above and all around dense foliage shut out the light, turning the place into a green grotto walled with leaves.

Flory threw off his clothes and stepped into the water. It was a shade cooler than the air, and it came up to his neck when he sat down. Shoals of silvery mahseer, no bigger than sardines, came nosing and nibbling at his body. Flo had also flopped into the water, and she swam round silently, otter-like, with her webbed feet. She knew the pool well, for they often came here when Flory was at Kyauktada.

There was a stirring high up in the peepul tree, and a bubbling noise like pots boiling. A flock of green pigeons were up there, eating the berries. Flory gazed up into the great green dome of the tree, trying to distinguish the birds; they were invisible, they matched the leaves so perfectly, and yet the whole tree was alive with them, shimmering, as though the ghosts of birds were shaking it. Flo rested herself against the roots and growled up at the invisible creatures. Then a single green pigeon fluttered down and perched on a lower branch. It did not know that it was being watched. It was a tender thing, smaller than a tame dove, with jade-green back as smooth as

velvet, and neck and breast of iridescent colours. Its legs were like the pink wax that dentists use.

The pigeon rocked itself backwards and forwards on the bough, swelling out its breast feathers and laying its coralline beak upon them. A pang went through Flory. Alone, alone, the bitterness of being alone! So often like this, in lonely places in the forest, he would come upon something — bird, flower, tree — beautiful beyond all words, if there had been a soul with whom to share it. Beauty is meaningless until it is shared. If he had one person, just one, to halve his loneliness! Suddenly the pigeon saw the man and dog below, sprang into the air and dashed away swift as a bullet, with a rattle of wings. One does not often see green pigeons so closely when they are alive. They are high-flying birds, living in the treetops, and they do not come to the ground, or only to drink. When one shoots them, if they are not killed outright, they cling to the branch until they die, and drop long after one has given up waiting and gone away.

Flory got out of the water, put on his clothes and recrossed the stream. He did not go home by the road, but followed a foot-track southward into the jungle, intending to make a detour and pass through a village that lay in the fringe of the jungle not far from his house. Flo frisked in and out of the undergrowth, yelping sometimes when her long ears caught in the thorns. She had once turned up a hare near here. Flory walked slowly. The smoke of his pipe floated straight upwards in still plumes. He was happy and at peace after the walk and the clear water. It was cooler now, except for patches of heat lingering under the thicker trees, and the light was gentle. Bullock-cart wheels were screaming peacefully in the distance.

Soon they had lost their way in the jungle, and were wandering in a maze of dead trees and tangled bushes. They came to an impasse where the path was blocked by large ugly plants like magnified aspidistras, whose leaves terminated in long lashes armed with thorns. A firefly glowed greenish at the bottom of a bush; it was getting twilight in the thicker places. Presently the bullock-cart wheels screamed nearer, taking a parallel course.

‘Hey, saya gyi, saya gyi!’ Flory shouted, taking Flo by the collar to prevent her running away.

‘Ba le-de?’ the Burman shouted back. There was the sound of plunging hooves and of yells to the bullocks.

‘Come here, if you please, O venerable and learned sir! We have lost our way. Stop a moment, O great builder of pagodas!’

The Burman left his cart and pushed through the jungle, slicing the creepers with his dah. He was a squat middle-aged man with one eye. He led the way back to the track, and Flory climbed on to the flat, uncomfortable bullock cart. The Burman took up the string reins, yelled to the bullocks, prodded the roots of their tails with his short stick, and the cart jolted on with a shriek of wheels. The Burmese bullock-cart drivers seldom grease their axles, probably because they believe that the screaming keeps away evil spirits, though when questioned they will say that it is because they are too poor to buy grease.

They passed a whitewashed wooden pagoda, no taller than a man and half hidden by the tendrils of creeping plants. Then the track wound into the village, which consisted of twenty ruinous, wooden huts roofed with thatch, and a well beneath some barren date-palms. The egrets that roosted in the palms were streaming homewards over the treetops like white flights of arrows. A fat yellow woman with her longyi hitched under her armpits was chasing a dog round a hut, smacking at it with a bamboo and laughing, and the dog was also laughing in its fashion. The village was called Nyaunglebin— ‘the four peepul trees’; there were no peepul trees there now, probably they had been cut down and forgotten a century ago. The villagers cultivated a narrow strip of fields that lay between the town and the jungle, and they also made bullock carts which they sold in Kyauktada. Bullock-cart wheels were littered everywhere under the houses; massive things five feet across, with spokes roughly but strongly carved.

Flory got off the cart and gave the driver a present of four annas. Some brindled curs hurried from beneath the houses to sniff at Flo, and a flock of pot-bellied, naked children, with their hair tied in top-knots, also appeared, curious about the white man but keeping their distance. The village headman, a wizened, leaf-brown old man, came out of his house, and there were shikoings. Flory sat down on the steps of the headman’s house and relighted his pipe. He was thirsty.

‘Is the water in your well good to drink, thugyi-min?’

The headman reflected, scratching the calf of his left leg with his right big toenail. ‘Those who drink it, drink it, thakin. And those who do not drink it, do not drink it.’

‘Ah. That is wisdom.’

The fat woman who had chased the pariah brought a blackened earthenware teapot and a handleless bowl, and gave Flory some pale green tea, tasting of wood-smoke.

‘I must be going, thugyi-min. Thank you for the tea.’

‘God go with you, thakin.’

Flory went home by a path that led out on to the maidan. It was dark now. Ko S’la had put on a clean ingyi and was waiting in the bedroom. He had heated two kerosene tins of bath-water, lighted the petrol lamps and laid out a clean suit and shirt for Flory. The clean clothes were intended as a hint that Flory should shave, dress himself and go down to the Club after dinner. Occasionally he spent the evening in Shan trousers, loafing in a chair with a book, and Ko S’la disapproved of this habit. He hated to see his master behaving differently from other white men. The fact that Flory often came back from the Club drunk, whereas he remained sober when he stayed at home, did not alter Ko S’la’s opinion, because getting drunk was normal and pardonable in a white man.

‘The woman has gone down to the bazaar,’ he announced, pleased, as he always was when Ma Hla May left the house. ‘Ba Pe has gone with a lantern, to look after her when she comes back.’

‘Good,’ Flory said.

She had gone to spend her five rupees — gambling, no doubt. ‘The holy one’s bath-water is ready.’

‘Wait, we must attend to the dog first. Bring the comb,’ Flory said.

The two men squatted on the floor together and combed Flo’s silky coat and felt between her toes, picking out the ticks. It had to be done every evening. She picked up vast numbers of ticks during the day, horrible grey things that were the size of pin-heads when they got on to her, and gorged themselves till they were as large as peas. As each tick was detached Ko S’la put it on the floor and carefully crushed it with his big toe.

Then Flory shaved, bathed, dressed, and sat down to dinner. Ko S'la stood behind his chair, handing him the dishes and fanning him with the wicker fan. He had arranged a bowl of scarlet hibiscus flowers in the middle of the little table. The meal was pretentious and filthy. The clever 'Mug' cooks, descendants of servants trained by Frenchmen in India centuries ago, can do anything with food except make it eatable. After dinner Flory walked down to the Club, to play bridge and get three parts drunk, as he did most evenings when he was in Kyauktada.

Chapter 5

In spite of the whisky he had drunk at the Club, Flory had little sleep that night. The pariah curs were baying the moon — it was only a quarter full and nearly down by midnight, but the dogs slept all day in the heat, and they had begun their moon-choruses already. One dog had taken a dislike to Flory's house, and had settled down to bay at it systematically. Sitting on its bottom fifty yards from the gate, it let out sharp, angry yelps, one to half a minute, as regularly as a clock. It would keep this up for two or three hours, until the cocks began crowing.

Flory lay turning from side to side, his head aching. Some fool has said that one cannot hate an animal; he should try a few nights in India, when the dogs are baying the moon. In the end Flory could stand it no longer. He got up, rummaged in the tin uniform case under his bed for a rifle and a couple of cartridges, and went out on to the veranda.

It was fairly light in the quarter moon. He could see the dog, and he could see his foresight. He rested himself against the wooden pillar of the veranda and took aim carefully; then, as he felt the hard vulcanite butt against his bare shoulder, he flinched. The rifle had a heavy kick, and it left a bruise when one fired it. The soft flesh of his shoulder quailed. He lowered the rifle. He had not the nerve to fire it in cold blood.

It was no use trying to sleep. Flory got his jacket and some cigarettes, and began to stroll up and down the garden path, between the ghostly flowers. It was hot, and the mosquitoes found him out and came droning after him. Phantoms of dogs were chasing one another on the maidan. Over to the left the gravestones of the English cemetery glittered whitish, rather sinister, and one could see the mounds near by, that were the remains of old Chinese tombs. The hillside was said to be haunted, and the Club chokras cried when they were sent up the road at night.

'Cur, spineless cur,' Flory was thinking to himself; without heat, however, for he was too accustomed to the thought. 'Sneaking, idling, boozing, fornicating, soul-examining, self-pitying cur. All

those fools at the Club, those dull louts to whom you are so pleased to think yourself superior — they are all better than you, every man of them. At least they are men in their oafish way. Not cowards, not liars. Not half-dead and rotting. But you— '

He had reason to call himself names. There had been a nasty, dirty affair at the Club that evening. Something quite ordinary, quite according to precedent; but still dingy, cowardly, dishonouring.

When Flory had arrived at the Club only Ellis and Maxwell were there. The Lackersteens had gone to the station with the loan of Mr Macgregor's car, to meet their niece, who was to arrive by the night train. The three men were playing three-handed bridge fairly amicably when Westfield came in, his sandy face quite pink with rage, bringing a copy of a Burmese paper called the Burmese Patriot. There was a libellous article in it, attacking Mr Macgregor. The rage of Ellis and Westfield was devilish. They were so angry that Flory had the greatest difficulty in pretending to be angry enough to satisfy them. Ellis spent five minutes in cursing and then, by some extraordinary process, made up his mind that Dr Veraswami was responsible for the article. And he had thought of a counterstroke already. They would put a notice on the board — a notice answering and contradicting the one Mr Macgregor had posted the day before. Ellis wrote it out immediately, in his tiny, clear handwriting:

'In view of the cowardly insult recently offered to our Deputy commissioner, we the undersigned wish to give it as our opinion that this is the worst possible moment to consider the election of niggers to this Club,' etc,etc.

Westfield demurred to 'niggers'. It was crossed out by a single thin line and 'natives' substituted. The notice was signed 'R. Westfield, P. W. Ellis, C. W. Maxwell, J. Flory.'

Ellis was so pleased with his idea that quite half of his anger evaporated. The notice would accomplish nothing in itself, but the news of it would travel swiftly round the town, and would reach Dr Veraswami tomorrow. In effect, the doctor would have been publicly called a nigger by the European community. This delighted Ellis. For the rest of the evening he could hardly keep his eyes from the notice-board, and every few minutes he exclaimed in glee, 'That'll give little fat-belly something to think about, eh? Teach the little sod what

we think of him. That's the way to put 'em in their place, eh?' etc.

Meanwhile, Flory had signed a public insult to his friend. He had done it for the same reason as he had done a thousand such things in his life; because he lacked the small spark of courage that was needed to refuse. For, of course, he could have refused if he had chosen; and, equally of course, refusal would have meant a row with Ellis and Westfield. And oh, how he loathed a row! The nagging, the jeers! At the very thought of it he flinched; he could feel his birthmark palpable on his cheek, and something happening in his throat that made his voice go flat and guilty. Not that! It was easier to insult his friend, knowing that his friend must hear of it.

Flory had been fifteen years in Burma, and in Burma one learns not to set oneself up against public opinion. But his trouble was older than that. It had begun in his mother's womb, when chance put the blue birthmark on his cheek. He thought of some of the early effects of his birthmark. His first arrival at school, aged nine; the stares and, after a few days, shouts of the other boys; the nickname Blueface, which lasted until the school poet (now, Flory remembered, a critic who wrote rather good articles in the Nation) came out with the couplet:

New-tick Flory does look rum, Got a face like a monkey's bum,

whereupon the nickname was changed to Monkey-bum. And the subsequent years. On Saturday nights the older boys used to have what they called a Spanish Inquisition. The favourite torture was for someone to hold you in a very painful grip known only to a few illuminati and called Special Togo, while someone else beat you with a conker on a piece of string. But Flory had lived down 'Monkey-bum' in time. He was a liar, and a good footballer, the two things absolutely necessary for success at school. In his last term he and another boy held the school poet in Special Togo while the captain of the eleven gave him six with a spiked running shoe for being caught writing a sonnet. It was a formative period.

From that school he went to a cheap, third-rate public school. It was a poor, spurious place. It aped the great public schools with their traditions of High Anglicanism, cricket and Latin verses, and it had a school song called 'The Scrum of Life' in which God figured as the Great Referee. But it lacked the chief virtue of the great public

schools, their atmosphere of literary scholarship. The boys learned as nearly as possible nothing. There was not enough caning to make them swallow the dreary rubbish of the curriculum, and the wretched, underpaid masters were not the kind from whom one absorbs wisdom unawares. Flory left school a barbarous young lout. And yet even then there were, and he knew it, certain possibilities in him; possibilities that would lead to trouble as likely as not. But, of course, he had suppressed them. A boy does not start his career nicknamed Monkey-bum without learning his lesson.

He was not quite twenty when he came to Burma. His parents, good people and devoted to him, had found him a place in a timber firm. They had had great difficulty in getting him the job, had paid a premium they could not afford; later, he had rewarded them by answering their letters with careless scrawls at intervals of months. His first six months in Burma he had spent in Rangoon, where he was supposed to be learning the office side of his business. He had lived in a 'chummery' with four other youths who devoted their entire energies to debauchery. And what debauchery! They swilled whisky which they privately hated, they stood round the piano bawling songs of insane filthiness and silliness, they squandered rupees by the hundred on aged Jewish whores with the faces of crocodiles. That too had been a formative period.

From Rangoon he had gone to a camp in the jungle, north of Mandalay, extracting teak. The jungle life was not a bad one, in spite of the discomfort, the loneliness, and what is almost the worst thing in Burma, the filthy, monotonous food. He was very young then, young enough for hero-worship, and he had friends among the men in his firm. There were also shooting, fishing, and perhaps once in a year a hurried trip to Rangoon — pretext, a visit to the dentist. Oh, the joy of those Rangoon trips! The rush to Smart and Mookerdum's bookshop for the new novels out from England, the dinner at Anderson's with beefsteaks and butter that had travelled eight thousand miles on ice, the glorious drinking-bout! He was too young to realize what this life was preparing for him. He did not see the years stretching out ahead, lonely, eventless, corrupting.

He acclimatized himself to Burma. His body grew attuned to the strange rhythms of the tropical seasons. Every year from February to

May the sun glared in the sky like an angry god, then suddenly the monsoon blew westward, first in sharp squalls, then in a heavy ceaseless downpour that drenched everything until neither one's clothes, one's bed nor even one's food ever seemed to be dry. It was still hot, with a stuffy, vaporous heat. The lower jungle paths turned into morasses, and the paddy-fields were wastes of stagnant water with a stale, mousy smell. Books and boots were mildewed. Naked Burmans in yard-wide hats of palm-leaf ploughed the paddy-fields, driving their buffaloes through knee-deep water. Later, the women and children planted the green seedlings of paddy, dabbing each plant into the mud with little three-pronged forks. Through July and August there was hardly a pause in the rain. Then one night, high overhead, one heard a squawking of invisible birds. The snipe were flying southward from Central Asia. The rains tailed off, ending in October. The fields dried up, the paddy ripened, the Burmese children played hop-scotch with gonyin seeds and flew kites in the cool winds. It was the beginning of the short winter, when Upper Burma seemed haunted by the ghost of England. Wild flowers sprang into bloom everywhere, not quite the same as the English ones, but very like them — honeysuckle in thick bushes, field roses smelling of pear-drops, even violets in dark places of the forest. The sun circled low in the sky, and the nights and early mornings were bitterly cold, with white mists that poured through the valleys like the steam of enormous kettles. One went shooting after duck and snipe. There were snipe in countless myriads, and wild geese in flocks that rose from the jeel with a roar like a goods train crossing an iron bridge. The ripening paddy, breast-high and yellow, looked like wheat. The Burmans went to their work with muffled heads and their arms clasped across their breasts, their faces yellow and pinched with the cold. In the morning one marched through misty, incongruous wilderness, clearings of drenched, almost English grass and naked trees where monkeys squatted in the upper branches, waiting for the sun. At night, coming back to camp through the cold lanes, one met herds of buffaloes which the boys were driving home, with their huge horns looming through the mist like crescents. One had three blankets on one's bed, and game pies instead of the eternal chicken. After dinner one sat on a log by the vast camp-fire, drinking

beer and talking about shooting. The flames danced like red holly, casting a circle of light at the edge of which servants and coolies squatted, too shy to intrude on the white men and yet edging up to the fire like dogs. As one lay in bed one could hear the dew dripping from the trees like large but gentle rain. It was a good life while one was young and need not think about the future or the past.

Flory was twenty-four, and due for home leave, when the War broke out. He had dodged military service, which was easy to do and seemed natural at the time. The civilians in Burma had a comforting theory that 'sticking by one's job' (wonderful language, English! 'Sticking BY' — how different from 'sticking TO') was the truest patriotism; there was even a covert hostility towards the men who threw up their jobs in order to join the Army. In reality, Flory had dodged the War because the East already corrupted him, and he did not want to exchange his whisky, his servants and his Burmese girls for the boredom of the parade ground and the strain of cruel marches. The War rolled on, like a storm beyond the horizon. The hot, blowsy country, remote from danger, had a lonely, forgotten feeling. Flory took to reading voraciously, and learned to live in books when life was tiresome. He was growing adult, tiring of boyish pleasures, learning to think for himself, almost willy-nilly.

He celebrated his twenty-seventh birthday in hospital, covered from head to foot with hideous sores which were called mud-sores, but were probably caused by whisky and bad food. They left little pits in his skin which did not disappear for two years. Quite suddenly he had begun to look and feel very much older. His youth was finished. Eight years of Eastern life, fever, loneliness and intermittent drinking, had set their mark on him.

Since then, each year had been lonelier and more bitter than the last. What was at the centre of all his thoughts now, and what poisoned everything, was the ever bitterer hatred of the atmosphere of imperialism in which he lived. For as his brain developed — you cannot stop your brain developing, and it is one of the tragedies of the half-educated that they develop late, when they are already committed to some wrong way of life — he had grasped the truth about the English and their Empire. The Indian Empire is a despotism — benevolent, no doubt, but still a despotism with theft as

its final object. And as to the English of the East, the sahiblog, Flory had come so to hate them from living in their society, that he was quite incapable of being fair to them. For after all, the poor devils are no worse than anybody else. They lead unenviable lives; it is a poor bargain to spend thirty years, ill-paid, in an alien country, and then come home with a wrecked liver and a pine-apple backside from sitting in cane chairs, to settle down as the bore of some second-rate Club. On the other hand, the sahiblog are not to be idealized. There is a prevalent idea that the men at the 'outposts of Empire' are at least able and hardworking. It is a delusion. Outside the scientific services — the Forest Department, the Public Works Department and the like — there is no particular need for a British official in India to do his job competently. Few of them work as hard or as intelligently as the postmaster of a provincial town in England. The real work of administration is done mainly by native subordinates; and the real backbone of the despotism is not the officials but the Army. Given the Army, the officials and the businessmen can rub along safely enough even if they are fools. And most of them ARE fools. A dull, decent people, cherishing and fortifying their dullness behind a quarter of a million bayonets.

It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahibs' code.

In the end the secrecy of your revolt poisons you like a secret disease. Your whole life is a life of lies. Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs, whisky to right of you, Pink'un to left of you, listening and eagerly agreeing while Colonel Bodger develops his theory that these bloody Nationalists should be boiled in oil. You hear your Oriental friends called 'greasy little babus', and

you admit, dutifully, that they ARE greasy little babus. You see louts fresh from school kicking grey-haired servants. The time comes when you burn with hatred of your own countrymen, when you long for a native rising to drown their Empire in blood. And in this there is nothing honourable, hardly even any sincerity. For, au fond, what do you care if the Indian Empire is a despotism, if Indians are bullied and exploited? You only care because the right of free speech is denied you. You are a creature of the despotism, a pukka sahib, tied tighter than a monk or a savage by an unbreakable system of tabus.

Time passed and each year Flory found himself less at home in the world of the sahibs, more liable to get into trouble when he talked seriously on any subject whatever. So he had learned to live inwardly, secretly, in books and secret thoughts that could not be uttered. Even his talks with the doctor were a kind of talking to himself; for the doctor, good man, understood little of what was said to him. But it is a corrupting thing to live one's real life in secret. One should live with the stream of life, not against it. It would be better to be the thickest-skulled pukka sahib who ever hiccuped over 'Forty years on', than to live silent, alone, consoling oneself in secret, sterile worlds.

Flory had never been home to England. Why, he could not have explained, though he knew well enough. In the beginning accidents had prevented him. First there was the War, and after the War his firm were so short of trained assistants that they would not let him go for two years more. Then at last he had set out. He was pining for England, though he dreaded facing it, as one dreads facing a pretty girl when one is collarless and unshaven. When he left home he had been a boy, a promising boy and handsome in spite of his birthmark; now, only ten years later, he was yellow, thin, drunken, almost middle-aged in habits and appearance. Still, he was pining for England. The ship rolled westward over wastes of sea like rough-beaten silver, with the winter trade wind behind her. Flory's thin blood quickened with the good food and the smell of the sea. And it occurred to him — a thing he had actually forgotten in the stagnant air of Burma — that he was still young enough to begin over again. He would live a year in a civilized society, he would find some girl who did not mind his birthmark — a civilized girl, not a pukka

memsahib — and he would marry her and endure ten, fifteen more years of Burma. Then they would retire — he would be worth twelve or fifteen thousand pounds on retirement, perhaps. They would buy a cottage in the country, surround themselves with friends, books, their children, animals. They would be free for ever of the smell of pukka sahibdom. He would forget Burma, the horrible country that had come near ruining him.

When he reached Colombo he found a cable waiting for him. Three men in his firm had died suddenly of black-water fever. The firm were sorry, but would he please return to Rangoon at once? He should have his leave at the earliest possible opportunity.

Flory boarded the next boat for Rangoon, cursing his luck, and took the train back to his headquarters. He was not at Kyauktada then, but at another Upper Burma town. All the servants were waiting for him on the platform. He had handed them over en bloc to his successor, who had died. It was so queer to see their familiar faces again! Only ten days ago he had been speeding for England, almost thinking himself in England already; and now back in the old stale scene, with the naked black coolies squabbling over the luggage and a Burman shouting at his bullocks down the road.

The servants came crowding round him, a ring of kindly brown faces, offering presents. Ko S'la had brought a sambhur skin, the Indians some sweetmeats and a garland of marigolds, Ba Pe, a young boy then, a squirrel in a wicker cage. There were bullock carts waiting for the luggage. Flory walked up to the house, looking ridiculous with the big garland dangling from his neck. The light of the cold-weather evening was yellow and kind. At the gate an old Indian, the colour of earth, was cropping grass with a tiny sickle. The wives of the cook and the mali were kneeling in front of the servants' quarters, grinding curry paste on the stone slab.

Something turned over in Flory's heart. It was one of those moments when one becomes conscious of a vast change and deterioration in one's life. For he had realized, suddenly, that in his heart he was glad to be coming back. This country which he hated was now his native country, his home. He had lived here ten years, and every particle of his body was compounded of Burmese soil. Scenes like these — the sallow evening light, the old Indian cropping

grass, the creak of the cartwheels, the streaming egrets — were more native to him than England. He had sent deep roots, perhaps his deepest, into a foreign country.

Since then he had not even applied for home leave. His father had died, then his mother, and his sisters, disagreeable horse-faced women whom he had never liked, had married and he had almost lost touch with them. He had no tie with Europe now, except the tie of books. For he had realized that merely to go back to England was no remedy for loneliness; he had grasped the special nature of the hell that is reserved for Anglo-Indians. Ah, those poor prosing old wrecks in Bath and Cheltenham! Those tomb-like boarding-houses with Anglo-Indians littered about in all stages of decomposition, all talking and talking about what happened in Boggleywalah in '88! Poor devils, they know what it means to have left one's heart in an alien and hated country. There was, he saw clearly, only one way out. To find someone who would share his life in Burma — but really share it, share his inner, secret life, carry away from Burma the same memories as he carried. Someone who would love Burma as he loved it and hate it as he hated it. Who would help him to live with nothing hidden, nothing unexpressed. Someone who understood him: a friend, that was what it came down to.

A friend. Or a wife? That quite impossible she. Someone like Mrs Lackersteen, for instance? Some damned memsahib, yellow and thin, scandalmongering over cocktails, making kit-kit with the servants, living twenty years in the country without learning a word of the language. Not one of those, please God.

Flory leaned over the gate. The moon was vanishing behind the dark wall of the jungle, but the dogs were still howling. Some lines from Gilbert came into his mind, a vulgar silly jingle but appropriate — something about 'discoursing on your complicated state of mind'. Gilbert was a gifted little skunk. Did all his trouble, then, simply boil down to that? Just complicated, unmanly whinings; poor-little-rich-girl stuff? Was he no more than a loafer using his idleness to invent imaginary woes? A spiritual Mrs Wititterly? A Hamlet without poetry? Perhaps. And if so, did that make it any more bearable? It is not the less bitter because it is perhaps one's own fault, to see oneself drifting, rotting, in dishonour and horrible futility, and all the while

knowing that somewhere within one there is the possibility of a decent human being.

Oh well, God save us from self-pity! Flory went back to the veranda, took up the rifle, and wincing slightly, let drive at the pariah dog. There was an echoing roar, and the bullet buried itself in the maidan, wide of the mark. A mulberry-coloured bruise sprang out on Flory's shoulder. The dog gave a yell of fright, took to its heels, and then, sitting down fifty yards farther away, once more began rhythmically baying.

Chapter 6

The morning sunlight slanted up the maidan and struck, yellow as goldleaf, against the white face of the bungalow. Four black-purple crows swooped down and perched on the veranda rail, waiting their chance to dart in and steal the bread and butter that Ko S'la had set down beside Flory's bed. Flory crawled through the mosquito net, shouted to Ko S'la to bring him some gin, and then went into the bathroom and sat for a while in a zinc tub of water that was supposed to be cold. Feeling better after the gin, he shaved himself. As a rule he put off shaving until the evening, for his beard was black and grew quickly.

While Flory was sitting morosely in his bath, Mr Macgregor, in shorts and singlet on the bamboo mat laid for the purpose in his bedroom, was struggling with Numbers 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of Nordenflycht's 'Physical Jerks for the Sedentary'. Mr Macgregor never, or hardly ever, missed his morning exercises. Number 8 (flat on the back, raise legs to the perpendicular without bending knees) was downright painful for a man of forty-three; Number 9 (flat on the back, rise to a sitting posture and touch toes with tips of fingers) was even worse. No matter, one must keep fit! As Mr Macgregor lunged painfully in the direction of his toes, a brick-red shade flowed upwards from his neck and congested his face with a threat of apoplexy. The sweat gleamed on his large, tallowy breasts. Stick it out, stick it out! At all costs one must keep fit. Mohammed Ali, the bearer, with Mr Macgregor's clean clothes across his arm, watched through the half-open door. His narrow, yellow, Arabian face expressed neither comprehension nor curiosity. He had watched these contortions — a sacrifice, he dimly imagined, to some mysterious and exacting god — every morning for five years.

At the same time, too, Westfield, who had gone out early, was leaning against the notched and ink-stained table of the police station, while the fat Sub-inspector interrogated a suspect whom two constables were guarding. The suspect was a man of forty, with a grey, timorous face, dressed only in a ragged longyi kilted to the knee, beneath which his lank, curved shins were speckled with tick-

bites.

'Who is this fellow?' said Westfield.

'Thief, sir. We catch him in possession of this ring with two emeralds very-dear. No explanation. How could he — poor coolie — own a emerald ring? He have stole it.'

He turned ferociously upon the suspect, advanced his face tomcat-fashion till it was almost touching the other's, and roared in an enormous voice:

'You stole the ring!'

'No.'

'You are an old offender!'

'No.'

'You have been in prison!'

'No.'

'Turn round!' bellowed the Sub-inspector on an inspiration. 'Bend over!'

The suspect turned his grey face in agony towards Westfield, who looked away. The two constables seized him, twisted him round and bent him over; the Sub-inspector tore off his longyi, exposing his buttocks.

'Look at this, sir!' He pointed to some scars. 'He have been flogged with bamboos. He is an old offender. THEREFORE he stole the ring!'

'All right, put him in the clink,' said Westfield moodily, as he lounged away from the table with his hands in his pockets. At the bottom of his heart he loathed running in these poor devils of common thieves. Dacoits, rebels — yes; but not these poor cringing rats! 'How many have you got in the clink now, Maung Ba?' he said.

'Three, sir.'

The lock-up was upstairs, a cage surrounded by six-inch wooden bars, guarded by a constable armed with a carbine. It was very dark, stifling hot, and quite unfurnished, except for an earth latrine that stank to heaven. Two prisoners were squatting at the bars, keeping their distance from a third, an Indian coolie, who was covered from head to foot with ringworm like a coat of mail. A stout Burmese woman, wife of a constable, was kneeling outside the cage ladling rice and watery dahl into tin pannikins.

‘Is the food good?’ said Westfield.

‘It is good, most holy one,’ chorused the prisoners.

The Government provided for the prisoners’ food at the rate of two annas and a half per meal per man, out of which the constable’s wife looked to make a profit of one anna.

Flory went outside and loitered down the compound, poking weeds into the ground with his stick. At that hour there were beautiful faint colours in everything — tender green of leaves, pinkish brown of earth and tree-trunks — like aquarelle washes that would vanish in the later glare. Down on the maidan flights of small, low-flying brown doves chased one another to and fro, and bee-eaters, emerald-green, curvetted like slow swallows. A file of sweepers, each with his load half hidden beneath his garment, were marching to some dreadful dumping-hole that existed on the edge of the jungle. Starveling wretches, with stick-like limbs and knees too feeble to be straightened, draped in earth-coloured rags, they were like a procession of shrouded skeletons walking.

The mali was breaking ground for a new flower-bed, down by the pigeon-cote that stood near the gate. He was a lymphatic, half-witted Hindu youth, who lived his life in almost complete silence, because he spoke some Manipur dialect which nobody else understood, not even his Zerbadi wife. His tongue was also a size too large for his mouth. He salaamed low to Flory, covering his face with his hand, then swung his mamootie aloft again and hacked at the dry ground with heavy, clumsy strokes, his tender back-muscles quivering.

A sharp grating scream that sounded like ‘Kwaaa!’ came from the servants quarters. Ko S’la’s wives had begun their morning quarrel. The tame fighting cock, called Nero, strutted zigzag down the path, nervous of Flo, and Ba Pe came out with a bowl of paddy and they fed Nero and the pigeons. There were more yells from the servants’ quarters, and the gruffer voices of men trying to stop the quarrel. Ko S’la suffered a great deal from his wives. Ma Pu, the first wife, was a gaunt hard-faced woman, stringy from much child-bearing, and Ma Yi, the ‘little wife’, was a fat, lazy cat some years younger. The two women fought incessantly when Flory was in headquarters and they were together. Once when Ma Pu was chasing Ko S’la with a bamboo, he had dodged behind Flory for protection, and Flory had

received a nasty blow on the leg.

Mr Macgregor was coming up the road, striding briskly and swinging a thick walking-stick. He was dressed in khaki pagri-cloth shirt, drill shorts and a pigsticker topi. Besides his exercises, he took a brisk two-mile walk every morning when he could spare the time.

'Top o' the mornin' to ye!' he called to Flory in a hearty matutinal voice, putting on an Irish accent. He cultivated a brisk, invigorating, cold-bath demeanour at this hour of the morning. Moreover, the libellous article in the Burmese Patriot, which he had read overnight, had hurt him, and he was affecting a special cheeriness to conceal this.

'Morning!' Flory called back as heartily as he could manage.

Nasty old bladder of lard! he thought, watching Mr Macgregor up the road. How his bottom did stick out in those tight khaki shorts. Like one of those beastly middle-aged scoutmasters, homosexuals almost to a man, that you see photographs of in the illustrated papers. Dressing himself up in those ridiculous clothes and exposing his pudgy, dimpled knees, because it is the pukka sahib thing to take exercise before breakfast — disgusting!

A Burman came up the hill, a splash of white and magenta. It was Flory's clerk, coming from the tiny office, which was not far from the church. Reaching the gate, he shikoed and presented a grimy envelope, stamped Burmese-fashion on the point of the flap.

'Good morning, sir.'

'Good morning. What's this thing?'

'Local letter, your honour. Come this morning's post. Anonymous letter, I think, sir.'

'Oh bother. All right, I'll be down to the office about eleven.'

Flory opened the letter. It was written on a sheet of foolscap, and it ran:

MR JOHN FLORY,

SIR, — I the undersigned beg to suggest and WARN to your honour certain useful pieces of information whereby your honour will be much profited, sir.

Sir, it has been remarked in Kyauktada your honour's great friendship and intimacy with Dr Veraswami, the Civil Surgeon,

frequenting with him, inviting him to your house, etc. Sir, we beg to inform you that the said Dr Veraswami is NOT A GOOD MAN and in no ways a worthy friend of European gentlemen. The doctor is eminently dishonest, disloyal and corrupt public servant. Coloured water is he providing to patients at the hospital and selling drugs for own profit, besides many bribes, extortions, etc. Two prisoners has he flogged with bamboos, afterwards rubbing chilis into the place if relatives do not send money. Besides this he is implicated with the Nationalist Party and lately provided material for a very evil article which appeared in the Burmese Patriot attacking Mr Macgregor, the honoured Deputy Commissioner.

He is also sleeping by force with female patients at the hospital.

Wherefore we are much hoping that your honour will ESCHEW same Dr Veraswami and not consort with persons who can bring nothing but evil upon your honour.

And shall ever pray for your honour's long health and prosperity.

(Signed) A FRIEND.

The letter was written in the shaky round hand of the bazaar letter-writer, which resembled a copybook exercise written by a drunkard. The letter-writer, however, would never have risen to such a word as 'eschew'. The letter must have been dictated by a clerk, and no doubt it came ultimately from U Po Kyin. From 'the crocodile', Flory reflected.

He did not like the tone of the letter. Under its appearance of servility it was obviously a covert threat. 'Drop the doctor or we will make it hot for you', was what it said in effect. Not that that mattered greatly; no Englishman ever feels himself in real danger from an Oriental.

Flory hesitated with the letter in his hands. There are two things one can do with an anonymous letter. One can say nothing about it, or one can show it to the person whom it concerns. The obvious, the decent course was to give the letter to Dr Veraswami and let him take what action he chose.

And yet — it was safer to keep out of this business altogether. It is so important (perhaps the most important of all the Ten Precepts of the pukka sahib) not to entangle oneself in 'native' quarrels. With Indians there must be no loyalty, no real friendship. Affection, even

love — yes. Englishmen do often love Indians — native officers, forest rangers, hunters, clerks, servants. Sepoys will weep like children when their colonel retires. Even intimacy is allowable, at the right moments. But alliance, partisanship, never! Even to know the rights and wrongs of a 'native' quarrel is a loss of prestige.

If he published the letter there would be a row and an official inquiry, and, in effect, he would have thrown in his lot with the doctor against U Po Kyin. U Po Kyin did not matter, but there were the Europeans; if he, Flory, were too conspicuously the doctor's partisan, there might be hell to pay. Much better to pretend that the letter had never reached him. The doctor was a good fellow, but as to championing him against the full fury of pukka sahibdom — ah, no, no! What shall it profit a man if he save his own soul and lose the whole world? Flory began to tear the letter across. The danger of making it public was very slight, very nebulous. But one must beware of the nebulous dangers in India. Prestige, the breath of life, is itself nebulous. He carefully tore the letter into small pieces and threw them over the gate.

At this moment there was a terrified scream, quite different from the voices of Ko S'la's wives. The mali lowered his mamootie and gaped in the direction of the sound, and Ko S'la, who had also heard it, came running bareheaded from the servants' quarters, while Flo sprang to her feet and yapped sharply. The scream was repeated. It came from the jungle behind the house, and it was an English voice, a woman's, crying out in terror.

There was no way out of the compound by the back. Flory scrambled over the gate and came down with his knee bleeding from a splinter. He ran round the compound fence and into the jungle, Flo following. Just behind the house, beyond the first fringe of bushes, there was a small hollow, which, as there was a pool of stagnant water in it, was frequented by buffaloes from Nyaunglebin. Flory pushed his way through the bushes. In the hollow an English girl, chalk-faced, was cowering against a bush, while a huge buffalo menaced her with its crescent-shaped horns. A hairy calf, no doubt the cause of the trouble, stood behind. Another buffalo, neck-deep in the slime of the pool, looked on with mild prehistoric face, wondering what was the matter.

The girl turned an agonized face to Flory as he appeared. ‘Oh, do be quick!’ she cried, in the angry, urgent tone of people who are frightened. ‘Please! Help me! Help me!’

Flory was too astonished to ask any questions. He hastened towards her, and, in default of a stick, smacked the buffalo sharply on the nose. With a timid, loutish movement the great beast turned aside, then lumbered off followed by the calf. The other buffalo also extricated itself from the slime and lolloped away. The girl threw herself against Flory, almost into his arms, quite overcome by her fright.

‘Oh, thank you, thank you! Oh, those dreadful things! What ARE they? I thought they were going to kill me. What horrible creatures! What ARE they?’

They’re only water-buffaloes. They come from the village up there.’

‘Buffaloes?’

‘Not wild buffaloes — bison, we call those. They’re just a kind of cattle the Burmans keep. I say, they’ve given you a nasty shock. I’m sorry.’

She was still clinging closely to his arm, and he could feel her shaking. He looked down, but he could not see her face, only the top of her head, hatless, with yellow hair as short as a boy’s. And he could see one of the hands on his arm. It was long, slender, youthful, with the mottled wrist of a schoolgirl. It was several years since he had seen such a hand. He became conscious of the soft, youthful body pressed against his own, and the warmth breathing out of it; whereat something seemed to thaw and grow warm within him.

‘It’s all right, they’re gone,’ he said. ‘There’s nothing to be frightened of.’

The girl was recovering from her fright, and she stood a little away from him, with one hand still on his arm. ‘I’m all right,’ she said. ‘It’s nothing. I’m not hurt. They didn’t touch me. It was only their looking so awful.’

‘They’re quite harmless really. Their horns are set so far back that they can’t gore you. They’re very stupid brutes. They only pretend to show fight when they’ve got calves.’

They had stood apart now, and a slight embarrassment came over

them both immediately. Flory had already turned himself sidelong to keep his birthmarked cheek away from her. He said:

'I say, this is a queer sort of introduction! I haven't asked yet how you got here. Wherever did you come from — if it's not rude to ask?'

'I just came out of my uncle's garden. It seemed such a nice morning, I thought I'd go for a walk. And then those dreadful things came after me. I'm quite new to this country, you see.'

'Your uncle? Oh, of course! You're Mr Lackersteen's niece. We heard you were coming. I say, shall we get out on to the maidan? There'll be a path somewhere. What a start for your first morning in Kyauktada! This'll give you rather a bad impression of Burma, I'm afraid.'

'Oh no; only it's all rather strange. How thick these bushes grow! All kind of twisted together and foreign-looking. You could get lost here in a moment. Is that what they call jungle?'

'Scrub jungle. Burma's mostly jungle — a green, unpleasant land, I call it. I wouldn't walk through that grass if I were you. The seeds get into your stockings and work their way into your skin.'

He let the girl walk ahead of him, feeling easier when she could not see his face. She was tallish for a girl, slender, and wearing a lilac-coloured cotton frock. From the way she moved her limbs he did not think she could be much past twenty. He had not noticed her face yet, except to see that she wore round tortoise-shell spectacles, and that her hair was as short as his own. He had never seen a woman with cropped hair before, except in the illustrated papers.

As they emerged on to the maidan he stepped level with her, and she turned to face him. Her face was oval, with delicate, regular features; not beautiful, perhaps, but it seemed so there, in Burma, where all Englishwomen are yellow and thin. He turned his head sharply aside, though the birthmark was away from her. He could not bear her to see his worn face too closely. He seemed to feel the withered skin round his eyes as though it had been a wound. But he remembered that he had shaved that morning, and it gave him courage. He said:

'I say, you must be a bit shaken up after this business. Would you like to come into my place and rest a few minutes before you go

home? It's rather late to be out of doors without a hat, too.'

'Oh, thank you, I would,' the girl said. She could not, he thought, know anything about Indian notions of propriety. 'Is this your house here?'

'Yes. We must go round the front way. I'll have the servants get a sunshade for you. This sun's dangerous for you, with your short hair.'

They walked up the garden path. Flo was frisking round them and trying to draw attention to herself. She always barked at strange Orientals, but she liked the smell of a European. The sun was growing stronger. A wave of blackcurrant scent flowed from the petunias beside the path, and one of the pigeons fluttered to the earth, to spring immediately into the air again as Flo made a grab at it. Flory and the girl stopped with one consent, to look at the flowers. A pang of unreasonable happiness had gone through them both.

'You really mustn't go out in this sun without a hat on,' he repeated, and somehow there was an intimacy in saying it. He could not help referring to her short hair somehow, it seemed to him so beautiful. To speak of it was like touching it with his hand.

'Look, your knee's bleeding,' the girl said. 'Did you do that when you were coming to help me?'

There was a slight trickle of blood, which was drying, purple, on his khaki stocking. 'It's nothing,' he said, but neither of them felt at that moment that it was nothing. They began chattering with extraordinary eagerness about the flowers. The girl 'adored' flowers, she said. And Flory led her up the path, talking garrulously about one plant and another.

'Look how these phloxes grow. They go on blooming for six months in this country. They can't get too much sun. I think those yellow ones must be almost the colour of primroses. I haven't seen a primrose for fifteen years, nor a wallflower, either. Those zinnias are fine, aren't they? — like painted flowers, with those wonderful dead colours. These are African marigolds. They're coarse things, weeds almost, but you can't help liking them, they're so vivid and strong. Indians have an extraordinary affection for them; wherever Indians have been you find marigolds growing, even years afterwards when

the jungle has buried every other trace of them. But I wish you'd come into the veranda and see the orchids. I've some I must show that are just like bells of gold — but literally like gold. And they smell of honey, almost overpoweringly. That's about the only merit of this beastly country, it's good for flowers. I hope you're fond of gardening? It's our greatest consolation, in this country.'

'Oh, I simply adore gardening,' the girl said.

They went into the veranda. Ko S'la had hurriedly put on his ingyi and his best pink silk gaungbaung, and he appeared from within the house with a tray on which were a decanter of gin, glasses and a box of cigarettes. He laid them on the table, and, eyeing the girl half apprehensively, put his hands flat together and shikoed.

'I expect it's no use offering you a drink at this hour of the morning?' Flory said. 'I can never get it into my servant's head that SOME people can exist without gin before breakfast.'

He added himself to the number by waving away the drink Ko S'la offered him. The girl had sat down in the wicker chair that Ko S'la had set out for her at the end of the veranda. The dark-leaved orchids hung behind her head, with gold trusses of blossom, breathing out warm honey-scent. Flory was standing against the veranda rail, half facing the girl, but keeping his birthmarked cheek hidden.

'What a perfectly divine view you have from here,' she said as she looked down the hillside.

'Yes, isn't it? Splendid, in this yellow light, before the sun gets going. I love that sombre yellow colour the maidan has, and those gold mohur trees, like blobs of crimson. And those hills at the horizon, almost black. My camp is on the other side of those hills,' he added.

The girl, who was long-sighted, took off her spectacles to look into the distance. He noticed that her eyes were very clear pale blue, paler than a harebell. And he noticed the smoothness of the skin round her eyes, like a petal, almost. It reminded him of his age and his haggard face again, so that he turned a little more away from her. But he said on impulse:

'I say, what a bit of luck you coming to Kyauktada! You can't imagine the difference it makes to us to see a new face in these

places. After months of our own miserable society, and an occasional official on his rounds and American globe-trotters skipping up the Irrawaddy with cameras. I suppose you've come straight from England?'

'Well, not England exactly. I was living in Paris before I came out here. My mother was an artist, you see.'

'Paris! Have you really lived in Paris? By Jove, just fancy coming from Paris to Kyauktada! Do you know, it's positively difficult, in a hole like this, to believe that there ARE such places as Paris.'

'Do you like Paris?' she said.

'I've never even seen it. But, good Lord, how I've imagined it! Paris — it's all a kind of jumble of pictures in my mind; cafes and boulevards and artists' studios and Villon and Baudelaire and Maupassant all mixed up together. You don't know how the names of those European towns sound to us, out here. And did you really live in Paris? Sitting in cafes with foreign art students, drinking white wine and talking about Marcel Proust?'

'Oh, that kind of thing, I suppose,' said the girl, laughing.

'What differences you'll find here! It's not white wine and Marcel Proust here. Whisky and Edgar Wallace more likely. But if you ever want books, you might find something you liked among mine. There's nothing but tripe in the Club library. But of course I'm hopelessly behind the times with my books. I expect you'll have read everything under the sun.'

'Oh no. But of course I simply adore reading,' the girl said.

'What it means to meet somebody who cares for books! I mean books worth reading, not that garbage in the Club libraries. I do hope you'll forgive me if I overwhelm you with talk. When I meet somebody who's heard that books exist, I'm afraid I go off like a bottle of warm beer. It's a fault you have to pardon in these countries.'

'Oh, but I love talking about books. I think reading is so wonderful. I mean, what would life be without it? It's such a — such a— '

'Such a private Alsatia. Yes— '

They plunged into an enormous and eager conversation, first about books, then about shooting, in which the girl seemed to have

an interest and about which she persuaded Flory to talk. She was quite thrilled when he described the murder of an elephant which he had perpetrated some years earlier. Flory scarcely noticed, and perhaps the girl did not either, that it was he who did all the talking. He could not stop himself, the joy of chattering was so great. And the girl was in a mood to listen. After all, he had saved her from the buffalo, and she did not yet believe that those monstrous brutes could be harmless; for the moment he was almost a hero in her eyes. When one does get any credit in this life, it is usually for something that one has not done. It was one of those times when the conversation flows so easily, so naturally, that one could go on talking forever. But suddenly, their pleasure evaporated, they started and fell silent. They had noticed that they were no longer alone.

At the other end of the veranda, between the rails, a coal-black moustachioed face was peeping with enormous curiosity. It belonged to old Sammy, the 'Mug' cook. Behind him stood Ma Pu, Ma Yi, Ko S'la's four eldest children, an unclaimed naked child, and two old women who had come down from the village upon the news that an 'Ingaleikma' was on view. Like carved teak statues with footlong cigars stuck in their wooden faces, the two old creatures gazed at the 'Ingaleikma' as English yokels might gaze at a Zulu warrior in full regalia.

'Those people . . .' the girl said uncomfortably, looking towards them.

Sammy, seeing himself detected, looked very guilty and pretended to be rearranging his pagri. The rest of the audience were a little abashed, except for the two wooden-faced old women.

'Dash their cheek!' Flory said. A cold pang of disappointment went through him. After all, it would not do for the girl to stay on his veranda any longer. Simultaneously both he and she had remembered that they were total strangers. Her face had turned a little pink. She began putting on her spectacles.

'I'm afraid an English girl is rather a novelty to these people,' he said. 'They don't mean any harm. Go away!' he added angrily, waving his hand at the audience, whereupon they vanished.

'Do you know, if you don't mind, I think I ought to be going,' the girl said. She had stood up. 'I've been out quite a long time. They

may be wondering where I've got to.'

'Must you really? It's quite early. I'll see that you don't have to go home bareheaded in the sun.'

'I ought really— ' she began again.

She stopped, looking at the doorway. Ma Hla May was emerging on to the veranda.

Ma Hla May came forward with her hand on her hip. She had come from within the house, with a calm air that asserted her right to be there. The two girls stood face to face, less than six feet apart.

No contrast could have been stranger; the one faintly coloured as an apple-blossom, the other dark and garish, with a gleam almost metallic on her cylinder of ebony hair and the salmon-pink silk of her longyi. Flory thought he had never noticed before how dark Ma Hla May's face was, and how outlandish her tiny, stiff body, straight as a soldier's, with not a curve in it except the vase-like curve of her hips. He stood against the veranda rail and watched the two girls, quite disregarded. For the best part of a minute neither of them could take her eyes from the other; but which found the spectacle more grotesque, more incredible, there is no saying.

Ma Hla May turned her face round to Flory, with her black brows, thin as pencil lines, drawn together. 'Who is this woman?' she demanded sullenly.

He answered casually, as though giving an order to a servant:

'Go away this instant. If you make any trouble I will afterwards take a bamboo and beat you till not one of your ribs is whole.'

Ma Hla May hesitated, shrugged her small shoulders and disappeared. And the other, gazing after her, said curiously:

'Was that a man or a woman?'

'A woman,' he said. 'One of the servants' wives, I believe. She came to ask about the laundry, that was all.'

'Oh, is THAT what Burmese women are like? They ARE queer little creatures! I saw a lot of them on my way up here in the train, but do you know, I thought they were all boys. They're just like a kind of Dutch doll, aren't they?'

She had begun to move towards the veranda steps, having lost interest in Ma Hla May now that she had disappeared. He did not stop her, for he thought Ma Hla May quite capable of coming back

and making a scene. Not that it mattered much, for neither girl knew a word of the other's language. He called to Ko S'la, and Ko S'la came running with a big oiled-silk umbrella with bamboo ribs. He opened it respectfully at the foot of the steps and held it over the girl's head as she came down. Flory went with them as far as the gate. They stopped to shake hands, he turning a little sideways in the strong sunlight, hiding his birthmark.

'My fellow here will see you home. It was ever so kind of you to come in. I can't tell you how glad I am to have met you. You'll make such a difference to us here in Kyauktada.'

'Good-bye, Mr — oh, how funny! I don't even know your name.'

'Flory, John Flory. And yours — Miss Lackersteen, is it?'

'Yes. Elizabeth. Good-bye, Mr Flory. And thank you EVER so much. That awful buffalo. You quite saved my life.'

'It was nothing. I hope I shall see you at the Club this evening? I expect your uncle and aunt will be coming down. Good-bye for the time being, then.'

He stood at the gate, watching them as they went. Elizabeth — lovely name, too rare nowadays. He hoped she spelt it with a Z. Ko S'la trotted after her at a queer uncomfortable gait, reaching the umbrella over her head and keeping his body as far away from her as possible. A cool breath of wind blew up the hill. It was one of those momentary winds that blow sometimes in the cold weather in Burma, coming from nowhere, filling one with thirst and with nostalgia for cold sea-pools, embraces of mermaids, waterfalls, caves of ice. It rustled through the wide domes of the gold mohur trees, and fluttered the fragments of the anonymous letter that Flory had thrown over the gate half an hour earlier.

Chapter 7

Elizabeth lay on the sofa in the Lackersteen's drawing-room, with her feet up and a cushion behind her head, reading Michael Arlen's These Charming People. In a general way Michael Arlen was her favourite author, but she was inclined to prefer William J. Locke when she wanted something serious.

The drawing-room was a cool, light-coloured room with lime-washed walls a yard thick; it was large, but seemed smaller than it was, because of a litter of occasional tables and Benares brassware ornaments. It smelt of chintz and dying flowers. Mrs Lackersteen was upstairs, sleeping. Outside, the servants lay silent in their quarters, their heads tethered to their wooden pillows by the death-like sleep of midday. Mr Lackersteen, in his small wooden office down the road, was probably sleeping too. No one stirred except Elizabeth, and the chokra who pulled the punkah outside Mrs Lackersteen's bedroom, lying on his back with one heel in the loop of the rope.

Elizabeth was just turned twenty-two, and was an orphan. Her father had been less of a drunkard than his brother Tom, but he was a man of similar stamp. He was a tea-broker, and his fortunes fluctuated greatly, but he was by nature too optimistic to put money aside in prosperous phases. Elizabeth's mother had been an incapable, half-baked, vapouring, self-pitying woman who shirked all the normal duties of life on the strength of sensibilities which she did not possess. After messing about for years with such things as Women's Suffrage and Higher Thought, and making many abortive attempts at literature, she had finally taken up with painting. Painting is the only art that can be practised without either talent or hard work. Mrs Lackersteen's pose was that of an artist exiled among 'the Philistines' — these, needless to say, included her husband — and it was a pose that gave her almost unlimited scope for making a nuisance of herself.

In the last year of the War Mr Lackersteen, who had managed to avoid service, made a great deal of money, and just after the Armistice they moved into a huge, new, rather bleak house in

Highgate, with quantities of greenhouses, shrubberies, stables and tennis courts. Mr Lackersteen had engaged a horde of servants, even, so great was his optimism, a butler. Elizabeth was sent for two terms to a very expensive boarding-school. Oh, the joy, the joy, the unforgettable joy of those two terms! Four of the girls at the school were 'the Honourable'; nearly all of them had ponies of their own, on which they were allowed to go riding on Saturday afternoons. There is a short period in everyone's life when his character is fixed forever; with Elizabeth, it was those two terms during which she rubbed shoulders with the rich. Thereafter her whole code of living was summed up in one belief, and that a simple one. It was that the Good ('lovely' was her name for it) is synonymous with the expensive, the elegant, the aristocratic; and the Bad ('beastly') is the cheap, the low, the shabby, the laborious. Perhaps it is in order to teach this creed that expensive girls' schools exist. The feeling subtilized itself as Elizabeth grew older, diffused itself through all her thoughts. Everything from a pair of stockings to a human soul was classifiable as 'lovely' or 'beastly'. And unfortunately — for Mr Lackersteen's prosperity did not last — it was the 'beastly' that had predominated in her life.

The inevitable crash came late in 1919. Elizabeth was taken away from school, to continue her education at a succession of cheap, beastly schools, with gaps of a term or two when her father could not pay the fees. He died when she was twenty, of influenza. Mrs Lackersteen was left with an income of L150 a year, which was to die with her. The two women could not, under Mrs Lackersteen's management, live on three pounds a week in England. They moved to Paris, where life was cheaper and where Mrs Lackersteen intended to dedicate herself wholly to Art.

Paris! Living in Paris! Flory had been a little wide of the mark when he pictured those interminable conversations with bearded artists under the green plane trees. Elizabeth's life in Paris had not been quite like that.

Her mother had taken a studio in the Montparnasse quarter, and relapsed at once into a state of squalid, muddling idleness. She was so foolish with money that her income would not come near covering expenses, and for several months Elizabeth did not even have enough

to eat. Then she found a job as visiting teacher of English to the family of a French bank manager. They called her 'notre mees Anglaise'. The banker lived in the twelfth arrondissement, a long way from Montparnasse, and Elizabeth had taken a room in a pension near by. It was a narrow, yellow-faced house in a side street, looking out on to a poulterer's shop, generally decorated with reeking carcasses of wild boars, which old gentlemen like decrepit satyrs would visit every morning and sniff long and lovingly. Next door to the poulterer's was a fly-blown cafe with the sign 'Cafe de l'Amitie. Bock Formidable'. How Elizabeth had loathed that pension! The patroness was an old black-clad sneak who spent her life in tiptoeing up and down stairs in hopes of catching the boarders washing stockings in their hand-basins. The boarders, sharp-tongued bilious widows, pursued the only man in the establishment, a mild, bald creature who worked in La Samaritaine, like sparrows worrying a bread-crust. At meals all of them watched each others' plates to see who was given the biggest helping. The bathroom was a dark den with leprous walls and a rickety verdigrised geyser which would spit two inches of tepid water into the bath and then mulishly stop working. The bank manager whose children Elizabeth taught was a man of fifty, with a fat, worn face and a bald, dark yellow crown resembling an ostrich's egg. The second day after her arrival he came into the room where the children were at their lessons, sat down beside Elizabeth and immediately pinched her elbow. The third day he pinched her on the calf, the fourth day behind the knee, the fifth day above the knee. Thereafter, every evening, it was a silent battle between the two of them, her hand under the table, struggling and struggling to keep that ferret-like hand away from her.

It was a mean, beastly existence. In fact, it reached levels of 'beastliness' which Elizabeth had not previously known to exist. But the thing that most depressed her, most filled her with the sense of sinking into some horrible lower world, was her mother's studio. Mrs Lackersteen was one of those people who go utterly to pieces when they are deprived of servants. She lived in a restless nightmare between painting and housekeeping, and never worked at either. At irregular intervals she went to a 'school' where she produced greyish still-lifes under the guidance of a master whose technique was

founded on dirty brushes; for the rest, she messed about miserably at home with teapots and frying-pans. The state of her studio was more than depressing to Elizabeth; it was evil, Satanic. It was a cold, dusty pigsty, with piles of books and papers littered all over the floor, generations of saucepans slumbering in their grease on the rusty gas-stove, the bed never made till afternoon, and everywhere — in every possible place where they could be stepped on or knocked over — tins of paint-fouled turpentine and pots half full of cold black tea. You would lift a cushion from a chair and find a plate holding the remains of a poached egg underneath it. As soon as Elizabeth entered the door she would burst out:

'Oh, Mother, Mother dearest, how CAN you? Look at the state of this room! It is so terrible to live like this!'

'The room, dearest? What's the matter? Is it untidy?'

'Untidy! Mother, NEED you leave that plate of porridge in the middle of your bed? And those saucepans! It does look so dreadful. Suppose anyone came in!'

The rapt, other-wordly look which Mrs Lackersteen assumed when anything like work presented itself, would come into her eyes.

'None of MY friends would mind, dear. We are such Bohemians, we artists. You don't understand how utterly wrapped up we all are in our painting. You haven't the artistic temperament, you see, dear.'

'I must try and clean some of those saucepans. I just can't bear to think of you living like this. What have you done with the scrubbing-brush?'

'The scrubbing-brush? Now, let me think, I know I saw it somewhere. Ah yes! I used it yesterday to clean my palette. But it'll be all right if you give it a good wash in turpentine.'

Mrs Lackersteen would sit down and continue smudging a sheet of sketching paper with a Conte crayon while Elizabeth worked.

'How wonderful you are, dear. So practical! I can't think whom you inherit it from. Now with me, Art is simply EVERYTHING. I seem to feel it like a great sea surging up inside me. It swamps everything mean and petty out of existence. Yesterday I ate my lunch off Nash's Magazine to save wasting time washing plates. Such a good idea! When you want a clean plate you just tear off a sheet,' etc., etc., etc.

Elizabeth had no friends in Paris. Her mother's friends were women of the same stamp as herself, or elderly ineffectual bachelors living on small incomes and practising contemptible half-arts such as wood-engraving or painting on porcelain. For the rest, Elizabeth saw only foreigners, and she disliked all foreigners en bloc; or at least all foreign men, with their cheap-looking clothes and their revolting table manners. She had one great solace at this time. It was to go to the American library in the rue de l'Elysee and look at the illustrated papers. Sometimes on a Sunday or her free afternoon she would sit there for hours at the big shiny table, dreaming, over the Sketch, the Tatter, the Graphic, the Sporting and Dramatic.

Ah, what joys were pictured there! 'Hounds meeting on the lawn of Charlton Hall, the lovely Warwickshire seat of Lord Burrowdean.' 'The Hon. Mrs Tyke-Bowlby in the Park with her splendid Alsatian, Kublai Khan, which took second prize at Cruft's this summer.' 'Sunbathing at Cannes. Left to right: Miss Barbara Pilbrick, Sir Edward Tuke, Lady Pamela Westrope, Captain "Tuppy" Benacre.'

Lovely, lovely, golden world! On two occasions the face of an old schoolfellow looked at Elizabeth from the page. It hurt her in her breast to see it. There they all were, her old schoolfellows, with their horses and their cars and their husbands in the cavalry; and here she, tied to that dreadful job, that dreadful pension, her dreadful mother! Was it possible that there was no escape? Could she be doomed forever to this sordid meanness, with no hope of ever getting back to the decent world again?

It was not unnatural, with the example of her mother before her eyes, that Elizabeth should have a healthy loathing of Art. In fact, any excess of intellect— 'braininess' was her word for it — tended to belong, in her eyes, to the 'beastly'. Real people, she felt, decent people — people who shot grouse, went to Ascot, yachted at Cowes — were not brainy. They didn't go in for this nonsense of writing books and fooling with paintbrushes; and all these Highbrow ideas — Socialism and all that. 'Highbrow' was a bitter word in her vocabulary. And when it happened, as it did once or twice, that she met a veritable artist who was willing to work penniless all his life, rather than sell himself to a bank or an insurance company, she despised him far more than she despised the dabblers of her mother's

circle. That a man should turn deliberately away from all that was good and decent, sacrifice himself for a futility that led nowhere, was shameful, degrading, evil. She dreaded spinsterhood, but she would have endured it a thousand lifetimes through rather than marry such a man.

When Elizabeth had been nearly two years in Paris her mother died abruptly of ptomaine poisoning. The wonder was that she had not died of it sooner. Elizabeth was left with rather less than a hundred pounds in the world. Her uncle and aunt cabled at once from Burma, asking her to come out and stay with them, and saying that a letter would follow.

Mrs Lackersteen had reflected for some time over the letter, her pen between her lips, looking down at the page with her delicate triangular face like a meditative snake.

'I suppose we must have her out here, at any rate for a year. WHAT a bore! However, they generally marry within a year if they've any looks at all. What am I to say to the girl, Tom?'

'Say? Oh, just say she'll pick up a husband out here a damn sight easier than at home. Something of that sort, y'know.'

'My DEAR Tom! What impossible things you say!'

Mrs Lackersteen wrote:

Of course, this is a very small station and we are in the jungle a great deal of the time. I'm afraid you will find it dreadfully dull after the DELIGHTS of Paris. But really in some ways these small stations have their advantages for a young girl. She finds herself quite a QUEEN in the local society. The unmarried men are so lonely that they appreciate a girl's society in a quite wonderful way, etc., etc.

Elizabeth spent thirty pounds on summer frocks and set sail immediately. The ship, heralded by rolling porpoises, ploughed across the Mediterranean and down the Canal into a sea of staring, enamel-like blue, then out into the green wastes of the Indian Ocean, where flocks of flying fish skimmed in terror from the approaching hull. At night the waters were phosphorescent, and the wash of the bow was like a moving arrowhead of green fire. Elizabeth 'loved' the life on board ship. She loved the dancing on deck at nights, the cocktails which every man on board seemed anxious to buy for her,

the deck games, of which, however, she grew tired at about the same time as the other members of the younger set. It was nothing to her that her mother's death was only two months past. She had never cared greatly for her mother, and besides, the people here knew nothing of her affairs. It was so lovely after those two graceless years to breathe the air of wealth again. Not that most of the people here were rich; but on board ship everyone behaves as though he were rich. She was going to love India, she knew. She had formed quite a picture of India, from the other passengers' conversation; she had even learned some of the more necessary Hindustani phrases, such as 'idher ao', 'jaldi', 'sahiblog', etc. In anticipation she tasted the agreeable atmosphere of Clubs, with punkahs flapping and barefooted white-turbaned boys reverently salaaming; and maidans where bronzed Englishmen with little clipped moustaches galloped to and fro, whacking polo balls. It was almost as nice as being really rich, the way people lived in India.

They sailed into Colombo through green glassy waters, where turtles and black snakes floated basking. A fleet of sampans came racing out to meet the ship, propelled by coal-black men with lips stained redder than blood by betel juice. They yelled and struggled round the gangway while the passengers descended. As Elizabeth and her friends came down, two sampan-wallahs, their prows nosing against the gangway, besought them with yells.

'Don't you go with him, missie! Not with him! Bad wicked man he, not fit taking missie!'

'Don't you listen him lies, missie! Nasty low fellow! Nasty low tricks him playing. Nasty NATIVE tricks!'

'Ha, ha! He is not native himself! Oh no! Him European man, white skin all same, missie! Ha ha!'

'Stop your bat, you two, or I'll fetch one of you a kick,' said the husband of Elizabeth's friend — he was a planter. They stepped into one of the sampans and were rowed towards the sun-bright quays. And the successful sampan-wallah turned and discharged at his rival a mouthful of spittle which he must have been saving up for a very long time.

This was the Orient. Scents of coco-nut oil and sandalwood, cinnamon and turmeric, floated across the water on the hot,

swimming air. Elizabeth's friends drove her out to Mount Lavinia, where they bathed in a lukewarm sea that foamed like Coca-Cola. She came back to the ship in the evening, and they reached Rangoon a week later.

North of Mandalay the train, fuelled with wood, crawled at twelve miles an hour across a vast, parched plain, bounded at its remote edges by blue rings of hills. White egrets stood poised, motionless, like herons, and piles of drying chilis gleamed crimson in the sun. Sometimes a white pagoda rose from the plain like the breast of a supine giantess. The early tropic night settled down, and the train jolted on, slowly, stopping at little stations where barbaric yells sounded from the darkness. Half-naked men with their long hair knotted behind their heads moved to and fro in torchlight, hideous as demons in Elizabeth's eyes. The train plunged into forest, and unseen branches brushed against the windows. It was about nine o'clock when they reached Kyauktada, where Elizabeth's uncle and aunt were waiting with Mr Macgregor's car, and with some servants carrying torches. Her aunt came forward and took Elizabeth's shoulders in her delicate, saurian hands.

'I suppose you are our niece Elizabeth? We are SO pleased to see you,' she said, and kissed her.

Mr Lackersteen peered over his wife's shoulder in the torchlight. He gave a half-whistle, exclaimed, 'Well, I'll be damned!' and then seized Elizabeth and kissed her, more warmly than he need have done, she thought. She had never seen either of them before.

After dinner, under the punkah in the drawing-room, Elizabeth and her aunt had a talk together. Mr Lackersteen was strolling in the garden, ostensibly to smell the frangipani, actually to have a surreptitious drink that one of the servants smuggled to him from the back of the house.

'My dear, how really lovely you are! Let me look at you again.' She took her by the shoulders. 'I DO think that Eton crop suits you. Did you have it done in Paris?'

'Yes. Everyone was getting Eton-cropped. It suits you if you've got a fairly small head.'

'Lovely! And those tortoise-shell spectacles — such a becoming fashion! I'm told that all the — er — demi-mondaines in South

America have taken to wearing them. I'd no idea I had such a RAVISHING beauty for a niece. How old did you say you were, dear?'

'Twenty-two.'

'Twenty-two! How delighted all the men will be when we take you to the Club tomorrow! They get so lonely, poor things, never seeing a new face. And you were two whole years in Paris? I can't think what the men there can have been about to let you leave unmarried.'

'I'm afraid I didn't meet many men, Aunt. Only foreigners. We had to live so quietly. And I was working,' she added, thinking this rather a disgraceful admission.

'Of course, of course,' sighed Mrs Lackersteen. 'One hears the same thing on every side. Lovely girls having to work for their living. It is such a shame! I think it's so terribly selfish, don't you, the way these men remain unmarried while there are so MANY poor girls looking for husbands?' Elizabeth not answering this, Mrs Lackersteen added with another sigh, 'I'm sure if I were a young girl I'd marry anybody, literally ANYBODY!'

The two women's eyes met. There was a great deal that Mrs Lackersteen wanted to say, but she had no intention of doing more than hint at it obliquely. A great deal of her conversation was carried on by hints; she generally contrived, however, to make her meaning reasonably clear. She said in a tenderly impersonal tone, as though discussing a subject of general interest:

'Of course, I must say this. There ARE cases when, if girls fail to get married it's THEIR OWN FAULT. It happens even out here sometimes. Only a short time ago I remember a case — a girl came out and stayed a whole year with her brother, and she had offers from all kinds of men — policemen, forest officers, men in timber firms with QUITE good prospects. And she refused them all; she wanted to marry into the I.C.S., I heard. Well, what do you expect? Of course her brother couldn't go on keeping her forever. And now I hear she's at home, poor thing, working as a kind of lady help, practically a SERVANT. And getting only fifteen shillings a week! Isn't it dreadful to think of such things?'

'Dreadful!' Elizabeth echoed.

No more was said on this subject. In the morning, after she came back from Flory's house, Elizabeth was describing her adventure to her aunt and uncle. They were at breakfast, at the flower-laden table, with the punkah flapping overhead and the tall stork-like Mohammedan butler in his white suit and pagri standing behind Mrs Lackersteen's chair, tray in hand.

'And oh, Aunt, such an interesting thing! A Burmese girl came on to the veranda. I'd never seen one before, at least, not knowing they were girls. Such a queer little thing — she was almost like a doll with her round yellow face and her black hair screwed up on top. She only looked about seventeen. Mr Flory said she was his laundress.'

The Indian butler's long body stiffened. He squinted down at the girl with his white eyeballs large in his black face. He spoke English well. Mr Lackersteen paused with a forkful of fish half-way from his plate and his crass mouth open.

'Laundress?' he said. 'Laundress! I say, dammit, some mistake there! No such thing as a laundress in this country, y'know. Laundering work's all done by men. If you ask me— '

And then he stopped very suddenly, almost as though someone had trodden on his toe under the table.

Chapter 8

That evening Flory told Ko S'la to send for the barber — he was the only barber in the town, an Indian, and he made a living by shaving the Indian coolies at the rate of eight annas a month for a dry shave every other day. The Europeans patronized him for lack of any other. The barber was waiting on the veranda when Flory came back from tennis, and Flory sterilized the scissors with boiling water and Condy's fluid and had his hair cut.

'Lay out my best Palm Beach suit,' he told Ko S'la, 'and a silk shirt and my sambhur-skin shoes. Also that new tie that came from Rangoon last week.'

'I have done so, thakin,' said Ko S'la, meaning that he would do so. When Flory came into the bedroom he found Ko S'la waiting beside the clothes he had laid out, with a faintly sulky air. It was immediately apparent that Ko S'la knew why Flory was dressing himself up (that is, in hopes of meeting Elizabeth) and that he disapproved of it.

'What are you waiting for?' Flory said.

'To help you dress, thakin.'

'I shall dress myself this evening. You can go.'

He was going to shave — the second time that day — and he did not want Ko S'la to see him take shaving things into the bathroom. It was several years since he had shaved twice in one day. What providential luck that he had sent for that new tie only last week, he thought. He dressed himself very carefully, and spent nearly a quarter of an hour in brushing his hair, which was stiff and would never lie down after it had been cut.

Almost the next moment, as it seemed, he was walking with Elizabeth down the bazaar road. He had found her alone in the Club 'library', and with a sudden burst of courage asked her to come out with him; and she had come with a readiness that surprised him; not even stopping to say anything to her uncle and aunt. He had lived so long in Burma, he had forgotten English ways. It was very dark under the peepul trees of the bazaar road, the foliage hiding the quarter moon, but the stars here and there in a gap blazed white and

low, like lamps hanging on invisible threads. Successive waves of scent came rolling, first the cloying sweetness of frangipani, then a cold putrid stench of dung or decay from the huts opposite Dr Veraswami's bungalow. Drums were throbbing a little distance away.

As he heard the drums Flory remembered that a pwe was being acted a little farther down the road, opposite U Po Kyin's house; in fact, it was U Po Kyin who had made arrangements for the pwe, though someone else had paid for it. A daring thought occurred to Flory. He would take Elizabeth to the pwe! She would love it — she must; no one with eyes in his head could resist a pwe-dance. Probably there would be a scandal when they came back to the Club together after a long absence; but damn it! what did it matter? She was different from that herd of fools at the Club. And it would be such fun to go to the pwe together! At this moment the music burst out with a fearful pandemonium — a strident squeal of pipes, a rattle like castanets and the hoarse thump of drums, above which a man's voice was brassily squalling.

'Whatever is that noise?' said Elizabeth, stopping. 'It sounds just like a jazz band!'

'Native music. They're having a pwe — that's a kind of Burmese play; a cross between a historical drama and a revue, if you can imagine that. It'll interest you, I think. Just round the bend of the road here.'

'Oh,' she said rather doubtfully.

They came round the bend into a glare of light. The whole road for thirty yards was blocked by the audience watching the pwe. At the back there was a raised stage, under humming petrol lamps, with the orchestra squalling and banging in front of it; on the stage two men dressed in clothes that reminded Elizabeth of Chinese pagodas were posturing with curved swords in their hands. All down the roadway it was a sea of white muslin backs of women, pink scarves flung round their shoulders and black hair-cylinders. A few sprawled on their mats, fast asleep. An old Chinese with a tray of peanuts was threading his way through the crowd, intoning mournfully, 'Myaype! Myaype!'

'We'll stop and watch a few minutes if you like,' Flory said.

The blaze of lights and the appalling din of the orchestra had almost dazed Elizabeth, but what startled her most of all was the sight of this crowd of people sitting in the road as though it had been the pit of a theatre.

'Do they always have their plays in the middle of the road?' she said.

'As a rule. They put up a rough stage and take it down in the morning. The show lasts all night.'

'But are they ALLOWED to — blocking up the whole roadway?'

'Oh yes. There are no traffic regulations here. No traffic to regulate, you see.'

It struck her as very queer. By this time almost the entire audience had turned round on their mats to stare at the 'Ingaleikma'. There were half a dozen chairs in the middle of the crowd, where some clerks and officials were sitting. U Po Kyin was among them, and he was making efforts to twist his elephantine body round and greet the Europeans. As the music stopped the pock-marked Ba Taik came hastening through the crowd and shikoed low to Flory, with his timorous air.

'Most holy one, my master U Po Kyin asks whether you and the young white lady will not come and watch our pwe for a few minutes. He has chairs ready for you.'

'They're asking us to come and sit down,' Flory said to Elizabeth. 'Would you like to? It's rather fun. Those two fellows will clear off in a moment and there'll be some dancing. If it wouldn't bore you for a few minutes?'

Elizabeth felt very doubtful. Somehow it did not seem right or even safe to go in among that smelly native crowd. However, she trusted Flory, who presumably knew what was proper, and allowed him to lead her to the chairs. The Burmans made way on their mats, gazing after her and chattering; her shins brushed against warm, muslin-clad bodies, there was a feral reek of sweat. U Po Kyin leaned over towards her, bowing as well as he could and saying nasally:

'Kindly to sit down, madam! I am most honoured to make your acquaintance. Good evening. Good morning, Mr Flory, sir! A most unexpected pleasure. Had we known that you were to honour us with

your company, we would have provided whiskies and other European refreshments. Ha ha!'

He laughed, and his betel-reddened teeth gleamed in the lamplight like red tinfoil. He was so vast and so hideous that Elizabeth could not help shrinking from him. A slender youth in a purple longyi was bowing to her and holding out a tray with two glasses of yellow sherbet, iced. U Po Kyin clapped his hands sharply, 'Hey haung galay!' he called to a boy beside him. He gave some instructions in Burmese, and the boy pushed his way to the edge of the stage.

'He's telling them to bring on their best dancer in our honour,' Flory said. 'Look, here she comes.'

A girl who had been squatting at the back of the stage, smoking, stepped forward into the lamplight. She was very young, slim-shouldered, breastless, dressed in a pale blue satin longyi that hid her feet. The skirts of her ingyi curved outwards above her hips in little panniers, according to the ancient Burmese fashion. They were like the petals of a downward-pointing flower. She threw her cigar languidly to one of the men in the orchestra, and then, holding out one slender arm, writhed it as though to shake the muscles loose.

The orchestra burst into a sudden loud squalling. There were pipes like bagpipes, a strange instrument consisting of plaques of bamboo which a man struck with a little hammer, and in the middle there was a man surrounded by twelve tall drums of different sizes. He reached rapidly from one to another, thumping them with the heel of his hand. In a moment the girl began to dance. But at first it was not a dance, it was a rhythmic nodding, posturing and twisting of the elbows, like the movements of one of those jointed wooden figures on an old-fashioned roundabout. The way her neck and elbows rotated was precisely like a jointed doll, and yet incredibly sinuous. Her hands, twisting like snakeheads with the fingers close together, could lie back until they were almost along her forearms. By degrees her movements quickened. She began to leap from side to side, flinging herself down in a kind of curtsy and springing up again with extraordinary agility, in spite of the long longyi that imprisoned her feet. Then she danced in a grotesque posture as though sitting down, knees bent, body leaned forward, with her arms extended and writhing, her head also moving to the beat of the drums. The music

quickened to a climax. The girl rose upright and whirled round as swiftly as a top, the pannier of her ingyi flying out about her like the petals of a snowdrop. Then the music stopped as abruptly as it had begun, and the girl sank again into a curtsy, amid raucous shouting from the audience.

Elizabeth watched the dance with a mixture of amazement, boredom and something approaching horror. She had sipped her drink and found that it tasted like hair oil. On a mat by her feet three Burmese girls lay fast asleep with their heads on the same pillow, their small oval faces side by side like the faces of kittens. Under cover of the music Flory was speaking in a low voice into Elizabeth's ear commenting on the dance.

'I knew this would interest you; that's why I brought you here. You've read books and been in civilized places, you're not like the rest of us miserable savages here. Don't you think this is worth watching, in its queer way? Just look at that girl's movements — look at that strange, bent-forward pose like a marionette, and the way her arms twist from the elbow like a cobra rising to strike. It's grotesque, it's even ugly, with a sort of wilful ugliness. And there's something sinister in it too. There's a touch of the diabolical in all Mongols. And yet when you look closely, what art, what centuries of culture you can see behind it! Every movement that girl makes has been studied and handed down through innumerable generations. Whenever you look closely at the art of these Eastern peoples you can see that — a civilization stretching back and back, practically the same, into times when we were dressed in woad. In some way that I can't define to you, the whole life and spirit of Burma is summed up in the way that girl twists her arms. When you see her you can see the rice fields, the villages under the teak trees, the pagodas, the priests in their yellow robes, the buffaloes swimming the rivers in the early morning, Thibaw's palace— '

His voice stopped abruptly as the music stopped. There were certain things, and a pwe-dance was one of them, that pricked him to talk discursively and incautiously; but now he realized that he had only been talking like a character in a novel, and not a very good novel. He looked away. Elizabeth had listened to him with a chill of discomfort. What WAS the man talking about? was her first thought.

Moreover, she had caught the hated word Art more than once. For the first time she remembered that Flory was a total stranger and that it had been unwise to come out with him alone. She looked round her, at the sea of dark faces and the lurid glare of the lamps; the strangeness of the scene almost frightened her. What was she doing in this place? Surely it was not right to be sitting among the black people like this, almost touching them, in the scent of their garlic and their sweat? Why was she not back at the Club with the other white people? Why had he brought her here, among this horde of natives, to watch this hideous and savage spectacle?

The music struck up, and the pwe girl began dancing again. Her face was powdered so thickly that it gleamed in the lamplight like a chalk mask with live eyes behind it. With that dead-white oval face and those wooden gestures she was monstrous, like a demon. The music changed its tempo, and the girl began to sing in a brassy voice. It was a song with a swift trochaic rhythm, gay yet fierce. The crowd took it up, a hundred voices chanting the harsh syllables in unison. Still in that strange bent posture the girl turned round and danced with her buttocks protruded towards the audience. Her silk longyi gleamed like metal. With hands and elbows still rotating she wagged her posterior from side to side. Then — astonishing feat, quite visible through the longyi — she began to wriggle her two buttocks independently in time with the music.

There was a shout of applause from the audience. The three girls asleep on the mat woke up at the same moment and began clapping their hands wildly. A clerk shouted nasally 'Bravo! Bravo!' in English for the Europeans' benefit. But U Po Kyin frowned and waved his hand. He knew all about European women. Elizabeth, however, had already stood up.

'I'm going. It's time we were back,' she said abruptly. She was looking away, but Flory could see that her face was pink.

He stood up beside her, dismayed. 'But, I say! Couldn't you stay a few minutes longer? I know it's late, but — they brought this girl on two hours before she was due, in our honour. Just a few minutes?'

'I can't help it, I ought to have been back ages ago. I don't know WHAT my uncle and aunt will be thinking.'

She began at once to pick her way through the crowd, and he

followed her, with not even time to thank the pwe people for their trouble. The Burmans made way with a sulky air. How like these English people, to upset everything by sending for the best dancer and then go away almost before she had started! There was a fearful row as soon as Flory and Elizabeth had gone, the pwe girl refusing to go on with her dance and the audience demanding that she should continue. However, peace was restored when two clowns hurried on to the stage and began letting off crackers and making obscene jokes.

Flory followed the girl abjectly up the road. She was walking quickly, her head turned away, and for some moments she would not speak. What a thing to happen, when they had been getting on so well together! He kept trying to apologize.

'I'm so sorry! I'd no idea you'd mind— '

'It's nothing. What is there to be sorry about? I only said it was time to go back, that's all.'

'I ought to have thought. One gets not to notice that kind of thing in this country. These people's sense of decency isn't the same as ours — it's stricter in some ways — but— '

'It's not that! It's not that!' she exclaimed quite angrily.

He saw that he was only making it worse. They walked on in silence, he behind. He was miserable. What a bloody fool he had been! And yet all the while he had no inkling of the real reason why she was angry with him. It was not the pwe girl's behaviour, in itself, that had offended her; it had only brought things to a head. But the whole expedition — the very notion of WANTING to rub shoulders with all those smelly natives — had impressed her badly. She was perfectly certain that that was not how white men ought to behave. And that extraordinary rambling speech that he had begun, with all those long words — almost, she thought bitterly, as though he were quoting poetry! It was how those beastly artists that you met sometimes in Paris used to talk. She had thought him a manly man till this evening. Then her mind went back to the morning's adventure, and how he had faced the buffalo barehanded, and some of her anger evaporated. By the time they reached the Club gate she felt inclined to forgive him. Flory had by now plucked up courage to speak again. He stopped, and she stopped too, in a patch where the boughs let through some starlight and he could see her face dimly.

‘I say. I say, I do hope you’re not really angry about this?’

‘No, of course I’m not. I told you I wasn’t.’

‘I oughtn’t to have taken you there. Please forgive me. Do you know, I don’t think I’d tell the others where you’ve been. Perhaps it would be better to say you’ve just been out for a stroll, out in the garden — something like that. They might think it queer, a white girl going to a pwe. I don’t think I’d tell them.’

‘Oh, of course I won’t!’ she agreed with a warmness that surprised him. After that he knew that he was forgiven. But what it was that he was forgiven, he had not yet grasped.

They went into the Club separately, by tacit consent. The expedition had been a failure, decidedly. There was a gala air about the Club lounge tonight. The entire European community were waiting to greet Elizabeth, and the butler and the six chokras, in their best starched white suits, were drawn up on either side of the door, smiling and salaaming. When the Europeans had finished their greetings the butler came forward with a vast garland of flowers that the servants had prepared for the ‘missiesahib’. Mr Macgregor made a very humorous speech of welcome, introducing everybody. He introduced Maxwell as ‘our local arboreal specialist’, Westfield as ‘the guardian of law and order and — ah — terror of the local banditti’, and so on and so forth. There was much laughter. The sight of a pretty girl’s face had put everyone in such a good humour that they could even enjoy Mr Macgregor’s speech — which, to tell the truth, he had spent most of the evening in preparing.

At the first possible moment Ellis, with a sly air, took Flory and Westfield by the arm and drew them away into the card-room. He was in a much better mood than usual. He pinched Flory’s arm with his small, hard fingers, painfully but quite amiably.

‘Well, my lad, everyone’s been looking for you. Where have you been all this time?’

‘Oh, only for a stroll.’

‘For a stroll! And who with?’

‘With Miss Lackersteen.’

‘I knew it! So YOU’RE the bloody fool who’s fallen into the trap, are you? YOU swallowed the bait before anyone else had time to look at it. I thought you were too old a bird for that, by God I did!’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Mean! Look at him pretending he doesn’t know what I mean! Why, I mean that Ma Lackersteen’s marked you down for her beloved nephew-in-law, of course. That is, if you aren’t bloody careful. Eh, Westfield?’

‘Quite right, ol’ boy. Eligible young bachelor. Marriage halter and all that. They’ve got their eye on him.’

‘I don’t know where you’re getting this idea from. The girl’s hardly been here twenty-four hours.’

‘Long enough for you to take her up the garden path, anyway. You watch your step. Tom Lackersteen may be a drunken sot, but he’s not such a bloody fool that he wants a niece hanging round his neck for the rest of his life. And of course SHE knows which side her bread’s buttered. So you take care and don’t go putting your head into the noose.’

‘Damn it, you’ve no right to talk about people like that. After all, the girl’s only a kid— ‘

‘My dear old ass’ — Ellis, almost affectionate now that he had a new subject for scandal, took Flory by the coat lapel— ‘my dear, dear old ass, don’t you go filling yourself up with moonshine. You think that girl’s easy fruit: she’s not. These girls out from home are all the same. “Anything in trousers but nothing this side the altar” — that’s their motto, every one of them. Why do you think the girl’s come out here?’

‘Why? I don’t know. Because she wanted to, I suppose.’

‘My good fool! She come out to lay her claws into a husband, of course. As if it wasn’t well known! When a girl’s failed everywhere else she tries India, where every man’s pining for the sight of a white woman. The Indian marriage-market, they call it. Meat market it ought to be. Shiploads of ‘em coming out every year like carcasses of frozen mutton, to be pawed over by nasty old bachelors like you. Cold storage. Juicy joints straight from the ice.’

‘You do say some repulsive things.’

‘Best pasture-fed English meat,’ said Ellis with a pleased air. ‘Fresh consignments. Warranted prime condition.’

He went through a pantomime of examining a joint of meat, with goatish sniffs. This joke was likely to last Ellis a long time; his jokes

usually did; and there was nothing that gave him quite so keen a pleasure as dragging a woman's name through mud.

Flory did not see much more of Elizabeth that evening. Everyone was in the lounge together, and there was the silly clattering chatter about nothing that there is on these occasions. Flory could never keep up that kind of conversation for long. But as for Elizabeth, the civilized atmosphere of the Club, with the white faces all round her and the friendly look of the illustrated papers and the 'Bonzo' pictures, reassured her after that doubtful interlude at the pwe.

When the Lackersteens left the Club at nine, it was not Flory but Mr Macgregor who walked home with them, ambling beside Elizabeth like some friendly saurian monster, among the faint crooked shadows of the gold mohur stems. The Prome anecdote, and many another, found a new home. Any newcomer to Kyauktada was apt to come in for rather a large share of Mr Macgregor's conversation, for the others looked on him as an unparalleled bore, and it was a tradition at the Club to interrupt his stories. But Elizabeth was by nature a good listener. Mr Macgregor thought he had seldom met so intelligent a girl.

Flory stayed a little longer at the Club, drinking with the others. There was much smutty talk about Elizabeth. The quarrel about Dr Veraswami's election had been shelved for the time being. Also, the notice that Ellis had put up on the previous evening had been taken down. Mr Macgregor had seen it during his morning visit to the Club, and in his fair-minded way he had at once insisted on its removal. So the notice had been suppressed; not, however, before it had achieved its object.

Chapter 9

During the next fortnight a great deal happened.

The feud between U Po Kyin and Dr Veraswami was now in full swing. The whole town was divided into two factions, with every native soul from the magistrates down to the bazaar sweepers enrolled on one side or the other, and all ready for perjury when the time came. But of the two parties, the doctor's was much the smaller and less efficiently libellous. The editor of the Burmese Patriot had been put on trial for sedition and libel, bail being refused. His arrest had provoked a small riot in Rangoon, which was suppressed by the police with the death of only two rioters. In prison the editor went on hunger strike, but broke down after six hours.

In Kyauktada, too, things had been happening. A dacoit named Nga Shwe O had escaped from the jail in mysterious circumstances. And there had been a whole crop of rumours about a projected native rising in the district. The rumours — they were very vague ones as yet — centred round a village named Thongwa, not far from the camp where Maxwell was girdling teak. A weiksa, or magician, was said to have appeared from nowhere and to be prophesying the doom of the English power and distributing magic bullet-proof jackets. Mr Macgregor did not take the rumours very seriously, but he had asked for an extra force of Military Police. It was said that a company of Indian infantry with a British officer in command would be sent to Kyauktada shortly. Westfield, of course, had hurried to Thongwa at the first threat, or rather hope, of trouble.

'God, if they'd only break out and rebel properly for once!' he said to Ellis before starting. 'But it'll be a bloody washout as usual. Always the same story with these rebellions — peter out almost before they've begun. Would you believe it, I've never fired my gun at a fellow yet, not even a dacoit. Eleven years of it, not counting the War, and never killed a man. Depressing.'

'Oh, well,' said Ellis, 'if they won't come up to the scratch you can always get hold of the ringleaders and give them a good bambooing on the Q.T. That's better than coddling them up in our damned nursing homes of prisons.'

‘H’m, probably. Can’t do it though, nowadays. All these kid-glove laws — got to keep them, I suppose, if we’re fools enough to make ‘em.’

‘Oh, rot the laws. Bambooing’s the only thing that makes any impression on the Burman. Have you seen them after they’ve been flogged? I have. Brought out of the jail on bullock carts, yelling, with the women plastering mashed bananas on their backsides. That’s something they do understand. If I had my way I’d give it ‘em on the soles of the feet the same as the Turks do.’

‘Ah well. Let’s hope they’ll have the guts to show a bit of fight for once. Then we’ll call out the Military Police, rifles and all. Plug a few dozen of ‘em — that’ll clear the air.’

However, the hoped-for opportunity did not come. Westfield and the dozen constables he had taken with him to Thongwa — jolly round-faced Gurkha boys, pining to use their kukris on somebody — found the district depressingly peaceful. There seemed not the ghost of a rebellion anywhere; only the annual attempt, as regular as the monsoon, of the villagers to avoid paying the capitation tax.

The weather was growing hotter and hotter. Elizabeth had had her first attack of prickly heat. Tennis at the Club had practically ceased; people would play one languid set and then fall into chairs and swallow pints of tepid lime-juice — tepid, because the ice came only twice weekly from Mandalay and melted within twenty-four hours of arriving. The Flame of the Forest was in full bloom. The Burmese women, to protect their children from the sun, streaked their faces with yellow cosmetic until they looked like little African witch-doctors. Flocks of green pigeons, and imperial pigeons as large as ducks, came to eat the berries of the big peepul trees along the bazaar road.

Meanwhile, Flory had turned Ma Hla May out of his house.

A nasty, dirty job! There was a sufficient pretext — she had stolen his gold cigarette-case and pawned it at the house of Li Yeik, the Chinese grocer and illicit pawnbroker in the bazaar — but still, it was only a pretext. Flory knew perfectly well, and Ma Hla May knew, and all the servants knew, that he was getting rid of her because of Elizabeth. Because of ‘the Ingaleikma with dyed hair’, as Ma Hla May called her.

Ma Hla May made no violent scene at first. She stood sullenly listening while he wrote her a cheque for a hundred rupees — Li Yeik or the Indian chetty in the bazaar would cash cheques — and told her that she was dismissed. He was more ashamed than she; he could not look her in the face, and his voice went flat and guilty. When the bullock cart came for her belongings, he shut himself in the bedroom skulking till the scene should be over.

Cartwheels grated on the drive, there was the sound of men shouting; then suddenly there was a fearful uproar of screams. Flory went outside. They were all struggling round the gate in the sunlight. Ma Hla May was clinging to the gatepost and Ko S'la was trying to bundle her out. She turned a face full of fury and despair towards Flory, screaming over and over, 'Thakin! Thakin! Thakin! Thakin! Thakin!' It hurt him to the heart that she should still call him thakin after he had dismissed her.

'What is it?' he said.

It appeared that there was a switch of false hair that Ma Hla May and Ma Yi both claimed. Flory gave the switch to Ma Yi and gave Ma Hla May two rupees to compensate her. Then the cart jolted away, with Ma Hla May sitting beside her two wicker baskets, straight-backed and sullen, and nursing a kitten on her knees. It was only two months since he had given her the kitten as a present.

Ko S'la, who had long wished for Ma Hla May's removal, was not altogether pleased now that it had happened. He was even less pleased when he saw his master going to church — or as he called it, to the 'English pagoda' — for Flory was still in Kyauktada on the Sunday of the padre's arrival, and he went to church with the others. There was a congregation of twelve, including Mr Francis, Mr Samuel and six native Christians, with Mrs Lackersteen playing 'Abide with Me' on the tiny harmonium with one game pedal. It was the first time in ten years that Flory had been to church, except to funerals. Ko S'la's notions of what went on in the 'English pagoda' were vague in the extreme; but he did know that church-going signified respectability — a quality which, like all bachelors' servants, he hated in his bones.

'There is trouble coming,' he said despondently to the other servants. 'I have been watching him (he meant Flory) these ten days

past. He has cut down his cigarettes to fifteen a day, he has stopped drinking gin before breakfast, he shaves himself every evening — though he thinks I do not know it, the fool. And he has ordered half a dozen new silk shirts! I had to stand over the dirzi calling him bahinchut to get them finished in time. Evil omens! I give him three months longer, and then good-bye to the peace in this house!'

'What, is he going to get married?' said Ba Pe.

'I am certain of it. When a white man begins going to the English pagoda, it is, as you might say, the beginning of the end.'

'I have had many masters in my life,' old Sammy said. 'The worst was Colonel Wimpole sahib, who used to make his orderly hold me down over the table while he came running from behind and kicked me with very thick boots for serving banana fritters too frequently. At other times, when he was drunk, he would fire his revolver through the roof of the servants' quarters, just above our heads. But I would sooner serve ten years under Colonel Wimpole sahib than a week under a memsahib with her kit-kit. If our master marries I shall leave the same day.'

'I shall not leave, for I have been his servant fifteen years. But I know what is in store for us when that woman comes. She will shout at us because of spots of dust on the furniture, and wake us up to bring cups of tea in the afternoon when we are asleep, and come poking into the cookhouse at all hours and complain over dirty saucepans and cockroaches in the flour bin. It is my belief that these women lie awake at nights thinking of new ways to torment their servants.'

'They keep a little red book,' said Sammy, 'in which they enter the bazaar-money, two annas for this, four annas for that, so that a man cannot earn a pice. They make more kit-kit over the price of an onion than a sahib over five rupees.'

'Ah, do I not know it! She will be worse than Ma Hla May. Women!' he added comprehensively, with a kind of sigh.

The sigh was echoed by the others, even by Ma Pu and Ma Yi. Neither took Ko S'la's remarks as a stricture upon her own sex, Englishwomen being considered a race apart, possibly not even human, and so dreadful that an Englishman's marriage is usually the signal for the flight of every servant in his house, even those who

have been with him for years.

Chapter 10

But as a matter of fact, Ko S'la's alarm was premature. After knowing Elizabeth for ten days, Flory was scarcely more intimate with her than on the day when he had first met her.

As it happened, he had her almost to himself during these ten days, most of the Europeans being in the jungle. Flory himself had no right to be loitering in headquarters, for at this time of year the work of timber-extraction was in full swing, and in his absence everything went to pieces under the incompetent Eurasian overseer. But he had stayed — pretext, a touch of fever — while despairing letters came almost every day from the overseer, telling of disasters. One of the elephants was ill, the engine of the light railway that was used for carrying teak logs to the river had broken down, fifteen of the coolies had deserted. But Flory still lingered, unable to tear himself away from Kyauktada while Elizabeth was there, and continually seeking — never, as yet, to much purpose — to recapture that easy and delightful friendship of their first meeting.

They met every day, morning and evening, it was true. Each evening they played a single of tennis at the Club — Mrs Lackersteen was too limp and Mr Lackersteen too liverish for tennis at this time of year — and afterwards they would sit in the lounge, all four together, playing bridge and talking. But though Flory spent hours in Elizabeth's company, and often they were alone together, he was never for an instant at his ease with her. They talked — so long as they talked of trivialities — with the utmost freedom, yet they were distant, like strangers. He felt stiff in her presence, he could not forget his birthmark; his twice-scraped chin smarted, his body tortured him for whisky and tobacco — for he tried to cut down his drinking and smoking when he was with her. After ten days they seemed no nearer the relationship he wanted.

For somehow, he had never been able to talk to her as he longed to talk. To talk, simply to talk! It sounds so little, and how much it is! When you have existed to the brink of middle age in bitter loneliness, among people to whom your true opinion on every subject on earth is blasphemy, the need to talk is the greatest of all

needs. Yet with Elizabeth serious talk seemed impossible. It was as though there had been a spell upon them that made all their conversation lapse into banality; gramophone records, dogs, tennis racquets — all that desolating Club-chatter. She seemed not to WANT to talk of anything but that. He had only to touch upon a subject of any conceivable interest to hear the evasion, the 'I shan't play', coming into her voice. Her taste in books appalled him when he discovered it. Yet she was young, he reminded himself, and had she not drunk white wine and talked of Marcel Proust under the Paris plane trees? Later, no doubt, she would understand him and give him the companionship he needed. Perhaps it was only that he had not won her confidence yet.

He was anything but tactful with her. Like all men who have lived much alone, he adjusted himself better to ideas than to people. And so, though all their talk was superficial, he began to irritate her sometimes; not by what he said but by what he implied. There was an uneasiness between them, ill-defined and yet often verging upon quarrels. When two people, one of whom has lived long in the country while the other is a newcomer, are thrown together, it is inevitable that the first should act as cicerone to the second. Elizabeth, during these days, was making her first acquaintance with Burma; it was Flory, naturally, who acted as her interpreter, explaining this, commenting upon that. And the things he said, or the way he said them, provoked in her a vague yet deep disagreement. For she perceived that Flory, when he spoke of the 'natives', spoke nearly always IN FAVOUR of them. He was forever praising Burmese customs and the Burmese character; he even went so far as to contrast them favourably with the English. It disquieted her. After all, natives were natives — interesting, no doubt, but finally only a 'subject' people, an inferior people with black faces. His attitude was a little TOO tolerant. Nor had he grasped, yet, in what way he was antagonizing her. He so wanted her to love Burma as he loved it, not to look at it with the dull, incurious eyes of a memsahib! He had forgotten that most people can be at ease in a foreign country only when they are disparaging the inhabitants.

He was too eager in his attempts to interest her in things Oriental. He tried to induce her, for instance, to learn Burmese, but it came to

nothing. (Her aunt had explained to her that only missionary-women spoke Burmese; nice women found kitchen Urdu quite as much as they needed.) There were countless small disagreements like that. She was grasping, dimly, that his views were not the views an Englishman should hold. Much more clearly she grasped that he was asking her to be fond of the Burmese, even to admire them; to admire people with black faces, almost savages, whose appearance still made her shudder!

The subject cropped up in a hundred ways. A knot of Burmans would pass them on the road. She, with her still fresh eyes, would gaze after them, half curious and half repelled; and she would say to Flory, as she would have said to anybody:

'How REVOLTINGLY ugly these people are, aren't they?'

'ARE they? I always think they're rather charming-looking, the Burmese. They have such splendid bodies! Look at that fellow's shoulders — like a bronze statue. Just think what sights you'd see in England if people went about half naked as they do here!'

'But they have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat's. And then the way their foreheads slant back — it makes them look so WICKED. I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people's heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a CRIMINAL TYPE.'

'Oh, come, that's a bit sweeping! Round about half the people in the world have that kind of forehead.'

'Oh, well, if you count COLOURED people, of course — !'

Or perhaps a string of women would pass, going to the well: heavy-set peasant-girls, copper-brown, erect under their water-pots with strong marelike buttocks protruded. The Burmese women repelled Elizabeth more than the men; she felt her kinship with them, and the hatefulness of being kin to creatures with black faces.

'Aren't they too simply dreadful? So COARSE-LOOKING; like some kind of animal. Do you think ANYONE could think those women attractive?'

'Their own men do, I believe.'

'I suppose they would. But that black skin — I don't know how anyone could bear it!'

'But, you know, one gets used to the brown skin in time. In fact

they say — I believe it's true — that after a few years in these countries a brown skin seems more natural than a white one. And after all, it IS more natural. Take the world as a whole, it's an eccentricity to be white.'

'You DO have some funny ideas!'

And so on and so on. She felt all the while an unsatisfactoriness, an unsoundness in the things he said. It was particularly so on the evening when Flory allowed Mr Francis and Mr Samuel, the two derelict Eurasians, to entrap him in conversation at the Club gate.

Elizabeth, as it happened, had reached the Club a few minutes before Flory, and when she heard his voice at the gate she came round the tennis-screen to meet him. The two Eurasians had sidled up to Flory and cornered him like a pair of dogs asking for a game. Francis was doing most of the talking. He was a meagre, excitable man, and as brown as a cigar-leaf, being the son of a South Indian woman; Samuel, whose mother had been a Karen, was pale yellow with dull red hair. Both were dressed in shabby drill suits, with vast topis beneath which their slender bodies looked like the stalks of toadstools.

Elizabeth came down the path in time to hear fragments of an enormous and complicated autobiography. Talking to white men — talking, for choice, about himself — was the great joy of Francis's life. When, at intervals of months, he found a European to listen to him, his life-history would pour out of him in unquenchable torrents. He was talking in a nasal, sing-song voice of incredible rapidity:

'Of my father, sir, I remember little, but he was very choleric man and many whackings with big bamboo stick all knobs on both for self, little half-brother and two mothers. Also how on occasion of bishop's visit little half-brother and I dress in longyis and sent among the Burmese children to preserve incognito. My father never rose to be bishop, sir. Four converts only in twenty-eight years, and also too great fondness for Chinese rice-spirit very fiery noised abroad and spoil sales of my father's booklet entitled The Scourge of Alcohol, published with the Rangoon Baptist Press, one rupee eight annas. My little half-brother die one hot weather, always coughing, coughing,' etc., etc.

The two Eurasians perceived the presence of Elizabeth. Both

doffed their topis with bows and brilliant displays of teeth. It was probably several years since either of them had had a chance of talking to an Englishwoman. Francis burst out more effusively than ever. He was chattering in evident dread that he would be interrupted and the conversation cut short.

'Good evening to you, madam, good evening, good evening! Most honoured to make your acquaintance, madam! Very sweltering is the weather these days, is not? But seasonable for April. Not too much you are suffering from prickly heat, I trust? Pounded tamarind applied to the afflicted spot is infallible. Myself I suffer torments each night. Very prevalent disease among we Europeans.'

He pronounced it Europian, like Mr Chollop in Martin Chuzzlewit. Elizabeth did not answer. She was looking at the Eurasians somewhat coldly. She had only a dim idea as to who or what they were, and it struck her as impertinent that they should speak to her.

'Thanks, I'll remember about the tamarind,' Flory said.

'Specific of renowned Chinese doctor, sir. Also, sir-madam, may I advise to you, wearing only Terai hat is not judicious in April, sir. For the natives all well, their skulls are adamant. But for us sunstroke ever menaces. Very deadly is the sun upon European skull. But is it that I detain you, madam?'

This was said in a disappointed tone. Elizabeth had, in fact, decided to snub the Eurasians. She did not know why Flory was allowing them to hold him in conversation. As she turned away to stroll back to the tennis court, she made a practice stroke in the air with her racquet, to remind Flory that the game was overdue. He saw it and followed her, rather reluctantly, for he did not like snubbing the wretched Francis, bore though he was.

'I must be off,' he said. 'Good evening, Francis. Good evening, Samuel.'

'Good evening, sir! Good evening, madam! Good evening, good evening!' They receded with more hat flourishes.

'Who ARE those two?' said Elizabeth as Flory came up with her. 'Such extraordinary creatures! They were in church on Sunday. One of them looks almost white. Surely he isn't an Englishman?'

'No, they're Eurasians — sons of white fathers and native

mothers. Yellow-bellies is our friendly nickname for them.'

'But what are they doing here? Where do they live? Do they do any work?'

'They exist somehow or other in the bazaar. I believe Francis acts as clerk to an Indian money-lender, and Samuel to some of the pleaders. But they'd probably starve now and then if it weren't for the charity of the natives.'

'The natives! Do you mean to say — sort of CADGE from the natives?'

'I fancy so. It would be a very easy thing to do, if one cared to. The Burmese won't let anyone starve.'

Elizabeth had never heard of anything of this kind before. The notion of men who were at least partly white living in poverty among 'natives' so shocked her that she stopped short on the path, and the game of tennis was postponed for a few minutes.

'But how awful! I mean, it's such a bad example! It's almost as bad as if one of US was like that. Couldn't something be done for those two? Get up a subscription and send them away from here, or something?'

'I'm afraid it wouldn't help much. Wherever they went they'd be in the same position.'

'But couldn't they get some proper work to do?'

'I doubt it. You see, Eurasians of that type — men who've been brought up in the bazaar and had no education — are done for from the start. The Europeans won't touch them with a stick, and they're cut off from entering the lower-grade Government services. There's nothing they can do except cadge, unless they chuck all pretension to being Europeans. And really you can't expect the poor devils to do that. Their drop of white blood is the sole asset they've got. Poor Francis, I never meet him but he begins telling me about his prickly heat. Natives, you see, are supposed not to suffer from prickly heat — bosh, of course, but people believe it. It's the same with sunstroke. They wear those huge topis to remind you that they've got European skulls. A kind of coat of arms. The bend sinister, you might say.'

This did not satisfy Elizabeth. She perceived that Flory, as usual, had a sneaking sympathy with the Eurasians. And the appearance of

the two men had excited a peculiar dislike in her. She had placed their type now. They looked like dagoes. Like those Mexicans and Italians and other dago people who play the mauvais role in so many a film.

'They looked awfully degenerate types, didn't they? So thin and weedy and cringing; and they haven't got at all HONEST faces. I suppose these Eurasians ARE very degenerate? I've heard that half-castes always inherit what's worst in both races. Is that true?'

'I don't know that it's true. Most Eurasians aren't very good specimens, and it's hard to see how they could be, with their upbringing. But our attitude towards them is rather beastly. We always talk of them as though they'd sprung up from the ground like mushrooms, with all their faults ready-made. But when all's said and done, we're responsible for their existence.'

'Responsible for their existence?'

'Well, they've all got fathers, you see.'

'Oh . . . Of course there's that. . . . But after all, YOU aren't responsible. I mean, only a very low kind of man would — er — have anything to do with native women, wouldn't he?'

'Oh, quite. But the fathers of both those two were clergymen in holy orders, I believe.'

He thought of Rosa McFee, the Eurasian girl he had seduced in Mandalay in 1913. The way he used to sneak down to the house in a gharry with the shutters down; Rosa's corkscrew curls; her withered old Burmese mother, giving him tea in the dark living-room with the fern pots and the wicker divan. And afterwards, when he had chucked Rosa, those dreadful, imploring letters on scented note-paper, which, in the end, he had ceased opening.

Elizabeth reverted to the subject of Francis and Samuel after tennis.

'Those two Eurasians — does anyone here have anything to do with them? Invite them to their houses or anything?'

'Good gracious, no. They're complete outcasts. It's not considered quite the thing to talk to them, in fact. Most of us say good morning to them — Ellis won't even do that.'

'But YOU talked to them.'

'Oh well, I break the rules occasionally. I meant that a pukka

sahib probably wouldn't be seen talking to them. But you see, I try — just sometimes, when I have the pluck — NOT to be a pukka sahib.'

It was an unwise remark. She knew very well by this time the meaning of the phrase 'pukka sahib' and all it stood for. His remark had made the difference in their viewpoint a little clearer. The glance she gave him was almost hostile, and curiously hard; for her face could look hard sometimes, in spite of its youth and its flower-like skin. Those modish tortoise-shell spectacles gave her a very self-possessed look. Spectacles are queerly expressive things — almost more expressive, indeed, than eyes.

As yet he had neither understood her nor quite won her trust. Yet on the surface, at least, things had not gone ill between them. He had fretted her sometimes, but the good impression that he had made that first morning was not yet effaced. It was a curious fact that she scarcely noticed his birthmark at this time. And there were some subjects on which she was glad to hear him talk. Shooting, for example — she seemed to have an enthusiasm for shooting that was remarkable in a girl. Horses, also; but he was less knowledgeable about horses. He had arranged to take her out for a day's shooting, later, when he could make preparations. Both of them were looking forward to the expedition with some eagerness, though not entirely for the same reason.

Chapter 11

Flory and Elizabeth walked down the bazaar road. It was morning, but the air was so hot that to walk in it was like wading through a torrid sea. Strings of Burmans passed, coming from the bazaar, on scraping sandals, and knots of girls who hurried by four and five abreast, with short quick steps, chattering, their burnished hair gleaming. By the roadside, just before you got to the jail, the fragments of a stone pagoda were littered, cracked and overthrown by the strong roots of a peepul tree. The angry carved faces of demons looked up from the grass where they had fallen. Near by another peepul tree had twined itself round a palm, uprooting it and bending it backwards in a wrestle that had lasted a decade.

They walked on and came to the jail, a vast square block, two hundred yards each way, with shiny concrete walls twenty feet high. A peacock, pet of the jail, was mincing pigeon-toed along the parapet. Six convicts came by, head down, dragging two heavy handcarts piled with earth, under the guard of Indian warders. They were long-sentence men, with heavy limbs, dressed in uniforms of coarse white cloth with small dunces' caps perched on their shaven crowns. Their faces were greyish, cowed and curiously flattened. Their leg-irons jingled with a clear ring. A woman came past carrying a basket of fish on her head. Two crows were circling round it and making darts at it, and the woman was flapping one hand negligently to keep them away.

There was a din of voices a little distance away. 'The bazaar's just round the corner,' Flory said. 'I think this is a market morning. It's rather fun to watch.'

He had asked her to come down to the bazaar with him, telling her it would amuse her to see it. They rounded the bend. The bazaar was an enclosure like a very large cattle pen, with low stalls, mostly palm-thatched, round its edge. In the enclosure, a mob of people seethed, shouting and jostling; the confusion of their multi-coloured clothes was like a cascade of hundreds-and-thousands poured out of a jar. Beyond the bazaar one could see the huge, miry river. Tree branches and long streaks of scum raced down it at seven miles an

hour. By the bank a fleet of sampans, with sharp beak-like bows on which eyes were painted, rocked at their mooring-poles.

Flory and Elizabeth stood watching for a moment. Files of women passed balancing vegetable baskets on their heads, and pop-eyed children who stared at the Europeans. An old Chinese in dungarees faded to sky-blue hurried by, nursing some unrecognizable, bloody fragment of a pig's intestines.

'Let's go and poke around the stalls a bit, shall we?' Flory said.

'Is it all right going in among the crowd? Everything's so horribly dirty.'

'Oh, it's all right, they'll make way for us. It'll interest you.'

Elizabeth followed him doubtfully and even unwillingly. Why was it that he always brought her to these places? Why was he forever dragging her in among the 'natives', trying to get her to take an interest in them and watch their filthy, disgusting habits? It was all wrong, somehow. However, she followed, not feeling able to explain her reluctance. A wave of stifling air met them; there was a reek of garlic, dried fish, sweat, dust, anise, cloves and turmeric. The crowd surged round them, swarms of stocky peasants with cigar-brown faces, withered elders with their grey hair tied in a bun behind, young mothers carrying naked babies astride the hip. Flo was trodden on and yelped. Low, strong shoulders bumped against Elizabeth, as the peasants, too busy bargaining even to stare at a white woman, struggled round the stalls.

'Look!' Flory was pointing with his stick to a stall, and saying something, but it was drowned by the yells of two women who were shaking their fists at each other over a basket of pineapples. Elizabeth had recoiled from the stench and din, but he did not notice it, and led her deeper into the crowd, pointing to this stall and that. The merchandise was foreign-looking, queer and poor. There were vast pomelos hanging on strings like green moons, red bananas, baskets of heliotrope-coloured prawns the size of lobsters, brittle dried fish tied in bundles, crimson chilis, ducks split open and cured like hams, green coco-nuts, the larvae of the rhinoceros beetle, sections of sugar-cane, dahs, lacquered sandals, check silk longyis, aphrodisiacs in the form of large, soap-like pills, glazed earthenware jars four feet high, Chinese sweetmeats made of garlic and sugar, green and white

cigars, purple prinjals, persimmon-seed necklaces, chickens cheeping in wicker cages, brass Buddhas, heart-shaped betel leaves, bottles of Kruschen salts, switches of false hair, red clay cooking-pots, steel shoes for bullocks, papier-mache marionettes, strips of alligator hide with magical properties. Elizabeth's head was beginning to swim. At the other end of the bazaar the sun gleamed through a priest's umbrella, blood-red, as though through the ear of a giant. In front of a stall four Dravidian women were pounding turmeric with heavy stakes in a large wooden mortar. The hot-scented yellow powder flew up and tickled Elizabeth's nostrils, making her sneeze. She felt that she could not endure this place a moment longer. She touched Flory's arm.

'This crowd — the heat is so dreadful. Do you think we could get into the shade?'

He turned round. To tell the truth, he had been too busy talking — mostly inaudibly, because of the din — to notice how the heat and stench were affecting her.

'Oh, I say, I am sorry. Let's get out of it at once. I tell you what, we'll go along to old Li Yeik's shop — he's the Chinese grocer — and he'll get us a drink of something. It is rather stifling here.'

'All these spices — they kind of take your breath away. And what is that dreadful smell like fish?'

'Oh, only a kind of sauce they make out of prawns. They bury them and then dig them up several weeks afterwards.'

'How absolutely horrible!'

'Quite wholesome, I believe. Come away from that!' he added to Flo, who was nosing at a basket of small gudgeon-like fish with spines on their gills.

Li Yeik's shop faced the farther end of the bazaar. What Elizabeth had really wanted was to go straight back to the Club, but the European look of Li Yeik's shop-front — it was piled with Lancashire-made cotton shirts and almost incredibly cheap German clocks — comforted her somewhat after the barbarity of the bazaar. They were about to climb the steps when a slim youth of twenty, damnably dressed in a longyi, blue cricket blazer and bright yellow shoes, with his hair parted and greased 'Ingaleik fashion', detached himself from the crowd and came after them. He greeted Flory with a

small awkward movement as though restraining himself from shikoing.

'What is it?' Flory said.

'Letter, sir.' He produced a grubby envelope.

'Would you excuse me?' Flory said to Elizabeth, opening the letter. It was from Ma Hla May — or rather, it had been written for her and she had signed it with a cross — and it demanded fifty rupees, in a vaguely menacing manner.

Flory pulled the youth aside. 'You speak English? Tell Ma Hla May I'll see about this later. And tell her that if she tries blackmailing me she won't get another pice. Do you understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And now go away. Don't follow me about, or there'll be trouble.'

'Yes, sir.'

'A clerk wanting a job,' Flory explained to Elizabeth as they went up the steps. 'They come bothering one at all hours.' And he reflected that the tone of the letter was curious, for he had not expected Ma Hla May to begin blackmailing him so soon; however, he had not time at the moment to wonder what it might mean.

They went into the shop, which seemed dark after the outer air. Li Yeik, who was sitting smoking among his baskets of merchandise — there was no counter — hobbled eagerly forward when he saw who had come in. Flory was a friend of his. He was an old bent-kneed man dressed in blue, wearing a pigtail, with a chinless yellow face, all cheekbones, like a benevolent skull. He greeted Flory with nasal honking noises which he intended for Burmese, and at once hobbled to the back of the shop to call for refreshments. There was a cool sweetish smell of opium. Long strips of red paper with black lettering were pasted on the walls, and at one side there was a little altar with a portrait of two large, serene-looking people in embroidered robes, and two sticks of incense smouldering in front of it. Two Chinese women, one old, and a girl were sitting on a mat rolling cigarettes with maize straw and tobacco like chopped horsehair. They wore black silk trousers, and their feet, with bulging, swollen insteps, were crammed into red-heeled wooden slippers no bigger than a doll's. A naked child was crawling slowly about the floor like a large yellow frog.

‘Do look at those women’s feet!’ Elizabeth whispered as soon as Li Yeik’s back was turned. ‘Isn’t it simply dreadful! How do they get them like that? Surely it isn’t natural?’

‘No, they deform them artificially. It’s going out in China, I believe, but the people here are behind the times. Old Li Yeik’s pigtail is another anachronism. Those small feet are beautiful according to Chinese ideas.’

‘Beautiful! They’re so horrible I can hardly look at them. These people must be absolute savages!’

‘Oh no! They’re highly civilized; more civilized than we are, in my opinion. Beauty’s all a matter of taste. There are a people in this country called the Palaungs who admire long necks in women. The girls wear broad brass rings to stretch their necks, and they put on more and more of them until in the end they have necks like giraffes. It’s no queerer than bustles or crinolines.’

At this moment Li Yeik came back with two fat, round-faced Burmese girls, evidently sisters, giggling and carrying between them two chairs and a blue Chinese teapot holding half a gallon. The two girls were or had been Li Yeik’s concubines. The old man had produced a tin of chocolates and was prising off the lid and smiling in a fatherly way, exposing three long, tobacco-blackened teeth. Elizabeth sat down in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. She was perfectly certain that it could not be right to accept these people’s hospitality. One of the Burmese girls had at once gone behind the chairs and begun fanning Flory and Elizabeth, while the other knelt at their feet and poured out cups of tea. Elizabeth felt very foolish with the girl fanning the back of her neck and the Chinaman grinning in front of her. Flory always seemed to get her into these uncomfortable situations. She took a chocolate from the tin Li Yeik offered her, but she could not bring herself to say ‘thank you’.

‘Is this ALL RIGHT?’ she whispered to Flory.

‘All right?’

‘I mean, ought we to be sitting down in these people’s house? Isn’t it sort of — sort of infra dig?’

‘It’s all right with a Chinaman. They’re a favoured race in this country. And they’re very democratic in their ideas. It’s best to treat them more or less as equals.’

‘This tea looks absolutely beastly. It’s quite green. You’d think they’d have the sense to put milk in it, wouldn’t you?’

‘It’s not bad. It’s a special kind of tea old Li Yeik gets from China. It has orange blossoms in it, I believe.’

‘Ugh! It tastes exactly like earth,’ she said, having tasted it.

Li Yeik stood holding his pipe, which was two feet long with a metal bowl the size of an acorn, and watching the Europeans to see whether they enjoyed his tea. The girl behind the chair said something in Burmese, at which both of them burst out giggling again. The one kneeling on the floor looked up and gazed in a naive admiring way at Elizabeth. Then she turned to Flory and asked him whether the English lady wore stays. She pronounced it s’tays.

‘Ch!’ said Li Yeik in a scandalized manner, stirring the girl with his toe to silence her.

‘I should hardly care to ask her,’ Flory said.

‘Oh, thakin, please do ask her! We are so anxious to know!’

There was an argument, and the girl behind the chair forgot fanning and joined in. Both of them, it appeared, had been pining all their lives to see a veritable pair of s’tays. They had heard so many tales about them; they were made of steel on the principle of a strait waistcoat, and they compressed a woman so tightly that she had no breasts, absolutely no breasts at all! The girls pressed their hands against their fat ribs in illustration. Would not Flory be so kind as to ask the English lady? There was a room behind the shop where she could come with them and undress. They had been so hoping to see a pair of s’tays.

Then the conversation lapsed suddenly. Elizabeth was sitting stiffly, holding her tiny cup of tea, which she could not bring herself to taste again, and wearing a rather hard smile. A chill fell upon the Orientals; they realized that the English girl, who could not join in their conversation, was not at her ease. Her elegance and her foreign beauty, which had charmed them a moment earlier, began to awe them a little. Even Flory was conscious of the same feeling. There came one of those dreadful moments that one has with Orientals, when everyone avoids everyone else’s eyes, trying vainly to think of something to say. Then the naked child, which had been exploring some baskets at the back of the shop, crawled across to where the

European sat. It examined their shoes and stockings with great curiosity, and then, looking up, saw their white faces and was seized with terror. It let out a desolate wail, and began making water on the floor.

The old Chinese woman looked up, clicked her tongue and went on rolling cigarettes. No one else took the smallest notice. A pool began to form on the floor. Elizabeth was so horrified that she set her cup down hastily, and spilled the tea. She plucked at Flory's arm.

'That child! Do look what it's doing! Really, can't someone — it's too awful!' For a moment everyone gazed in astonishment, and then they all grasped what was the matter. There was a flurry and a general clicking of tongues. No one had paid any attention to the child — the incident was too normal to be noticed — and now they all felt horribly ashamed. Everyone began putting the blame on the child. There were exclamations of 'What a disgraceful child! What a disgusting child!' The old Chinese woman carried the child, still howling, to the door, and held it out over the step as though wringing out a bath sponge. And in the same moment, as it seemed, Flory and Elizabeth were outside the shop, and he was following her back to the road with Li Yeik and the others looking after them in dismay.

'If THAT'S what you call civilized people — !' she was exclaiming.

'I'm sorry,' he said feebly. 'I never expected— '

'What absolutely DISGUSTING people!'

She was bitterly angry. Her face had flushed a wonderful delicate pink, like a poppy bud opened a day too soon. It was the deepest colour of which it was capable. He followed her past the bazaar and back to the main road, and they had gone fifty yards before he ventured to speak again.

'I'm so sorry that this should have happened! Li Yeik is such a decent old chap. He'd hate to think that he'd offended you. Really it would have been better to stay a few minutes. Just to thank him for the tea.'

'Thank him! After THAT!'

'But honestly, you oughtn't to mind that sort of thing. Not in this country. These people's whole outlook is so different from ours. One has to adjust oneself. Suppose, for instance, you were back in the

Middle Ages— ‘

‘I think I’d rather not discuss it any longer.’

It was the first time they had definitely quarrelled. He was too miserable even to ask himself how it was that he offended her. He did not realize that this constant striving to interest her in Oriental things struck her only as perverse, ungentlemanly, a deliberate seeking after the squalid and the ‘beastly’. He had not grasped even now with what eyes she saw the ‘natives’. He only knew that at each attempt to make her share his life, his thoughts, his sense of beauty, she shied away from him like a frightened horse.

They walked up the road, he to the left of her and a little behind. He watched her averted cheek and the tiny gold hairs on her nape beneath the brim of her Terai hat. How he loved her, how he loved her! It was as though he had never truly loved her till this moment, when he walked behind her in disgrace, not even daring to show his disfigured face. He made to speak several times, and stopped himself. His voice was not quite ready, and he did not know what he could say that did not risk offending her somehow. At last he said, flatly, with a feeble pretence that nothing was the matter:

‘It’s getting beastly hot, isn’t it?’

With the temperature at 90 degrees in the shade it was not a brilliant remark. To his surprise she seized on it with a kind of eagerness. She turned to face him, and she was smiling again.

‘Isn’t it simply BAKING!’

With that they were at peace. The silly, banal remark, bringing with it the reassuring atmosphere of Club-chatter, had soothed her like a charm. Flo, who had lagged behind, came puffing up to them dribbling saliva; in an instant they were talking, quite as usual, about dogs. They talked about dogs for the rest of the way home, almost without a pause. Dogs are an inexhaustible subject. Dogs, dogs! thought Flory as they climbed the hot hillside, with the mounting sun scorching their shoulders through their thin clothes, like the breath of fire — were they never to talk of anything except dogs? Or failing dogs, gramophone records and tennis racquets? And yet, when they kept to trash like this, how easily, how amicably they could talk!

They passed the glittering white wall of the cemetery and came to the Lackersteens’ gate. Old mohur trees grew round it, and a clump

of hollyhocks eight feet high, with round red flowers like blowsy girls' faces. Flory took off his hat in the shade and fanned his face.

'Well, we're back before the worst of the heat comes. I'm afraid our trip to the bazaar wasn't altogether a success.'

'Oh, not at all! I enjoyed it, really I did.'

'No — I don't know, something unfortunate always seems to happen. — Oh, by the way! You haven't forgotten that we're going out shooting the day after tomorrow? I hope that day will be all right for you?'

'Yes, and my uncle's going to lend me his gun. Such awful fun! You'll have to teach me all about shooting. I AM so looking forward to it.'

'So am I. It's a rotten time of year for shooting, but we'll do our best. Goodbye for the present, then.'

'Good-bye, Mr Flory.'

She still called him Mr Flory though he called her Elizabeth. They parted and went their ways, each thinking of the shooting trip, which, both of them felt, would in some way put things right between them.

Chapter 12

In the sticky, sleepy heat of the living-room, almost dark because of the beaded curtain, U Po Kyin was marching slowly up and down, boasting. From time to time he would put a hand under his singlet and scratch his sweating breasts, huge as a woman's with fat. Ma Kin was sitting on her mat, smoking slender white cigars. Through the open door of the bedroom one could see the corner of U Po Kyin's huge square bed, with carved teak posts, like a catafalque, on which he had committed many and many a rape.

Ma Kin was now hearing for the first time of the 'other affair' which underlay U Po Kyin's attack on Dr Veraswami. Much as he despised her intelligence, U Po Kyin usually let Ma Kin into his secrets sooner or later. She was the only person in his immediate circle who was not afraid of him, and there was therefore a pleasure in impressing her.

'Well, Kin Kin,' he said, 'you see how it has all gone according to plan! Eighteen anonymous letters already, and every one of them a masterpiece. I would repeat some of them to you if I thought you were capable of appreciating them.'

'But supposing the Europeans take no notice of your anonymous letters? What then?'

'Take no notice? Aha, no fear of that! I think I know something about the European mentality. Let me tell you, Kin Kin, that if there is one thing I CAN do, it is to write an anonymous letter.'

This was true. U Po Kyin's letters had already taken effect, and especially on their chief target, Mr Macgregor.

Only two days earlier than this, Mr Macgregor had spent a very troubled evening in trying to make up his mind whether Dr Veraswami was or was not guilty of disloyalty to the Government. Of course, it was not a question of any overt act of disloyalty — that was quite irrelevant. The point was, was the doctor the KIND of man who would hold seditious opinions? In India you are not judged for what you do, but for what you ARE. The merest breath of suspicion against his loyalty can ruin an Oriental official. Mr Macgregor had too just a nature to condemn even an Oriental out of hand. He had

puzzled as late as midnight over a whole pile of confidential papers, including the five anonymous letters he had received, besides two others that had been forwarded to him by Westfield, pinned together with a cactus thorn.

It was not only the letters. Rumours about the doctor had been pouring in from every side. U Po Kyin fully grasped that to call the doctor a traitor was not enough in itself; it was necessary to attack his reputation from every possible angle. The doctor was charged not only with sedition, but also with extortion, rape, torture, performing illegal operations, performing operations while blind drunk, murder by poison, murder by sympathetic magic, eating beef, selling death certificates to murderers, wearing his shoes in the precincts of the pagoda and making homosexual attempts on the Military Police drummer boy. To hear what was said of him, anyone would have imagined the doctor a compound of Machiavelli, Sweeny Todd and the Marquis de Sade. Mr Macgregor had not paid much attention at first. He was too accustomed to this kind of thing. But with the last of the anonymous letters U Po Kyin had brought off a stroke that was brilliant even for him.

It concerned the escape of Nga Shwe O, the dacoit, from Kyauktada jail. Nga Shwe O, who was in the middle of a well-earned seven years, had been preparing his escape for several months past, and as a start his friends outside had bribed one of the Indian warders. The warder received his hundred rupees in advance, applied for leave to visit the death-bed of a relative and spent several busy days in the Mandalay brothels. Time passed, and the day of the escape was postponed several times — the warder, meanwhile, growing more and more homesick for the brothels. Finally he decided to earn a further reward by betraying the plot to U Po Kyin. But U Po Kyin, as usual, saw his chance. He told the warder on dire penalties to hold his tongue, and then, on the very night of the escape, when it was too late to do anything, sent another anonymous letter to Mr Macgregor, warning him that an escape was being attempted. The letter added, needless to say, that Dr Veraswami, the superintendent of the jail, had been bribed for his connivance.

In the morning there was a hullabaloo and a rushing to and fro of warders and, policemen at the jail, for Nga Shwe O had escaped. (He

was a long way down the river, in a sampan provided by U Po Kyin.) This time Mr Macgregor was taken aback. Whoever had written the letter must have been privy to the plot, and was probably telling the truth about the doctor's connivance. It was a very serious matter. A jail superintendent who will take bribes to let a prisoner escape is capable of anything. And therefore — perhaps the logical sequence was not quite clear, but it was clear enough to Mr Macgregor — therefore the charge of sedition, which was the main charge against the doctor, became much more credible.

U Po Kyin had attacked the other Europeans at the same time. Flory, who was the doctor's friend and his chief source of prestige, had been scared easily enough into deserting him. With Westfield it was a little harder. Westfield, as a policeman, knew a great deal about U Po Kyin and might conceivably upset his plans. Policemen and magistrates are natural enemies. But U Po Kyin had known how to turn even this fact to advantage. He had accused the doctor, anonymously of course, of being in league with the notorious scoundrel and bribe-taker U Po Kyin. That settled Westfield. As for Ellis, no anonymous letters were needed in his case; nothing could possibly make him think worse of the doctor than he did already.

U Po Kyin had even sent one of his anonymous letters to Mrs Lackersteen, for he knew the power of European women. Dr Veraswami, the letter said, was inciting the natives to abduct and rape the European women — no details were given, nor were they needed. U Po Kyin had touched Mrs Lackersteen's weak spot. To her mind the words 'sedition', 'Nationalism,', 'rebellion', 'Home Rule', conveyed one thing and one only, and that was a picture of herself being raped by a procession of jet-black coolies with rolling white eyeballs. It was a thought that kept her awake at night sometimes. Whatever good regard the Europeans might once have had for the doctor was crumbling rapidly.

'So you see,' said U Po Kyin with a pleased air, 'you see how I have undermined him. He is like a tree sawn through at the base. One tap and down he comes. In three weeks or less I shall deliver that tap.'

'How?'

'I am just coming to that. I think it is time for you to hear about it.

You have no sense in these matters, but you know how to hold your tongue. You have heard talk of this rebellion that is brewing near Thongwa village?'

'Yes. They are very foolish, those villagers. What can they do with their dahs and spears against the Indian soldiers? They will be shot down like wild animals.'

'Of course. If there is any fighting it will be a massacre. But they are only a pack of superstitious peasants. They have put their faith in these absurd bullet-proof jackets that are being distributed to them. I despise such ignorance.'

'Poor men! Why do you not stop them, Ko Po Kyin? There is no need to arrest anybody. You have only to go to the village and tell them that you know their plans, and they will never dare to go on.'

'Ah well, I could stop them if I chose, of course. But then I do not choose. I have my reasons. You see, Kin Kin — you will please keep silent about this — this is, so to speak, my own rebellion. I arranged it myself.'

'What!'

Ma Kin dropped her cigar. Her eyes had opened so wide that the pale blue white showed all round the pupil. She was horrified. She burst out:

'Ko Po Kyin, what are you saying? You do not mean it! You, raising a rebellion — it cannot be true!'

'Certainly it is true. And a very good job we are making of it. That magician whom I brought from Rangoon is a clever fellow. He has toured all over India as a circus conjurer. The bullet-proof jackets were bought at Whiteaway & Laidlaw's stores, one rupee eight annas each. They are costing me a pretty penny, I can tell you.'

'But, Ko Po Kyin! A rebellion! The terrible fighting and shooting, and all the poor men who will be killed! Surely you have not gone mad? Are you not afraid of being shot yourself?'

U Po Kyin halted in his stride. He was astonished. 'Good gracious, woman, what idea have you got hold of now? You do not suppose that *I* am rebelling against the Government? I — a Government servant of thirty years' standing! Good heavens, no! I said that I had STARTED the rebellion, not that I was taking part in it. It is these fools of villagers who are going to risk their skins, not I.

No one dreams that I have anything to do with it, or ever will, except Ba Sein and one or two others.'

'But you said it was you who were persuading them to rebel?'

'Of course. I have accused Veraswami of raising a rebellion against the Government. Well, I must have a rebellion to show, must I not?'

'Ah, I see. And when the rebellion breaks out, you are going to say that Dr Veraswami is to blame for it. Is that it?'

'How slow you are! I should have thought even a fool would have seen that I am raising the rebellion merely in order to crush it. I am — what is that expression Mr Macgregor uses? Agent provocateur — Latin, you would not understand. I am agent provocateur. First I persuade these fools at Thongwa to rebel, and then I arrest them as rebels. At the very moment when it is due to start, I shall pounce on the ringleaders and clap every one of them in jail. After that, I dare say there may possibly be some fighting. A few men may be killed and a few more sent to the Andamans. But, meanwhile, I shall be first in the field. U Po Kyin, the man who quelled a most dangerous rising in the nick of time! I shall be the hero of the district.'

U Po Kyin, justly proud of his plan, began to pace up and down the room again with his hands behind his back, smiling. Ma Kin considered the plan in silence for some time. Finally she said:

'I still do not see why you are doing this, Ko Po Kyin. Where is it all leading? And what has it got to do with Dr Veraswami?'

'I shall never teach you wisdom, Kin Kin! Did I not tell you at the beginning that Veraswami stands in my way? This rebellion is the very thing to get rid of him. Of course we shall never prove that he is responsible for it; but what does that matter? All the Europeans will take it for granted that he is mixed up in it somehow. That is how their minds work. He will be ruined for life. And his fall is my rise. The blacker I can paint him, the more glorious my own conduct will appear. Now do you understand?'

'Yes, I do understand. And I think it is a base, evil plan. I wonder you are not ashamed to tell it me.'

'Now, Kin Kin! Surely you are not going to start that nonsense over again?'

‘Ko Po Kyin, why is it that you are only happy when you are being wicked? Why is it that everything you do must bring evil to others? Think of that poor doctor who will be dismissed from his post, and those villagers who will be shot or flogged with bamboos or imprisoned for life. Is it necessary to do such things? What can you want with more money when you are rich already?’

‘Money! Who is talking about money? Some day, woman, you will realize that there are other things in the world besides money. Fame, for example. Greatness. Do you realize that the Governor of Burma will very probably pin an Order on my breast for my loyal action in this affair? Would not even you be proud of such an honour as that?’

Ma Kin shook her head, unimpressed. ‘When will you remember, Ko Po Kyin, that you are not going to live a thousand years? Consider what happens to those who have lived wickedly. There is such a thing, for instance, as being turned into a rat or a frog. There is even hell. I remember what a priest said to me once about hell, something that he had translated from the Pali scriptures, and it was very terrible. He said, “Once in a thousand centuries two red-hot spears will meet in your heart, and you will say to yourself, ‘Another thousand centuries of my torment are ended, and there is as much to come as there has been before.’” Is it not very dreadful to think of such things, Ko Po Kyin?’

U Po Kyin laughed and gave a careless wave of his hand that meant ‘pagodas’.

‘Well, I hope you may still laugh when it comes to the end. But for myself, I should not care to look back upon such a life.’

She relighted her cigar with her thin shoulder turned disapprovingly on U Po Kyin while he took several more turns up and down the room. When he spoke, it was more seriously than before, and even with a touch of diffidence.

‘You know, Kin Kin, there is another matter behind all this. Something that I have not told to you or to anyone else. Even Ba Sein does not know. But I believe I will tell it you now.’

‘I do not want to hear it, if it is more wickedness.’

‘No, no. You were asking just now what is my real object in this affair. You think, I suppose, that I am ruining Veraswami merely

because I dislike him and his ideas about bribes as a nuisance. It is not only that. There is something else that is far more important, and it concerns you as well as me.'

'What is it?'

'Have you never felt in you, Kin Kin, a desire for higher things? Has it never struck you that after all our successes — all my successes, I should say — we are almost in the same position as when we started? I am worth, I dare say, two lakhs of rupees, and yet look at the style in which we live! Look at this room! Positively it is no better than that of a peasant. I am tired of eating with my fingers and associating only with Burmans — poor, inferior people — and living, as you might say, like a miserable Township Officer. Money is not enough; I should like to feel that I have risen in the world as well. Do you not wish sometimes for a way of life that is a little more — how shall I say — elevated?'

'I do not know how we could want more than what we have already. When I was a girl in my village I never thought that I should live in such a house as this. Look at those English chairs — I have never sat in one of them in my life. But I am very proud to look at them and think that I own them.'

'Ch! Why did you ever leave that village of yours, Kin Kin? You are only fit to stand gossiping by the well with a stone water-pot on your head. But I am more ambitious, God be praised. And now I will tell you the real reason why I am intriguing against Veraswami. It is in my mind to do something that is really magnificent. Something noble, glorious! Something that is the very highest honour an Oriental can attain to. You know what I mean, of course?'

'No. What do you mean?'

'Come, now! The greatest achievement of my life! Surely you can guess?'

'Ah, I know! You are going to buy a motor-car. But oh, Ko Po Kyin, please do not expect me to ride in it!'

U Po Kyin threw up his hands in disgust. 'A motor-car! You have the mind of a bazaar peanut-seller! I could buy twenty motor-cars if I wanted them. And what use would a motor-car be in this place? No, it is something far grander than that.'

'What, then?'

‘It is this. I happen to know that in a month’s time the Europeans are going to elect one native member to their Club. They do not want to do it, but they will have orders from the Commissioner, and they will obey. Naturally, they would elect Veraswami, who is the highest native official in the district. But I have disgraced Veraswami. And so— ‘

‘What?’

U Po Kyin did not answer for a moment. He looked at Ma Kin, and his vast yellow face, with its broad jaw and numberless teeth, was so softened that it was almost child-like. There might even have been tears in his tawny eyes. He said in a small, almost awed voice, as though the greatness of what he was saying overcame him:

‘Do you not see, woman? Do you not see that if Veraswami is disgraced I shall be elected to the Club myself?’

The effect of it was crushing. There was not another word of argument on Ma Kin’s part. The magnificence of U Po Kyin’s project had struck her dumb.

And not without reason, for all the achievements of U Po Kyin’s life were as nothing beside this. It is a real triumph — it would be doubly so in Kyauktada — for an official of the lower ranks to worm his way into the European Club. The European Club, that remote, mysterious temple, that holy of holies far harder of entry than Nirvana! Po Kyin, the naked gutter-boy of Mandalay, the thieving clerk and obscure official, would enter that sacred place, call Europeans ‘old chap’, drink whisky and soda and knock white balls to and fro on the green table! Ma Kin, the village woman, who had first seen the light through the chinks of a bamboo hut thatched with palm-leaves, would sit on a high chair with her feet imprisoned in silk stockings and high-heeled shoes (yes, she would actually wear shoes in that place!) talking to English ladies in Hindustani about baby-linen! It was a prospect that would have dazzled anybody.

For a long time Ma Kin remained silent, her lips parted, thinking of the European Club and the splendours that it might contain. For the first time in her life she surveyed U Po Kyin’s intrigues without disapproval. Perhaps it was a feat greater even than the storming of the Club to have planted a grain of ambition in Ma Kin’s gentle heart.

Chapter 13

As Flory came through the gate of the hospital compound four ragged sweepers passed him, carrying some dead coolie, wrapped in sackcloth, to a foot-deep grave in the jungle. Flory crossed the brick-like earth of the yard between the hospital sheds. All down the wide verandas, on sheetless charpoys, rows of grey-faced men lay silent and moveless. Some filthy-looking curs, which were said to devour amputated limbs, dozed or snapped at their fleas among the piles of the buildings. The whole place wore a sluttish and decaying air. Dr Veraswami struggled hard to keep it clean, but there was no coping with the dust and the bad water-supply, and the inertia of sweepers and half-trained Assistant Surgeons.

Flory was told that the doctor was in the out-patients' department. It was a plaster-walled room furnished only with a table and two chairs, and a dusty portrait of Queen Victoria, much awry. A procession of Burmans, peasants with gnarled muscles beneath their faded rags, were filing into the room and queueing up at the table. The doctor was in shirt-sleeves and sweating profusely. He sprang to his feet with an exclamation of pleasure, and in his usual fussy haste thrust Flory into the vacant chair and produced a tin of cigarettes from the drawer of the table.

'What a delightful visit, Mr Flory! Please to make yourself comfortable — that iss, if one can possibly be comfortable in such a place ass this, ha, ha! Afterwards, at my house, we will talk with beer and amenities. Kindly excuse me while I attend to the populace.'

Flory sat down, and the hot sweat immediately burst out and drenched his shirt. The heat of the room was stifling. The peasants steamed garlic from all their pores. As each man came to the table the doctor would bounce from his chair, prod the patient in the back, lay a black ear to his chest, fire off several questions in villainous Burmese, then bounce back to the table and scribble a prescription. The patients took the prescriptions across the yard to the Compounder, who gave them bottles filled with water and various vegetable dyes. The Compounder supported himself largely by the sale of drugs, for the Government paid him only twenty-five rupees a

month. However, the doctor knew nothing of this.

On most mornings the doctor had not time to attend to the out-patients himself, and left them to one of the Assistant Surgeons. The Assistant Surgeon's methods of diagnosis were brief. He would simply ask each patient, 'Where is your pain? Head, back or belly?' and at the reply hand out a prescription from one of three piles that he had prepared beforehand. The patients much preferred this method to the doctor's. The doctor had a way of asking them whether they had suffered from venereal diseases — an ungentlemanly, pointless question — and sometimes he horrified them still more by suggesting operations. 'Belly-cutting' was their phrase for it. The majority of them would have died a dozen times over rather than submit to 'belly-cutting'.

As the last patient disappeared the doctor sank into his chair, fanning his face with the prescription-pad.

'Ach, this heat! Some mornings I think that never will I get the smell of garlic out of my nose! It iss amazing to me how their very blood becomes impregnated with it. Are you not suffocated, Mr Flory? You English have the sense of smell almost too highly developed. What torments you must all suffer in our filthy East!'

'Abandon your noses, all ye who enter here, what? They might write that up over the Suez Canal. You seem busy this morning?'

'Ass ever. Ah but, my friend, how discouraging iss the work of a doctor in this country! These villagers — dirty, ignorant savages! Even to get them to come to hospital iss all we can do, and they will die of gangrene or carry a tumour ass large ass a melon for ten years rather than face the knife. And such medicines ass their own so-called doctors give to them! Herbs gathered under the new moon, tigers' whiskers, rhinoceros horn, urine, menstrual blood! How men can drink such compounds iss disgusting.'

'Rather picturesque, all the same. You ought to compile a Burmese pharmacopoeia, doctor. It would be almost as good as Culpeper.'

'Barbarous cattle, barbarous cattle,' said the doctor, beginning to struggle into his white coat. 'Shall we go back to my house? There iss beer and I trust a few fragments of ice left. I have an operation at ten, strangulated hernia, very urgent. Till then I am free.'

‘Yes. As a matter of fact there’s something I rather wanted to talk to you about.’

They recrossed the yard and climbed the steps of the doctor’s veranda. The doctor, having felt in the ice-chest and found that the ice was all melted to tepid water, opened a bottle of beer and called fussily to the servants to set some more bottles swinging in a cradle of wet straw. Flory was standing looking over the veranda rail, with his hat still on. The fact was that he had come here to utter an apology. He had been avoiding the doctor for nearly a fortnight — since the day, in fact, when he had set his name to the insulting notice at the Club. But the apology had got to be uttered. U Po Kyin was a very good judge of men, but he had erred in supposing that two anonymous letters were enough to scare Flory permanently away from his friend.

‘Look here, doctor, you know what I wanted to say?’

‘I? No.’

‘Yes, you do. It’s about that beastly trick I played on you the other week. When Ellis put that notice on the Club board and I signed my name to it. You must have heard about it. I want to try and explain— ‘

‘No, no, my friend, no, no!’ The doctor was so distressed that he sprang across the veranda and seized Flory by the arm. ‘You shall NOT explain! Please never mention it! I understand perfectly — but most perfectly.’

‘No, you don’t understand. You couldn’t. You don’t realize just what KIND of pressure is put on one to make one do things like that. There was nothing to make me sign the notice. Nothing could have happened if I’d refused. There’s no law telling us to be beastly to Orientals — quite the contrary. But — it’s just that one daren’t be loyal to an Oriental when it means going against the others. It doesn’t DO. If I’d stuck out against signing the notice I’d have been in disgrace at the Club for a week or two. So I funked it, as usual.’

‘Please, Mr Flory, please! Possitively you will make me uncomfortable if you continue. Ass though I could not make all allowances for your position!’

‘Our motto, you know is, “In India, do as the English do”.’

‘Of course, of course. And a most noble motto. “Hanging

together", ass you call it. It iss the secret of your superiority to we Orientals.'

'Well, it's never much use saying one's sorry. But what I did come here to say was that it shan't happen again. In fact— '

'Now, now, Mr Flory, you will oblige me by saying no more upon this subject. It iss all over and forgotten. Please to drink up your beer before it becomes ass hot ass tea. Also, I have a thing to tell you. You have not asked for my news yet.'

'Ah, your news. What is your news, by the way? How's everything been going all this time? How's Ma Britannia? Still moribund?'

'Aha, very low, very low! But not so low ass I. I am in deep waters, my friend.'

'What? U Po Kyin again? Is he still libelling you?'

'If he iss libelling me! This time it iss — well, it iss something diabolical. My friend, you have heard of this rebellion that is supposed to be on the point of breaking out in the district?'

'I've heard a lot of talk. Westfield's been out bent on slaughter, but I hear he can't find any rebels. Only the usual village Hampdens who won't pay their taxes.'

'Ah yes. Wretched fools! Do you know how much iss the tax that most of them have refused to pay? Five rupees! They will get tired of it and pay up presently. We have this trouble every year. But ass for the rebellion — the SO-CALLED rebellion, Mr Flory — I wish you to know that there iss more in it than meets the eye.'

'Oh? What?'

To Flory's surprise the doctor made such a violent gesture of anger that he spilled most of his beer. He put his glass down on the veranda rail and burst out:

'It iss U Po Kyin again! That unutterable scoundrel! That crocodile deprived of natural feeling! That — that— '

'Go on. "That obscene trunk of humors, that swol'n parcel of dropsies, that bolting-hutch of beastliness" — go on. What's he been up to now?'

'A villainy unparalleled' — and here the doctor outlined the plot for a sham rebellion, very much as U Po Kyin had explained it to Ma Kin. The only detail not known to him was U Po Kyin's intention of

getting himself elected to the European Club. The doctor's face could not accurately be said to flush, but it grew several shades blacker in his anger. Flory was so astonished that he remained standing up.

'The cunning old devil! Who'd have thought he had it in him? But how did you manage to find all this out?'

'Ah, I have a few friends left. But now do you see, my friend, what ruin he iss preparing for me? Already he hass calumniated me right and left. When this absurd rebellion breaks out, he will do everything in his power to connect my name with it. And I tell you that the slightest suspicion of my loyalty could be ruin for me, ruin! If it were ever breathed that I were even a sympathizer with this rebellion, there iss an end of me.'

'But, damn it, this is ridiculous! Surely you can defend yourself somehow?'

'How can I defend myself when I can prove nothing? I know that all this iss true, but what use iss that? If I demand a public inquiry, for every witness I produce U Po Kyin would produce fifty. You do not realize the influence of that man in the district. No one dare speak against him.'

'But why need you prove anything? Why not go to old Macgregor and tell him about it? He's a very fair-minded old chap in his way. He'd hear you out.'

'Useless, useless. You have not the mind of an intriguer, Mr Flory. Qui s'excuse, s'accuse, iss it not? It does not pay to cry that there iss a conspiracy against one.'

'Well, what are you going to do, then?'

'There iss nothing I can do. Simply I must wait and hope that my prestige will carry me through. In affairs like this, where a native official's reputation iss at stake, there iss no question of proof, of evidence. All depends upon one's standing with the Europeans. If my standing iss good, they will not believe it of me; if bad, they will believe it. Prestige iss all.'

They were silent for a moment. Flory understood well enough that 'prestige iss all'. He was used to these nebulous conflicts, in which suspicion counts for more than proof, and reputation for more than a thousand witnesses. A thought came into his head, an uncomfortable, chilling thought which would never have occurred to him three

weeks earlier. It was one of those moments when one sees quite clearly what is one's duty, and, with all the will in the world to shirk it, feels certain that one must carry it out. He said:

'Suppose, for instance, you were elected to the Club? Would that do your prestige any good?'

'If I were elected to the Club! Ah, indeed, yes! The Club! It iss a fortress impregnable. Once there, and no one would listen to these tales about me any more than if it were about you, or Mr Macgregor, or any other European gentleman. But what hope have I that they will elect me after their minds have been poisoned against me?'

'Well now, look here, doctor, I tell you what. I'll propose your name at the next general meeting. I know the question's got to come up then, and if someone comes forward with the name of a candidate, I dare say no one except Ellis will blackball him. And in the meantime— '

'Ah, my friend, my dear friend!' The doctor's emotion caused him almost to choke. He seized Flory by the hand. 'Ah, my friend, that iss noble! Truly it iss noble! But it iss too much. I fear that you will be in trouble with your European friends again. Mr Ellis, for example — would he tolerate it that you propose my name?'

'Oh, bother Ellis. But you must understand that I can't promise to get you elected. It depends on what Macgregor says and what mood the others are in. It may all come to nothing.'

The doctor was still holding Flory's hand between his own, which were plump and damp. The tears had actually started into his eyes, and these, magnified by his spectacles, beamed upon Flory like the liquid eyes of a dog.

'Ah, my friend! If I should but be elected! What an end to all my troubles! But, my friend, ass I said before, do not be too rash in this matter. Beware of U Po Kyin! By now he will have numbered you among hiss enemies. And even for you hiss enmity can be a danger.'

'Oh, good Lord, he can't touch me. He's done nothing so far — only a few silly anonymous letters.'

'I would not be too sure. He hass subtle ways to strike. And for sure he will raise heaven and earth to keep me from being elected to the Club. If you have a weak spot, guard it, my friend. He will find it out. He strikes always at the weakest spot.'

‘Like the crocodile,’ Flory suggested.

‘Like the crocodile,’ agreed the doctor gravely. ‘Ah but, my friend, how gratifying to me if I should become a member of your European Club! What an honour, to be the associate of European gentlemen! But there iss one other matter, Mr Flory, that I did not care to mention before. It iss — I hope this iss clearly understood — that I have no intention of USING the Club in any way. Membership is all I desire. Even if I were elected, I should not, of course, ever presume to COME to the Club.’

‘Not come to the Club?’

‘No, no! Heaven forbid that I should force my society upon the European gentlemen! Simply I should pay my subscriptions. That, for me, iss a privilege high enough. You understand that, I trust?’

‘Perfectly, doctor, perfectly.’

Flory could not help laughing as he walked up the hill. He was definitely committed now to proposing the doctor’s election. And there would be such a row when the others heard of it — oh, such a devil of a row! But the astonishing thing was that it only made him laugh. The prospect that would have appalled him a month back now almost exhilarated him.

Why? And why had he given his promise at all? It was a small thing, a small risk to take — nothing heroic about it — and yet it was unlike him. Why, after all these years — the circumspect, pukka sahib-like years — break all the rules so suddenly?

He knew why. It was because Elizabeth, by coming into his life, had so changed it and renewed it that all the dirty, miserable years might never have passed. Her presence had changed the whole orbit of his mind. She had brought back to him the air of England — dear England, where thought is free and one is not condemned forever to dance the danse du pukka sahib for the edification of the lower races. Where is the life that late I led? he thought. Just by existing she had made it possible for him, she had even made it natural to him, to act decently.

Where is the life that late I led? he thought again as he came through the garden gate. He was happy, happy. For he had perceived that the pious ones are right when they say that there is salvation and life can begin anew. He came up the path, and it seemed to him that

his house, his flowers, his servants, all the life that so short a time ago had been drenched in ennui and homesickness, were somehow made new, significant, beautiful inexhaustibly. What fun it could all be, if only you had someone to share it with you! How you could love this country, if only you were not alone! Nero was out on the path, braving the sun for some grains of paddy that the mali had dropped, taking food to his goats. Flo made a dash at him, panting, and Nero sprang into the air with a flurry and lighted on Flory's shoulder. Flory walked into the house with the little red cock in his arms, stroking his silky ruff and the smooth, diamond-shaped feathers of his back.

He had not set foot on the veranda before he knew that Ma Hla May was in the house. It did not need Ko S'la to come hurrying from within with a face of evil tidings. Flory had smelled her scent of sandalwood, garlic, coco-nut oil and the jasmine in her hair. He dropped Nero over the veranda rail.

'THE WOMAN has come back,' said Ko S'la.

Flory had turned very pale. When he turned pale the birthmark made him hideously ugly. A pang like a blade of ice had gone through his entrails. Ma Hla May had appeared in the doorway of the bedroom. She stood with her face downcast, looking at him from beneath lowered brows.

'Thakin,' she said in a low voice, half sullen, half urgent.

'Go away!' said Flory angrily to Ko S'la, venting his fear and anger upon him.

'Thakin,' she said, 'come into the bedroom here. I have a thing to say to you.'

He followed her into the bedroom. In a week — it was only a week — her appearance had degenerated extraordinarily. Her hair looked greasy. All her lockets were gone, and she was wearing a Manchester longyi of flowered cotton, costing two rupees eight annas. She had coated her face so thick with powder that it was like a clown's mask, and at the roots of her hair, where the powder ended, there was a ribbon of natural-coloured brown skin. She looked a drab. Flory would not face her, but stood looking sullenly through the open doorway to the veranda.

'What do you mean by coming back like this? Why did you not

go home to your village?'

'I am staying in Kyauktada, at my cousin's house. How can I go back to my village after what has happened?'

'And what do you mean by sending men to demand money from me? How can you want more money already, when I gave you a hundred rupees only a week ago?'

'How can I go back?' she repeated, ignoring what he had said. Her voice rose so sharply that he turned round. She was standing very upright, sullen, with her black brows drawn together and her lips pouted.

'Why cannot you go back?'

'After that! After what you have done to me!'

Suddenly she burst into a furious tirade. Her voice had risen to the hysterical graceless scream of the bazaar women when they quarrel.

'How can I go back, to be jeered at and pointed at by those low, stupid peasants whom I despise? I who have been a bo-kadaw, a white man's wife, to go home to my father's house, and shake the paddy basket with old hags and women who are too ugly to find husbands! Ah, what shame, what shame! Two years I was your wife, you loved me and cared for me, and then without warning, without reason, you drove me from your door like a dog. And I must go back to my village, with no money, with all my jewels and silk longyis gone, and the people will point and say, "There is Ma Hla May who thought herself cleverer than the rest of us. And behold! her white man has treated her as they always do." I am ruined, ruined! What man will marry me after I have lived two years in your house? You have taken my youth from me. Ah, what shame, what shame!'

He could not look at her; he stood helpless, pale, hang-dog. Every word she said was justified, and how tell her that he could do no other than he had done? How tell her that it would have been an outrage, a sin, to continue as her lover? He almost cringed from her, and the birthmark stood on his yellow face like a splash of ink. He said flatly, turning instinctively to money — for money had never failed with Ma Hla May:

'I will give you money. You shall have the fifty rupees you asked me for — more later. I have no more till next month.'

This was true. The hundred rupees he had given her, and what he

had spent on clothes, had taken most of his ready money. To his dismay she burst into a loud wail. Her white mask puckered up and the tears sprang quickly out and coursed down her cheeks. Before he could stop her she had fallen on her knees in front of him, and she was bowing, touching the floor with her forehead in the 'full' shiko of utter abasement.

'Get up, get up!' he exclaimed. The shameful, abject shiko, neck bent, body doubled up as though inviting a blow, always horrified him. 'I can't bear that. Get up this instant.'

She wailed again, and made an attempt to clasp his ankles. He stepped backwards hurriedly.

'Get up, now, and stop that dreadful noise. I don't know what you are crying about.'

She did not get up, but only rose to her knees and wailed at him anew. 'Why do you offer me money? Do you think it is only for money that I have come back? Do you think that when you have driven me from your door like a dog it is only because of money that I care?'

'Get up,' he repeated. He had moved several paces away, lest she should seize him. 'What do you want if it is not money?'

'Why do you hate me?' she wailed. 'What harm have I done you? I stole your cigarette-case, but you were not angry at that. You are going to marry this white woman, I know it, everyone knows it. But what does it matter, why must you turn me away? Why do you hate me?'

'I don't hate you. I can't explain. Get up, please get up.'

She was weeping quite shamelessly now. After all, she was hardly more than a child. She looked at him through her tears, anxiously, studying him for a sign of mercy. Then, a dreadful thing, she stretched herself at full length, flat on her face.

'Get up, get up!' he cried out in English. 'I can't bear that — it's too abominable!'

She did not get up, but crept, wormlike, right across the floor to his feet. Her body made a broad ribbon on the dusty floor. She lay prostrate in front of him, face hidden, arms extended, as though before a god's altar.

'Master, master,' she whimpered, 'will you not forgive me? This

once, only this once! Take Ma Hla May back. I will be your slave, lower than your slave. Anything sooner than turn me away.'

She had wound her arms round his ankles, actually was kissing his toes. He stood looking down at her with his hands in his pockets, helpless. Flo came ambling into the room, walked to where Ma Hla May lay and sniffed at her longyi. She wagged her tail vaguely, recognizing the smell. Flory could not endure it. He bent down and took Ma Hla May by the shoulders, lifting her to her knees.

'Stand up, now,' he said. 'It hurts me to see you like this. I will do what I can for you. What is the use of crying?'

Instantly she cried out in renewed hope: 'Then you will take me back? Oh, master, take Ma Hla May back! No one need ever know. I will stay here when that white woman comes, she will think I am one of the servants' wives. Will you not take me back?'

'I cannot. It's impossible,' he said, turning away again.

She heard finality in his tone, and uttered a harsh, ugly cry. She bent forward again in a shiko, beating her forehead against the floor. It was dreadful. And what was more dreadful than all, what hurt in his breast, was the utter gracelessness, the lowness of the emotion beneath those entreaties. For in all this there was not a spark of love for him. If she wept and grovelled it was only for the position she had once had as his mistress, the idle life, the rich clothes and dominion over servants. There was something pitiful beyond words in that. Had she loved him he could have driven her from his door with far less compunction. No sorrows are so bitter as those that are without a trace of nobility. He bent down and picked her up in his arms.

'Listen, Ma Hla May,' he said; 'I do not hate you, you have done me no evil. It is I who have wronged you. But there is no help for it now. You must go home, and later I will send you money. If you like you shall start a shop in the bazaar. You are young. This will not matter to you when you have money and can find yourself a husband.'

'I am ruined!' she wailed again. 'I shall kill myself. I shall jump off the jetty into the river. How can I live after this disgrace?'

He was holding her in his arms, almost caressing her. She was clinging close to him, her face hidden against his shirt, her body

shaking with sobs. The scent of sandalwood floated into his nostrils. Perhaps even now she thought that with her arms around him and her body against his she could renew her power over him. He disentangled himself gently, and then, seeing that she did not fall on her knees again, stood apart from her.

'That is enough. You must go now. And look, I will give you the fifty rupees I promised you.'

He dragged his tin uniform case from under the bed and took out five ten-rupee notes. She stowed them silently in the bosom of her ingyi. Her tears had ceased flowing quite suddenly. Without speaking she went into the bathroom for a moment, and came out with her face washed to its natural brown, and her hair and dress rearranged. She looked sullen, but not hysterical any longer.

'For the last time, thakin: you will not take me back? That is your last word?'

'Yes. I cannot help it.'

'Then I am going, thakin.'

'Very well. God go with you.'

Leaning against the wooden pillar of the veranda, he watched her walk down the path in the strong sunlight. She walked very upright, with bitter offence in the carriage of her back and head. It was true what she had said, he had robbed her of her youth. His knees were trembling uncontrollably. Ko S'la came behind him, silent-footed. He gave a little deprecating cough to attract Flory's attention.

'What's the matter now?'

'The holy one's breakfast is getting cold.'

'I don't want any breakfast. Get me something to drink — gin.'

Where is the life that late I led?

Chapter 14

Like long curved needles threading through embroidery, the two canoes that carried Flory and Elizabeth threaded their way up the creek that led inland from the eastern bank of the Irrawaddy. It was the day of the shooting trip — a short afternoon trip, for they could not stay a night in the jungle together. They were to shoot for a couple of hours in the comparative cool of the evening, and be back at Kyauktada in time for dinner.

The canoes, each hollowed out of a single tree-trunk, glided swiftly, hardly rippling the dark brown water. Water hyacinth with profuse spongy foliage and blue flowers had choked the stream so that the channel was only a winding ribbon four feet wide. The light filtered, greenish, through interlacing boughs. Sometimes one could hear parrots scream overhead, but no wild creatures showed themselves, except once a snake that swam hurriedly away and disappeared among the water hyacinth.

'How long before we get to the village?' Elizabeth called back to Flory. He was in a larger canoe behind, together with Flo and Ko S'la, paddled by a wrinkly old woman dressed in rags.

'How far, grandmama?' Flory asked the canoe-woman.

The old woman took her cigar out of her mouth and rested her paddle on her knees to think. 'The distance a man can shout,' she said after reflection.

'About half a mile,' Flory translated.

They had come two miles. Elizabeth's back was aching. The canoes were liable to upset at a careless moment, and you had to sit bolt upright on the narrow backless seat, keeping your feet as well as possible out of the bilge, with dead prawns in it, that sagged to and fro at the bottom. The Burman who paddled Elizabeth was sixty years old, half naked, leaf-brown, with a body as perfect as that of a young man. His face was battered, gentle and humorous. His black cloud of hair, finer than that of most Burmans, was knotted loosely over one ear, with a wisp or two tumbling across his cheek. Elizabeth was nursing her uncle's gun across her knees. Flory had offered to take it, but she had refused; in reality, the feel of it delighted her so

much that she could not bring herself to give it up. She had never had a gun in her hand until today. She was wearing a rough skirt with brogue shoes and a silk shirt like a man's, and she knew that with her Terai hat they looked well on her. She was very happy, in spite of her aching back and the hot sweat that tickled her face, and the large, speckled mosquitoes that hummed round her ankles.

The stream narrowed and the beds of water hyacinth gave place to steep banks of glistening mud, like chocolate. Rickety thatched huts leaned far out over the stream, their piles driven into its bed. A naked boy was standing between two of the huts, flying a green beetle on a piece of thread like a kite. He yelled at the sight of the Europeans, whereat more children appeared from nowhere. The old Burman guided the canoe to a jetty made of a single palm-trunk laid in the mud — it was covered with barnacles and so gave foothold — and sprang out and helped Elizabeth ashore. The others followed with the bags and cartridges, and Flo, as she always did on these occasions, fell into the mud and sank as deep as the shoulder. A skinny old gentleman wearing a magenta paso, with a mole on his cheek from which four yard-long grey hairs sprouted, came forward shikoing and cuffing the heads of the children who had gathered round the jetty.

'The village headman,' Flory said.

The old man led the way to his house, walking ahead with an extraordinary crouching gait, like a letter L upside down — the result of rheumatism combined with the constant shikoing needed in a minor Government official. A mob of children marched rapidly after the Europeans, and more and more dogs, all yapping and causing Flo to shrink against Flory's heels. In the doorway of every hut clusters of moonlike, rustic faces gaped at the 'Ingaleikma'. The village was darkish under the shade of broad leaves. In the rains the creek would flood, turning the lower parts of the village into a squalid wooden Venice where the villagers stepped from their front doors into their canoes.

The headman's house was a little bigger than the others, and it had a corrugated iron roof, which, in spite of the intolerable din it made during the rains, was the pride of the headman's life. He had foregone the building of a pagoda, and appreciably lessened his chances of Nirvana, to pay for it. He hastened up the steps and gently

kicked in the ribs a youth who was lying asleep on the veranda. Then he turned and shikoed again to the Europeans, asking them to come inside.

'Shall we go in?' Flory said. 'I expect we shall have to wait half an hour.'

'Couldn't you tell him to bring some chairs out on the veranda?' Elizabeth said. After her experience in Li Yeik's house she had privately decided that she would never go inside a native house again, if she could help it.

There was a fuss inside the house, and the headman, the youth and some women dragged forth two chairs decorated in an extraordinary manner with red hibiscus flowers, and also some begonias growing in kerosene tins. It was evident that a sort of double throne had been prepared within for the Europeans. When Elizabeth had sat down the headman reappeared with a teapot, a bunch of very long, bright green bananas, and six coal-black cheroots. But when he had poured her out a cup of tea Elizabeth shook her head, for the tea looked, if possible, worse even than Li Yeik's.

The headman looked abashed and rubbed his nose. He turned to Flory and asked him whether the young thakin-ma would like some milk in her tea. He had heard that Europeans drank milk in their tea. The villages should, if it were desired, catch a cow and milk it. However, Elizabeth still refused the tea; but she was thirsty, and she asked Flory to send for one of the bottles of soda-water that Ko S'la had brought in his bag. Seeing this, the headman retired, feeling guiltily that his preparations had been insufficient, and left the veranda to the Europeans.

Elizabeth was still nursing her gun on her knees, while Flory leaned against the veranda rail pretending to smoke one of the headman's cheroots. Elizabeth was pining for the shooting to begin. She plied Flory with innumerable questions.

'How soon can we start out? Do you think we've got enough cartridges? How many beaters shall we take? Oh, I do so hope we have some luck! You do think we'll get something, don't you?'

'Nothing wonderful, probably. We're bound to get a few pigeons, and perhaps jungle fowl. They're out of season, but it doesn't matter shooting the cocks. They say there's a leopard round here, that killed

a bullock almost in the village last week.'

'Oh, a leopard! How lovely if we could shoot it!'

'It's very unlikely, I'm afraid. The only rule with this shooting in Burma is to hope for nothing. It's invariably disappointing. The jungles teem with game, but as often as not you don't even get a chance to fire your gun.'

'Why is that?'

'The jungle is so thick. An animal may be five yards away and quite invisible, and half the time they manage to dodge back past the beaters. Even when you see them it's only for a flash of a second. And again, there's water everywhere, so that no animal is tied down to one particular spot. A tiger, for instance, will roam hundreds of miles if it suits him. And with all the game there is, they need never come back to a kill if there's anything suspicious about it. Night after night, when I was a boy, I've sat up over horrible stinking dead cows, waiting for tigers that never came.'

Elizabeth wriggled her shoulder-blades against the chair. It was a movement that she made sometimes when she was deeply pleased. She loved Flory, really loved him, when he talked like this. The most trivial scrap of information about shooting thrilled her. If only he would always talk about shooting, instead of about books and Art and that mucky poetry! In a sudden burst of admiration she decided that Flory was really quite a handsome man, in his way. He looked so splendidly manly, with his pagri-cloth shirt open at the throat, and his shorts and puttees and shooting boots! And his face, lined, sunburned, like a soldier's face. He was standing with his birthmarked cheek away from her. She pressed him to go on talking.

'DO tell me some more about tiger-shooting. It's so awfully interesting!'

He described the shooting, years ago, of a mangy old man-eater who had killed one of his coolies. The wait in the mosquito-ridden machan; the tiger's eyes approaching through the dark jungle, like great green lanterns; the panting, slobbering noise as he devoured the coolie's body, tied to a stake below. Flory told it all perfunctorily enough — did not the proverbial Anglo Indian bore always talk about tiger-shooting? — but Elizabeth wriggled her shoulders delightedly once more. He did not realize how such talk as this

reassured her and made up for all the times when he had bored her and disquieted her. Six shock-headed youths came down the path, carrying dahs over their shoulders, and headed by a stringy but active old man with grey hair. They halted in front of the headman's house, and one of them uttered a hoarse whoop, whereat the headman appeared and explained that these were the beaters. They were ready to start now, if the young thakin-ma did not find it too hot.

They set out. The side of the village away from the creek was protected by a hedge of cactus six feet high and twelve thick. One went up a narrow lane of cactus, then along a rutted, dusty bullock-cart track, with bamboos as tall as flagstaffs growing densely on either side. The beaters marched rapidly ahead in single file, each with his broad dah laid along his forearm. The old hunter was marching just in front of Elizabeth. His longyi was hitched up like a loin-cloth, and his meagre thighs were tattooed with dark blue patterns, so intricate that he might have been wearing drawers of blue lace. A bamboo the thickness of a man's wrist had fallen and hung across the path. The leading beater severed it with an upward flick of his dah; the prisoned water gushed out of it with a diamond-flash. After half a mile they reached the open fields, and everyone was sweating, for they had walked fast and the sun was savage.

'That's where we're going to shoot, over there,' Flory said.

He pointed across the stubble, a wide dust-coloured plain, cut up into patches of an acre or two by mud boundaries. It was horribly flat, and lifeless save for the snowy egrets. At the far edge a jungle of great trees rose abruptly, like a dark green cliff. The beaters had gone across to a small tree like a hawthorn twenty yards away. One of them was on his knees, shikoing to the tree and gabbling, while the old hunter poured a bottle of some cloudy liquid on to the ground. The others stood looking on with serious, bored faces, like men in church.

'What ARE those men doing?' Elizabeth said.

'Only sacrificing to the local gods. Nats, they call them — a kind of dryad. They're praying to him to bring us good luck.'

The hunter came back and in a cracked voice explained that they were to beat a small patch of scrub over to the right before proceeding to the main jungle. Apparently the Nat had counselled

this. The hunter directed Flory and Elizabeth where to stand, pointing with his dah. The six beaters, plunged into the scrub; they would make a detour and beat back towards the paddy-fields. There were some bushes of the wild rose thirty yards from the jungle's edge, and Flory and Elizabeth took cover behind one of these, while Ko S'la squatted down behind another bush a little distance away, holding Flo's collar and stroking her to keep her quiet. Flory always sent Ko S'la to a distance when he was shooting, for he had an irritating trick of clicking his tongue if a shot was missed. Presently there was a far-off echoing sound — a sound of tapping and strange hollow cries; the beat had started. Elizabeth at once began trembling so uncontrollably that she could not keep her gun-barrel still. A wonderful bird, a little bigger than a thrush, with grey wings and body of blazing scarlet, broke from the trees and came towards them with a dipping flight. The tapping and the cries came nearer. One of the bushes at the jungle's edge waved violently — some large animal was emerging. Elizabeth raised her gun and tried to steady it. But it was only a naked yellow beater, dah in hand. He saw that he had emerged and shouted to the others to join him.

Elizabeth lowered her gun. 'What's happened?'

'Nothing. The beat's over.'

'So there was nothing there!' she cried in bitter disappointment.

'Never mind, one never gets anything the first beat. We'll have better luck next time.'

They crossed the lumpy stubble, climbing over the mud boundaries that divided the fields, and took up their position opposite the high green wall of the jungle. Elizabeth had already learned how to load her gun. This time the beat had hardly started when Ko S'la whistled sharply.

'Look out!' Flory cried. 'Quick, here they come!'

A flight of green pigeons were dashing towards them at incredible speed, forty yards up. They were like a handful of catapulted stones whirling through the sky. Elizabeth was helpless with excitement. For a moment she could not move, then she flung her barrel into the air, somewhere in the direction of the birds, and tugged violently at the trigger. Nothing happened — she was pulling at the trigger-guard. Just as the birds passed overhead she found the triggers and

pulled both of them simultaneously. There was a deafening roar and she was thrown backwards a pace with her collar-bone almost broken. She had fired thirty yards behind the birds. At the same moment she saw Flory turn and level his gun. Two of the pigeons, suddenly checked in their flight, swirled over and dropped to the ground like arrows. Ko S'la yelled, and he and Flo raced after them.

'Look out!' said Flory, 'here's an imperial pigeon. Let's have him!'

A large heavy bird, with flight much slower than the others, was flapping overhead. Elizabeth did not care to fire after her previous failure. She watched Flory thrust a cartridge into the breech and raise his gun, and the white plume of smoke leapt up from the muzzle. The bird planed heavily down, his wing broken. Flo and Ko S'la came running excitedly up, Flo with the big imperial pigeon in her mouth, and Ko S'la grinning and producing two green pigeons from his Kachin bag.

Flory took one of the little green corpses to show to Elizabeth. 'Look at it. Aren't they lovely things? The most beautiful bird in Asia.'

Elizabeth touched its smooth feathers with her finger-tip. It filled her with bitter envy, because she had not shot it. And yet it was curious, but she felt almost an adoration for Flory now that she had seen how he could shoot.

'Just look at its breast-feathers; like a jewel. It's murder to shoot them. The Burmese say that when you kill one of these birds they vomit, meaning to say, "Look, here is all I possess, and I've taken nothing of yours. Why do you kill me?" I've never seen one do it, I must admit.'

'Are they good to eat?'

'Very. Even so, I always feel it's a shame to kill them.'

'I wish I could do it like you do!' she said enviously.

'It's only a knack, you'll soon pick it up. You know how to hold your gun, and that's more than most people do when they start.'

However, at the next two beats, Elizabeth could hit nothing. She had learned not to fire both barrels at once, but she was too paralysed with excitement ever to take aim. Flory shot several more pigeons, and a small bronze-wing dove with back as green as verdigris. The

jungle fowl were too cunning to show themselves, though one could hear them cluck-clucking all round, and once or twice the sharp trumpet-call of a cock. They were getting deeper into the jungle now. The light was greyish, with dazzling patches of sunlight. Whichever way one looked one's view was shut in by the multitudinous ranks of trees, and the tangled bushes and creepers that struggled round their bases like the sea round the piles of a pier. It was so dense, like a bramble bush extending mile after mile, that one's eyes were oppressed by it. Some of the creepers were huge, like serpents. Flory and Elizabeth struggled along narrow game-tracks, up slippery banks, thorns tearing at their clothes. Both their shirts were drenched with sweat. It was stifling hot, with a scent of crushed leaves. Sometimes for minutes together invisible cidadas would keep up a shrill, metallic pinging like the twanging of a steel guitar, and then, by stopping, make a silence that startled one.

As they were walking to the fifth beat they came to a great peepul tree in which, high up, one could hear imperial pigeons cooing. It was a sound like the far-off lowing of cows. One bird fluttered out and perched alone on the topmost bough, a small greyish shape.

'Try a sitting shot,' Flory said to Elizabeth. 'Get your sight on him and pull off without waiting. Don't shut your left eye.'

Elizabeth raised her gun, which had begun trembling as usual. The beaters halted in a group to watch, and some of them could not refrain from clicking their tongues; they thought it queer and rather shocking to see a woman handle a gun. With a violent effort of will Elizabeth kept her gun still for a second, and pulled the trigger. She did not hear the shot; one never does when it has gone home. The bird seemed to jump upwards from the bough, then down it came, tumbling over and over, and stuck in a fork ten yards up. One of the beaters laid down his dah and glanced appraisingly at the tree; then he walked to a great creeper, thick as a man's thigh and twisted like a stick of barley sugar, that hung far out from a bough. He ran up the creeper as easily as though it had been a ladder, walked upright along the broad bough, and brought the pigeon to the ground. He put it limp and warm into Elizabeth's hand.

She could hardly give it up, the feel of it so ravished her. She could have kissed it, hugged it to her breast. All the men, Flory and

Ko S'la and the beaters, smiled at one another to see her fondling the dead bird. Reluctantly, she gave it to Ko S'la to put in the bag. She was conscious of an extraordinary desire to fling her arms round Flory's neck and kiss him; and in some way it was the killing of the pigeon that made her feel this.

After the fifth beat the hunter explained to Flory that they must cross a clearing that was used for growing pineapples, and would beat another patch of jungle beyond. They came out into sunlight, dazzling after the jungle gloom. The clearing was an oblong of an acre or two hacked out of the jungle like a patch mown in long grass, with the pineapples, prickly cactus-like plants, growing in rows, almost smothered by weeds. A low hedge of thorns divided the field in the middle. They had nearly crossed the field when there was a sharp cock-a-doodle-doo from beyond the hedge.

'Oh, listen!' said Elizabeth, stopping. 'Was that a jungle cock?'

'Yes. They come out to feed about this time.'

'Couldn't we go and shoot him?'

'We'll have a try if you like. They're cunning beggars. Look, we'll stalk up the hedge until we get opposite where he is. We'll have to go without making a sound.'

He sent Ko S'la and the beaters on, and the two of them skirted the field and crept along the hedge. They had to bend double to keep themselves out of sight. Elizabeth was in front. The hot sweat trickled down her face, tickling her upper lip, and her heart was knocking violently. She felt Flory touch her heel from behind. Both of them stood upright and looked over the hedge together.

Ten yards away a little cock the size of a bantam, was pecking vigorously at the ground. He was beautiful, with his long silky neck-feathers, bunched comb and arching, laurel-green tail. There were six hens with him, smaller brown birds, with diamond-shaped feathers like snake-scales on their backs. All this Elizabeth and Flory saw in the space of a second, then with a squawk and a whirr the birds were up and flying like bullets for the jungle. Instantly, automatically as it seemed, Elizabeth raised her gun and fired. It was one of those shots where there is no aiming, no consciousness of the gun in one's hand, when one's mind seems to fly behind the charge and drive it to the mark. She knew the bird was doomed even before she pulled the

trigger. He tumbled, showered feathers thirty yards away. ‘Good shot, good shot!’ cried Flory. In their excitement both of them dropped their guns, broke through the thorn hedge and raced side by side to where the bird lay.

‘Good shot!’ Flory repeated, as excited as she. ‘By Jove, I’ve never seen anyone kill a flying bird their first day, never! You got your gun off like lightning. It’s marvellous!’

They were kneeling face to face with the dead bird between them. With a shock they discovered that their hands, his right and her left, were clasped tightly together. They had run to the place hand-in-hand without noticing it.

A sudden stillness came on them both, a sense of something momentous that must happen. Flory reached across and took her other hand. It came yieldingly, willingly. For a moment they knelt with their hands clasped together. The sun blazed upon them and the warmth breathed out of their bodies; they seemed to be floating upon clouds of heat and joy. He took her by the upper arms to draw her towards him.

Then suddenly he turned his head away and stood up, pulling Elizabeth to her feet. He let go of her arms. He had remembered his birthmark. He dared not do it. Not here, not in daylight! The snub it invited was too terrible. To cover the awkwardness of the moment he bent down and picked up the jungle cock.

‘It was splendid,’ he said. ‘You don’t need any teaching. You can shoot already. We’d better get on to the next beat.’

They had just crossed the hedge and picked up their guns when there was a series of shouts from the edge of the jungle. Two of the beaters were running towards them with enormous leaps, waving their arms wildly in the air.

‘What is it?’ Elizabeth said.

‘I don’t know. They’ve seen some animal or other. Something good, by the look of them.’

‘Oh, hurrah! Come on!’

They broke into a run and hurried across the field, breaking through the pineapples and the stiff prickly weeds. Ko S’la and five of the beaters were standing in a knot all talking at once, and the other two were beckoning excitedly to Flory and Elizabeth. As they

came up they saw in the middle of the group an old woman who was holding up her ragged longyi with one hand and gesticulating with a big cigar in the other. Elizabeth could hear some word that sounded like 'Char' repeated over and over again.

'What is it they're saying?' she said.

The beaters came crowding round Flory, all talking eagerly and pointing into the jungle. After a few questions he waved his hand to silence them and turned to Elizabeth:

'I say, here's a bit of luck! This old girl was coming through the jungle, and she says that at the sound of the shot you fired just now, she saw a leopard run across the path. These fellows know where he's likely to hide. If we're quick they may be able to surround him before he sneaks away, and drive him out. Shall we try it?'

'Oh, do let's! Oh, what awful fun! How lovely, how lovely if we could get that leopard!'

'You understand it's dangerous? We'll keep close together and it'll probably be all right, but it's never absolutely safe on foot. Are you ready for that?'

'Oh, of course, of course! I'm not frightened. Oh, do let's be quick and start!'

'One of you come with us, and show us the way,' he said to the beaters. 'Ko S'la, put Flo on the leash and go with the others. She'll never keep quiet with us. We'll have to hurry,' he added to Elizabeth.

Ko S'la and the beaters hurried off along the edge of the jungle. They would strike in and begin beating farther up. The other beater, the same youth who had climbed the tree after the pigeon, dived into the jungle, Flory and Elizabeth following. With short rapid steps, almost running, he led them through a labyrinth of game-tracks. The bushes trailed so low that sometimes one had almost to crawl, and creepers hung across the path like trip-wires. The ground was dusty and silent underfoot. At some landmark in the jungle the beater halted, pointed to the ground as a sign that this spot would do, and put his finger on his lips to enjoin silence. Flory took four SG cartridges from his pockets and took Elizabeth's gun to load it silently.

There was a faint rustling behind them, and they all started. A nearly naked youth with a pellet-bow, come goodness knows

whence, had parted the bushes. He looked at the beater, shook his head and pointed up the path. There was a dialogue of signs between the two youths, then the beater seemed to agree. Without speaking all four stole forty yards along the path, round a bend, and halted again. At the same moment a frightful pandemonium of yells, punctuated by barks from Flo, broke out a few hundred yards away.

Elizabeth felt the beater's hand on her shoulder, pushing her downwards. They all four squatted down under cover of a prickly bush, the Europeans in front, the Burmans behind. In the distance there was such a tumult of yells and the rattle of dahs against tree-trunks that one could hardly believe six men could make so much noise. The beaters were taking good care that the leopard should not turn back upon them. Elizabeth watched some large, pale yellow ants marching like soldiers over the thorns of the bush. One fell on to her hand and crawled up her forearm. She dared not move to brush it away. She was praying silently, 'Please God, let the leopard come! Oh please, God, let the leopard come!'

There was a sudden loud pattering on the leaves. Elizabeth raised her gun, but Flory shook his head sharply and pushed the barrel down again. A jungle fowl scuttled across the path with long noisy strides.

The yells of the beaters seemed hardly to come any closer, and this end of the jungle the silence was like a pall. The ant on Elizabeth's arm bit her painfully and dropped to the ground. A dreadful despair had begun to form in her heart; the leopard was not coming, he had slipped away somewhere, they had lost him. She almost wished they had never heard of the leopard, the disappointment was so agonizing. Then she felt the beater pinch her elbow. He was craning his face forward, his smooth, dull yellow cheek only a few inches from her own; she could smell the coco-nut oil in his hair. His coarse lips were puckered as in a whistle; he had heard something. Then Flory and Elizabeth heard it too, the faintest whisper, as though some creature of air were gliding through the jungle, just brushing the ground with its foot. At the same moment the leopard's head and shoulders emerged from the undergrowth, fifteen yards down the path.

He stopped with his forepaws on the path. They could see his low,

flat-eared head, his bare eye-tooth and his thick, terrible forearm. In the shadow he did not look yellow but grey. He was listening intently. Elizabeth saw Flory spring to his feet, raise his gun and pull the trigger instantly. The shot roared, and almost simultaneously there was a heavy crash as the brute dropped flat in the weeds. 'Look out!' Flory cried, 'he's not done for!' He fired again, and there was a fresh thump as the shot went home. The leopard gasped. Flory threw open his gun and felt in his pocket for a cartridge, then flung all his cartridges on to the path and fell on his knees, searching rapidly among them.

'Damn and blast it!' he cried. 'There isn't a single SG among them. Where in hell did I put them?'

The leopard had disappeared as he fell. He was thrashing about in the undergrowth like a great, wounded snake, and crying out with a snarling, sobbing noise, savage and pitiful. The noise seemed to be coming nearer. Every cartridge Flory turned up had 6 or 8 marked on the end. The rest of the large-shot cartridges had, in fact, been left with Ko S'la. The crashing and snarling were now hardly five yards away, but they could see nothing, the jungle was so thick.

The two Burmans were crying out 'Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!' The sound of 'Shoot! Shoot!' got farther away — they were skipping for the nearest climbable trees. There was a crash in the undergrowth so close that it shook the bush by which Elizabeth was standing.

'By God, he's almost on us!' Flory said. 'We must turn him somehow. Let fly at the sound.'

Elizabeth raised her gun. Her knees were knocking like castanets, but her hand was as steady as stone. She fired rapidly, once, twice. The crashing noise receded. The leopard was crawling away, crippled but swift, and still invisible.

'Well done! You've scared him,' Flory said.

'But he's getting away! He's getting away!' Elizabeth cried, dancing about in agitation. She made to follow him. Flory jumped to his feet and pulled her back.

'No fear! You stay here. Wait!'

He slipped two of the small-shot cartridges into his gun and ran after the sound of the leopard. For a moment Elizabeth could not see either beast or man, then they reappeared in a bare patch thirty yards

away. The leopard was writhing along on his belly, sobbing as he went. Flory levelled his gun and fired at four yards' distance. The leopard jumped like a cushion when one hits it, then rolled over, curled up and lay still. Flory poked the body with his gun-barrel. It did not stir.

'It's all right, he's done for,' he called. 'Come and have a look at him.'

The two Burmans jumped down from their tree, and they and Elizabeth went across to where Flory was standing. The leopard — it was a male — was lying curled up with his head between his forepaws. He looked much smaller than he had looked alive; he looked rather pathetic, like a dead kitten. Elizabeth's knees were still quivering. She and Flory stood looking down at the leopard, close together, but not clasping hands this time.

It was only a moment before Ko S'la and the others came up, shouting with glee. Flo gave one sniff at the dead leopard, then down went her tail and she bolted fifty yards, whimpering. She could not be induced to come near him again. Everyone squatted down round the leopard and gazed at him. They stroked his beautiful white belly, soft as a hare's, and squeezed his broad pugs to bring out the claws, and pulled back his black lips to examine the fangs. Presently two of the beaters cut down a tall bamboo and slung the leopard upon it by his paws, with his long tail trailing down, and then they marched back to the village in triumph. There was no talk of further shooting, though the light still held. They were all, including the Europeans, too anxious to get home and boast of what they had done.

Flory and Elizabeth walked side by side across the stubble field. The others were thirty yards ahead with the guns and the leopard, and Flo was slinking after them a long way in the rear. The sun was going down beyond the Irrawaddy. The light shone level across the field, gilding the stubble stalks, and striking into their faces with a yellow, gentle beam. Elizabeth's shoulder was almost touching Flory's as they walked. The sweat that had drenched their shirts had dried again. They did not talk much. They were happy with that inordinate happiness that comes of exhaustion and achievement, and with which nothing else in life — no joy of either the body or the mind — is even able to be compared.

‘The leopard skin is yours,’ Flory said as they approached the village.

‘Oh, but you shot him!’

‘Never mind, you stick to the skin. By Jove, I wonder how many of the women in this country would have kept their heads like you did! I can just see them screaming and fainting. I’ll get the skin cured for you in Kyauktada jail. There’s a convict there who can cure skins as soft as velvet. He’s doing a seven-year sentence, so he’s had time to learn the job.’

‘Oh well, thanks awfully.’

No more was said for the present. Later, when they had washed off the sweat and dirt, and were fed and rested, they would meet again at the Club. They made no rendezvous, but it was understood between them that they would meet. Also, it was understood that Flory would ask Elizabeth to marry him, though nothing was said about this either.

At the village Flory paid the beaters eight annas each, superintended the skinning of the leopard, and gave the headman a bottle of beer and two of the imperial pigeons. The skin and skull were packed into one of the canoes. All the whiskers had been stolen, in spite of Ko S’la’s efforts to guard them. Some young men of the village carried off the carcass in order to eat the heart and various other organs, the eating of which they believed would make them strong and swift like the leopard.

Chapter 15

When Flory arrived at the Club he found the Lackersteens in an unusually morose mood. Mrs Lackersteen was sitting, as usual, in the best place under the punkah, and was reading the Civil List, the Debrett of Burma. She was in a bad temper with her husband, who had defied her by ordering a 'large peg' as soon as he reached the Club, and was further defying her by reading the Pink'un. Elizabeth was alone in the stuffy little library, turning over the pages of an old copy of Blackwood's.

Since parting with Flory, Elizabeth had had a very disagreeable adventure. She had come out of her bath and was half-way through dressing for dinner when her uncle had suddenly appeared in her room — pretext, to hear some more about the day's shooting — and begun pinching her leg in a way that simply could not be misunderstood. Elizabeth was horrified. This was her first introduction to the fact that some men are capable of making love to their nieces. We live and learn. Mr Lackersteen had tried to carry the thing off as a joke, but he was too clumsy and too nearly drunk to succeed. It was fortunate that his wife was out of hearing, or there might have been a first-rate scandal.

After this, dinner was an uncomfortable meal. Mr Lackersteen was sulking. What rot it was, the way these women put on airs and prevented you from having a good time! The girl was pretty enough to remind him of the Illustrations in La Vie Parisienne, and damn it! wasn't he paying for her keep? It was a shame. But for Elizabeth the position was very serious. She was penniless and had no home except her uncle's house. She had come eight thousand miles to stay here. It would be terrible if after only a fortnight her uncle's house were to be made uninhabitable for her.

Consequently, one thing was much surer in her mind than it had been: that if Flory asked her to marry him (and he would, there was little doubt of it), she would say yes. At another time it was just possible that she would have decided differently. This afternoon, under the spell of that glorious, exciting, altogether 'lovely' adventure, she had come near to loving Flory; as near as, in his

particular case, she was able to come. Yet even after that, perhaps, her doubts would have returned. For there had always been something dubious about Flory; his age, his birthmark, his queer, perverse way of talking — that 'highbrow' talk that was at once unintelligible and disquieting. There had been days when she had even disliked him. But now her uncle's behaviour had turned the scale. Whatever happened she had got to escape from her uncle's house, and that soon. Yes, undoubtedly she would marry Flory when he asked her!

He could see her answer in her face as he came into the library. Her air was gentler, more yielding than he had known it. She was wearing the same lilac-coloured frock that she had worn that first morning when he met her, and the sight of the familiar frock gave him courage. It seemed to bring her nearer to him, taking away the strangeness and the elegance that had sometimes unnerved him.

He picked up the magazine she had been reading and made some remark; for a moment they chattered in the banal way they so seldom managed to avoid. It is strange how the drivelling habits of conversation will persist into almost all moments. Yet even as they chattered they found themselves drifting to the door and then outside, and presently to the big frangipani tree by the tennis court. It was the night of the full moon. Flaring like a white-hot coin, so brilliant that it hurt one's eyes, the moon swam rapidly upwards in a sky of smoky blue, across which drifted a few wisps of yellowish cloud. The stars were all invisible. The croton bushes, by day hideous things like jaundiced laurels, were changed by the moon into jagged black and white designs like fantastic wood-cuts. By the compound fence two Dravidian coolies were walking down the road, transfigured, their white rags gleaming. Through the tepid air the scent streamed from the frangipani trees like some intolerable compound out of a penny-in-the-slot machine.

'Look at the moon, just look at it!' Flory said. 'It's like a white sun. It's brighter than an English winter day.'

Elizabeth looked up into the branches of the frangipani tree, which the moon seemed to have changed into rods of silver. The light lay thick, as though palpable, on everything, crusting the earth and the rough bark of trees like some dazzling salt, and every leaf

seemed to bear a freight of solid light, like snow. Even Elizabeth, indifferent to such things, was astonished.

'It's wonderful! You never see moonlight like that at Home. It's so — so— ' No adjective except 'bright' presenting itself, she was silent. She had a habit of leaving her sentences unfinished, like Rosa Dartle, though for a different reason.

'Yes, the old moon does her best in this country. How that tree does stink, doesn't it? Beastly, tropical thing! I hate a tree that blooms all the year round, don't you?'

He was talking half abstractedly, to cover the time till the coolies should be out of sight. As they disappeared he put his arm round Elizabeth's shoulder, and then, when she did not start or speak, turned her round and drew her against him. Her head came against his breast, and her short hair grazed his lips. He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face up to meet his. She was not wearing her spectacles.

'You don't mind?'

'No.'

'I mean, you don't mind my — this thing of mine?' he shook his head slightly to indicate the birthmark. He could not kiss her without first asking this question.

'No, no. Of course not.'

A moment after their mouths met he felt her bare arms settle lightly round his neck. They stood pressed together, against the smooth trunk of the frangipani tree, body to body, mouth to mouth, for a minute or more. The sickly scent of the tree came mingling with the scent of Elizabeth's hair. And the scent gave him a feeling of stultification, of remoteness from Elizabeth, even though she was in his arms. All that that alien tree symbolized for him, his exile, the secret, wasted years — it was like an unbridgeable gulf between them. How should he ever make her understand what it was that he wanted of her? He disengaged himself and pressed her shoulders gently against the tree, looking down at her face, which he could see very clearly though the moon was behind her.

'It's useless trying to tell you what you mean to me,' he said. '"What you mean to me!" These blunted phrases! You don't know, you can't know, how much I love you. But I've got to try and tell

you. There's so much I must tell you. Had we better go back to the Club? They may come looking for us. We can talk on the veranda.'

'Is my hair very untidy?' she said.

'It's beautiful.'

'But has it got untidy? Smooth it for me, would you, please?'

She bent her head towards him, and he smoothed the short, cool locks with his hand. The way she bent her head to him gave him a curious feeling of intimacy, far more intimate than the kiss, as though he had already been her husband. Ah, he must have her, that was certain! Only by marrying her could his life be salvaged. In a moment he would ask her. They walked slowly through the cotton bushes and back to the Club, his arm still round her shoulder.

'We can talk on the veranda,' he repeated. 'Somehow, we've never really talked, you and I. My God, how I've longed all these years for somebody to talk to! How I could talk to you, interminably, interminably! That sounds boring. I'm afraid it will be boring. I must ask you to put up with it for a little while.'

She made a sound of remonstrance at the word 'boring'.

'No, it is boring, I know that. We Anglo-Indians are always looked on as bores. And we ARE bores. But we can't help it. You see, there's — how shall I say? — a demon inside us driving us to talk. We walk about under a load of memories which we long to share and somehow never can. It's the price we pay for coming to this country.'

They were fairly safe from interruption on the side veranda, for there was no door opening directly upon it. Elizabeth had sat down with her arms on the little wicker table, but Flory remained strolling back and forth, with his hands in his coatpockets, stepping into the moonlight that streamed beneath the eastern eaves of the veranda, and back into the shadows.

'I said just now that I loved you. Love! The word's been used till it's meaningless. But let me try to explain. This afternoon when you were there shooting with me, I thought, my God! here at last is somebody who can share my life with me, but really share it, really LIVE it with me — do you see— '

He was going to ask her to marry him — indeed, he had intended to ask her without more delay. But the words were not spoken yet;

instead, he found himself talking egoistically on and on. He could not help it. It was so important that she should understand something of what his life in this country had been; that she should grasp the nature of the loneliness that he wanted her to nullify. And it was so devilishly difficult to explain. It is devilish to suffer from a pain that is all but nameless. Blessed are they who are stricken only with classifiable diseases! Blessed are the poor, the sick, the crossed in love, for at least other people know what is the matter with them and will listen to their belly-achings with sympathy. But who that has not suffered it understands the pain of exile? Elizabeth watched him as he moved to and fro, in and out of the pool of moonlight that turned his silk coat to silver. Her heart was still knocking from the kiss, and yet her thoughts wandered as he talked. Was he going to ask her to marry him? He was being so slow about it! She was dimly aware that he was saying something about loneliness. Ah, of course! He was telling her about the loneliness she would have to put up with in the jungle, when they were married. He needn't have troubled. Perhaps you did get rather lonely in the jungle sometimes? Miles from anywhere, no cinemas, no dances, no one but each other to talk to, nothing to do in the evenings except read — rather a bore, that. Still, you could have a gramophone. What a difference it would make when those new portable radio sets got out to Burma! She was about to say this when he added:

'Have I made myself at all clear to you? Have you got some picture of the life we live here? The foreignness, the solitude, the melancholy! Foreign trees, foreign flowers, foreign landscapes, foreign faces. It's all as alien as a different planet. But do you see — and it's this that I so want you to understand — do you see, it mightn't be so bad living on a different planet, it might even be the most interesting thing imaginable, if you had even one person to share it with. One person who could see it with eyes something like your own. This country's been a kind of solitary hell to me — it's so to most of us — and yet I tell you it could be a paradise if one weren't alone. Does all this seem quite meaningless?'

He had stopped beside the table, and he picked up her hand. In the half-darkness he could see her face only as a pale oval, like a flower, but by the feeling of her hand he knew instantly that she had not

understood a word of what he was saying. How should she, indeed? It was so futile, this meandering talk! He would say to her at once, Will you marry me? Was there not a lifetime to talk in? He took her other hand and drew her gently to her feet.

'Forgive me all this rot I've been talking.'

'It's all right,' she murmured indistinctly, expecting that he was about to kiss her.

'No, it's rot talking like that. Some things will go into words, some won't. Besides, it was an impertinence to go belly-aching on and on about myself. But I was trying to lead up to something. Look, this is what I wanted to say. Will— '

'Eliz-a-beth!'

It was Mrs Lackersteen's high-pitched, plaintive voice, calling from within the Club.

'Elizabeth? Where are you, Elizabeth?'

Evidently she was near the front door — would be on the veranda in a moment. Flory pulled Elizabeth against him. They kissed hurriedly. He released her, only holding her hands.

'Quickly, there's just time. Answer me this. Will you— '

But that sentence never got any further. At the same moment something extraordinary happened under his feet — the floor was surging and rolling like a sea — he was staggering, then dizzily falling, hitting his upper arm a thump as the floor rushed towards him. As he lay there he found himself jerked violently backwards and forwards as though some enormous beast below were rocking the whole building on its back.

The drunken floor righted itself very suddenly, and Flory sat up, dazed but not much hurt. He dimly noticed Elizabeth sprawling beside him, and screams coming from within the Club. Beyond the gate two Burmans were racing through the moonlight with their long hair streaming behind them. They were yelling at the top of their voices:

'Nga Yin is shaking himself! Nga Yin is shaking himself!'

Flory watched them unintelligently. Who was Nga Yin? Nga is the prefix given to criminals. Nga Yin must be a dacoit. Why was he shaking himself? Then he remembered. Nga Yin was a giant supposed by the Burmese to be buried, like Typhaeus, beneath the

crust of the earth. Of course! It was an earthquake.

'An earthquake!' he exclaimed, and he remembered Elizabeth and moved to pick her up. But she was already sitting up, unhurt, and rubbing the back of her head.

'Was that an earthquake?' she said in a rather awed voice.

Mrs Lackersteen's tall form came creeping round the corner of the veranda, clinging to the wall like some elongated lizard. She was exclaiming hysterically:

'Oh dear, an earthquake! Oh, what a dreadful shock! I can't bear it — my heart won't stand it! Oh dear, oh dear! An earthquake!'

Mr Lackersteen tottered after her, with a strange ataxic step caused partly by earth-tremors and partly by gin.

'An earthquake, dammit!' he said.

Flory and Elizabeth slowly picked themselves up. They all went inside, with that queer feeling in the soles of the feet that one has when one steps from a rocking boat on to the shore. The old butler was hurrying from the servants' quarters, thrusting his pagri on his head as he came, and a troop of twittering chokras after him.

'Earthquake, sir, earthquake!' he bubbled eagerly.

'I should damn well think it was an earthquake,' said Mr Lackersteen as he lowered himself cautiously into a chair. 'Here, get some drinks, butler. By God, I could do with a nip of something after that.'

They all had a nip of something. The butler, shy yet beaming, stood on one leg beside the table, with the tray in his hand. 'Earthquake, sir, BIG earthquake!' he repeated enthusiastically. He was bursting with eagerness to talk; so, for that matter, was everyone else. An extraordinary joie de vivre had come over them all as soon as the shaky feeling departed from their legs. An earthquake is such fun when it is over. It is so exhilarating to reflect that you are not, as you well might be, lying dead under a heap of ruins. With one accord they all burst out talking: 'My dear, I've never HAD such a shock — I fell absolutely FLAT on my back — I thought it was a dam' pariah dog scratching itself under the floor — I thought it must be an explosion somewhere— ' and so on and so forth; the usual earthquake-chatter. Even the butler was included in the conversation.

'I expect you can remember ever so many earthquakes can't you

butler?' said Mrs Lackersteen, quite graciously, for her.

'Oh yes, madam, many earthquakes! 1887, 1899, 1906, 1912 — many, many I can remember, madam!'

'The 1912 one was a biggish one,' Flory said.

'Oh, sir, but 1906 was bigger! Very bad shock, sir! And big heathen idol in the temple fall down on top of the thathanabaing, that is Buddhist bishop, madam, which the Burmese say mean bad omen for failure of paddy crop and foot-and-mouth disease. Also in 1887 my first earthquake I remember, when I was a little chokra, and Major Maclagan sahib was lying under the table and promising he sign the teetotal pledge tomorrow morning. He not know it was an earthquake. Also two cows was killed by falling roofs,' etc., etc.

The Europeans stayed in the Club till midnight, and the butler popped into the room as many as half a dozen times, to relate a new anecdote. So far from snubbing him, the Europeans even encouraged him to talk. There is nothing like an earthquake for drawing people together. One more tremor, or perhaps two, and they would have asked the butler to sit down at table with them.

Meanwhile, Flory's proposal went no further. One cannot propose marriage immediately after an earthquake. In any case, he did not see Elizabeth alone for the rest of that evening. But it did not matter, he knew that she was his now. In the morning there would be time enough. On this thought, at peace in his mind, and dog-tired after the long day, he went to bed.

Chapter 16

The vultures in the big pyinkado trees by the cemetery flapped from their dung-whitened branches, steadied themselves on the wing, and climbed by vast spirals into the upper air. It was early, but Flory was out already. He was going down to the Club, to wait until Elizabeth came and then ask her formally to marry him. Some instinct, which he did not understand, prompted him to do it before the other Europeans returned from the jungle.

As he came out of the compound gate he saw that there was a new arrival at Kyauktada. A youth with a long spear like a needle in his hand was cantering across the maidan on a white pony. Some Sikhs, looking like sepoys, ran after him, leading two other ponies, a bay and a chestnut, by the bridle. When he came level with him Flory halted on the road and shouted good morning. He had not recognized the youth, but it is usual in small stations to make strangers welcome. The other saw that he was hailed, wheeled his pony negligently round and brought it to the side of the road. He was a youth of about twenty-live, lank but very straight, and manifestly a cavalry officer. He had one of those rabbit-like faces common among English soldiers, with pale blue eyes and a little triangle of fore-teeth visible between the lips; yet hard, fearless and even brutal in a careless fashion — a rabbit, perhaps, but a tough and martial rabbit. He sat his horse as though he were part of it, and he looked offensively young and fit. His fresh face was tanned to the exact shade that went with his light-coloured eyes, and he was as elegant as a picture with his white buckskin topi and his polo-boots that gleamed like an old meerschaum pipe. Flory felt uncomfortable in his presence from the start.

'How d'you do?' said Flory. 'Have you just arrived?'

'Last night, got in by the late train.' He had a surly, boyish voice. 'I've been sent up here with a company of men to stand by in case your local bad-mashes start any trouble. My name's Verrall — Military Police,' he added, not, however, inquiring Flory's name in return.

'Oh yes. We heard they were sending somebody. Where are you

putting up?'

'Dak bungalow, for the time being. There was some black beggar staying there when I got in last night — Excise Officer or something. I booted him out. This is a filthy hole, isn't it?' he said with a backward movement of his head, indicating the whole of Kyauktada.

'I suppose it's like the rest of these small stations. Are you staying long?'

'Only a month or so, thank God. Till the rains break. What a rotten maidan you've got here, haven't you? Pity they can't keep this stuff cut,' he added, swishing the dried-up grass with the point of his spear. 'Makes it so hopeless for polo or anything.'

'I'm afraid you won't get any polo here,' Flory said. 'Tennis is the best we can manage. There are only eight of us all told, and most of us spend three-quarters of our time in the jungle.'

'Christ! What a hole!'

After this there was a silence. The tall, bearded Sikhs stood in a group round their horses' heads, eyeing Flory without much favour. It was perfectly clear that Verral was bored with the conversation and wanted to escape. Flory had never in his life felt so completely de trop, or so old and shabby. He noticed that Verrall's pony was a beautiful Arab, a mare, with proud neck and arching, plume-like tail; a lovely milk-white thing, worth several thousands of rupees. Verrall had already twitched the bridle to turn away, evidently feeling that he had talked enough for one morning.

'That's a wonderful pony of yours,' Flory said.

'She's not bad, better than these Burma scrubs. I've come out to do a bit of tent-pegging. It's hopeless trying to knock a polo ball about in this muck. Hey, Hira Singh!' he called, and turned his pony away.

The sepoy holding the bay pony handed his bridle to a companion, ran to a spot forty yards away, and fixed a narrow boxwood peg in the ground. Verral took no further notice of Flory. He raised his spear and poised himself as though taking aim at the peg, while the Indians backed their horses out of the way and stood watching critically. With a just perceptible movement Verrall dug his knees into the pony's sides. She bounded forward like a bullet from a catapult. As easily as a centaur the lank, straight youth leaned over in

the saddle, lowered his spear and plunged it clean through the peg. One of the Indians muttered gruffly 'Shabash!' Verrall raised his spear behind him in the orthodox fashion, and then, pulling his horse to a canter, wheeled round and handed the transfixed peg to the sepoy.

Verrall rode twice more at the peg, and hit it each time. It was done with matchless grace and with extraordinary solemnity. The whole group of men, Englishman and Indians, were concentrated upon the business of hitting the peg as though it had been a religious ritual. Flory still stood watching, disregarded — Verrall's face was one of those that are specially constructed for ignoring unwelcome strangers — but from the very fact that he had been snubbed unable to tear himself away. Somehow, Verrall had filled him with a horrible sense of inferiority. He was trying to think of some pretext for renewing the conversation, when he looked up the hillside and saw Elizabeth, in pale blue, coming out of her uncle's gate. She must have seen the third transfixing of the peg. His heart stirred painfully. A thought occurred to him, one of those rash thoughts that usually lead to trouble. He called to Verrall, who was a few yards away from him, and pointed with his stick.

'Do these other two know how to do it?'

Verrall looked over his shoulder with a surly air. He had expected Flory to go away after being ignored.

'What?'

'Can these other two do it?' Flory repeated.

'The chestnut's not bad. Bolts if you let him, though.'

'Let me have a shot at the peg, would you?'

'All right,' said Verrall ungraciously. 'Don't go and cut his mouth to bits.'

A sepoy brought the pony, and Flory pretended to examine the curb-chain. In reality he was temporizing until Elizabeth should be thirty or forty yards away. He made up his mind that he would stick the peg exactly at the moment when she passed (it is easy enough on the small Burma ponies, provided that they will gallop straight), and then ride up to her with it on his point. That was obviously the right move. He did not want her to think that that pink-faced young whelp was the only person who could ride. He was wearing shorts, which

are uncomfortable to ride in, but he knew that, like nearly everyone, he looked his best on horseback.

Elizabeth was approaching. Flory stepped into the saddle, took the spear from the Indian and waved it in greeting to Elizabeth. She made no response, however. Probably she was shy in front of Verrall. She was looking away, towards the cemetery, and her cheeks were pink.

'Chalo,' said Flory to the Indian, and then dug his knees into the horse's sides.

The very next instant, before the horse had taken to bounds, Flory found himself hurtling through the air, hitting the ground with a crack that wrenched his shoulder almost out of joint, and rolling over and over. Mercifully the spear fell clear of him. He lay supine, with a blurred vision of blue sky and floating vultures. Then his eyes focused on the khaki pagri and dark face of a Sikh, bearded to the eyes, bending over him.

'What's happened?' he said in English, and he raised himself painfully on his elbow. The Sikh made some gruff answer and pointed. Flory saw the chestnut pony careering away over the maidan, with the saddle under its belly. The girth had not been tightened, and had slipped round; hence his fall.

When Flory sat up he found that he was in extreme pain. The right shoulder of his shirt was torn open and already soaking with blood, and he could feel more blood oozing from his cheek. The hard earth had grazed him. His hat, too, was gone. With a deadly pang he remembered Elizabeth, and he saw her coming towards him, barely ten yards away, looking straight at him as he sprawled there so ignominiously. My God, my God! he thought, O my God, what a fool I must look! The thought of it even drove away the pain of the fall. He clapped a hand over his birth-mark, though the other cheek was the damaged one.

'Elizabeth! Hullo, Elizabeth! Good morning!'

He had called out eagerly, appealingly, as one does when one is conscious of looking a fool. She did not answer, and what was almost incredible, she walked on without pausing even for an instant, as though she had neither seen nor heard him.

'Elizabeth!' he called again, taken aback; 'did you see my fall?

The saddle slipped. The fool of a sepoy hadn't— '

There was no question that she had heard him now. She turned her face full upon him for a moment, and looked at him and through him as though he had not existed. Then she gazed away into the distance beyond the cemetery. It was terrible. He called after her in dismay —

'Elizabeth! I say, Elizabeth!'

She passed on without a word, without a sign, without a look. She was walking sharply down the road, with a click of heels, her back turned upon him.

The sepoys had come round him now, and Verrall, too, had ridden across to where Flory lay. Some of the sepoys had saluted Elizabeth; Verrall had ignored her, perhaps not seeing her. Flory rose stiffly to his feet. He was badly bruised, but no bones were broken. The Indians brought him his hat and stick, but they did not apologize for their carelessness. They looked faintly contemptuous, as though thinking that he had only got what he deserved. It was conceivable that they had loosened the girth on purpose.

'The saddle slipped,' said Flory in the weak, stupid way that one does at such moments.

'Why the devil couldn't you look at it before you got up?' said Verrall briefly. 'You ought to know these beggars aren't to be trusted.'

Having said which he twitched his bridle and rode away, feeling the incident closed. The sepoys followed him without saluting Flory. When Flory reached his gate he looked back and saw that the chestnut pony had already been caught and re-saddled, and Verrall was tent-pegging upon it.

The fall had so shaken him that even now he could hardly collect his thoughts. What could have made her behave like that? She had seen him lying bloody and in pain, and she had walked past him as though he had been a dead dog. How could it have happened? HAD it happened? It was incredible. Could she be angry with him? Could he have offended her in any way? All the servants were waiting at the compound fence. They had come out to watch the tent-pegging, and every one of them had seen his bitter humiliation. Ko S'la ran part of the way down the hill to meet him, with concerned face.

‘The god has hurt himself? Shall I carry the god back to the house?’

‘No,’ said the god. ‘Go and get me some whisky and a clean shirt.’

When they got back to the house Ko S’la made Flory sit down on the bed and peeled off his torn shirt which the blood had stuck to his body. Ko S’la clicked his tongue.

‘Ah ma lay? These cuts are full of dirt. You ought not to play these children’s games on strange ponies, thakin. Not at your age. It is too dangerous.’

‘The saddle slipped,’ Flory said.

‘Such games,’ pursued Ko S’la, ‘are all very well for the young police officer. But you are no longer young, thakin. A fall hurts at your age. You should take more care of yourself.’

‘Do you take me for an old man?’ said Flory angrily. His shoulder was smarting abominably.

‘You are thirty-five, thakin,’ said Ko S’la politely but firmly.

It was all very humiliating. Ma Pu and Ma Yi, temporarily at peace, had brought a pot of some dreadful mess which they declared was good for cuts. Flory told Ko S’la privately to throw it out of the window and substitute boracic ointment. Then, while he sat in a tepid bath and Ko S’la sponged the dirt out of his grazes, he puzzled helplessly, and, as his head grew clearer, with a deeper and deeper dismay, over what had happened. He had offended her bitterly, that was clear. But, when he had not even seen her since last night, how COULD he have offended her? And there was no even plausible answer.

He explained to Ko S’la several times over that his fall was due to the saddle slipping. But Ko S’la, though sympathetic, clearly did not believe him. To the end of his days, Flory perceived, the fall would be attributed to his own bad horsemanship. On the other hand, a fortnight ago, he had won undeserved renown by putting to flight the harmless buffalo. Fate is even-handed, after a fashion.

Chapter 17

Flory did not see Elizabeth again until he went down to the Club after dinner. He had not, as he might have done, sought her out and demanded an explanation. His face unnerved him when he looked at it in the glass. With the birthmark on one side and the graze on the other it was so woebegone, so hideous, that he dared not show himself by daylight. As he entered the Club lounge he put his hand over his birthmark — pretext, a mosquito bite on the forehead. It would have been more than his nerve was equal to, not to cover his birthmark at such a moment. However, Elizabeth was not there.

Instead, he tumbled into an unexpected quarrel. Ellis and Westfield had just got back from the jungle, and they were sitting drinking, in a sour mood. News had come from Rangoon that the editor of the Burmese Patriot had been given only four months' imprisonment for his libel against Mr Macregor, and Ellis was working himself up into a rage over this light sentence. As soon as Flory came in Ellis began baiting him with remarks about 'that little nigger Very-slimy'. At the moment the very thought of quarrelling made Flory yawn, but he answered incautiously, and there was an argument. It grew heated, and after Ellis had called Flory a nigger's Nancy Boy and Flory had replied in kind, Westfield too lost his temper. He was a good-natured man, but Flory's Bolshie ideas sometimes annoyed him. He could never understand why, when there was so clearly a right and a wrong opinion about everything, Flory always seemed to delight in choosing the wrong one. He told Flory 'not to start talking like a damned Hyde Park agitator', and then read him a snappish little sermon, taking as his text the five chief beatitudes of the pukka sahib, namely:

Keeping up our prestige, The firm hand (without the velvet glove), We white men must hang together, Give them an inch and they'll take an ell, and Esprit de Corps.

All the while his anxiety to see Elizabeth was so gnawing at Flory's heart that he could hardly hear what was said to him. Besides, he had heard it all so often, so very often — a hundred times, a thousand times it might be, since his first week in Rangoon,

when his burra sahib (an old Scotch gin-soaker and great breeder of racing ponies, afterwards warned off the turf for some dirty business of running the same horse under two different names) saw him take off his topi to pass a native funeral and said to him reprovingly: 'Remember laddie, always remember, we are sahiblog and they are dirrt!' It sickened him, now, to have to listen to such trash. So he cut Westfield short by saying blasphemously:

'Oh, shut up! I'm sick of the subject. Veraswami's a damned good fellow — a damned sight better than some white men I can think of. Anyway, I'm going to propose his name for the Club when the general meeting comes. Perhaps he'll liven this bloody place up a bit.'

Whereat the row would have become serious if it had not ended as most rows ended at the Club — with the appearance of the butler, who had heard the raised voices.

'Did master call, sir?'

'No. Go to hell,' said Ellis morosely.

The butler retired, but that was the end of the dispute for the time being. At this moment there were footsteps and voices outside; the Lackersteens were arriving at the Club.

When they entered the lounge, Flory could not even nerve himself to look directly at Elizabeth; but he noticed that all three of them were much more smartly dressed than usual. Mr Lackersteen was even wearing a dinner-jacket — white, because of the season — and was completely sober. The boiled shirt and pique waistcoat seemed to hold him upright and stiffen his moral fibre like a breastplate. Mrs Lackersteen looked handsome and serpentine in a red dress. In some indefinable way all three gave the impression that they were waiting to receive some distinguished guest.

When drinks had been called for, and Mrs Lackersteen had usurped the place under the punkah, Flory took a chair on the outside of the group. He dared not accost Elizabeth yet. Mrs Lackersteen had begun talking in an extraordinary, silly manner about the dear Prince of Wales, and putting on an accent like a temporarily promoted chorus-girl playing the part of a duchess in a musical comedy. The others wondered privately what the devil was the matter with her. Flory had stationed himself almost behind Elizabeth. She was

wearing a yellow frock, cut very short as the fashion then was, with champagne-coloured stockings and slippers to match, and she carried a big ostrich-feather fan. She looked so modish, so adult, that he feared her more than he had ever done. It was unbelievable that he had ever kissed her. She was talking easily to all the others at once, and now and again he dared to put a word into the general conversation; but she never answered him directly, and whether or not she meant to ignore him, he could not tell.

'Well,' said Mrs Lackersteen presently, 'and who's for a rubbah?'

She said quite distinctly a 'rubbah'. Her accent was growing more aristocratic with every word she uttered. It was unaccountable. It appeared that Ellis, Westfield and Mr Lackersteen were for a 'rubbah'. Flory refused as soon as he saw that Elizabeth was not playing. Now or never was his chance to get her alone. When they all moved for the card-room, he saw with a mixture of fear and relief that Elizabeth came last. He stopped in the doorway, barring her path. He had turned dreadly pale. She shrank from him a little.

'Excuse me,' they both said simultaneously.

'One moment,' he said, and do what he would his voice trembled. 'May I speak to you? You don't mind — there's something I must say.'

'Will you please let me pass, Mr Flory?'

'Please! Please! We're alone now. You won't refuse just to let me speak?'

'What is it, then?'

'It's only this. Whatever I've done to offend you — please tell me what it is. Tell me and let me put it right. I'd sooner cut my hand off than offend you. Just tell me, don't let me go on not even knowing what it is.'

'I really don't know what you're talking about. "Tell you how you've offended me?" Why should you have OFFENDED me?'

'But I must have! After the way you behaved!'

'"After the way I behaved?" I don't know what you mean. I don't know why you're talking in this extraordinary way at all.'

'But you won't even speak to me! This morning you cut me absolutely dead.'

'Surely I can do as I like without being questioned?'

‘But please, please! Don’t you see, you must see, what it’s like for me to be snubbed all of a sudden. After all, only last night you— ‘

She turned pink. ‘I think it’s absolutely — absolutely caddish of you to mention such things!’

‘I know, I know. I know all that. But what else can I do? You walked past me this morning as though I’d been a stone. I know that I’ve offended you in some way. Can you blame me if I want to know what it is that I’ve done?’

He was, as usual, making it worse with every word he said. He perceived that whatever he had done, to be made to speak of it seemed to her worse than the thing itself. She was not going to explain. She was going to leave him in the dark — snub him and then pretend that nothing had happened; the natural feminine move. Nevertheless he urged her again:

‘Please tell me. I can’t let everything end between us like this.’

‘“End between us”? There was nothing to end,’ she said coldly.

The vulgarity of this remark wounded him, and he said quickly:

‘That wasn’t like you, Elizabeth! It’s not generous to cut a man dead after you’ve been kind to him, and then refuse even to tell him the reason. You might be straightforward with me. Please tell me what it is that I’ve done.’

She gave him an oblique, bitter look, bitter not because of what he had done, but because he had made her speak of it. But perhaps she was anxious to end the scene, and she said:

‘Well then, if you absolutely force me to speak of it— ‘

‘Yes?’

‘I’m told that at the very same time as you were pretending to — well, when you were . . . with me — oh, it’s too beastly! I can’t speak of it.’

‘Go on.’

‘I’m told that you’re keeping a Burmese woman. And now, will you please let me pass?’

With that she sailed — there was no other possible word for it — she sailed past him with a swish of her short skirts, and vanished into the card-room. And he remained looking after her, too appalled to speak, and looking unutterably ridiculous.

It was dreadful. He could not face her after that. He turned to

hurry out of the Club, and then dared not even pass the door of the card-room, lest she should see him. He went into the lounge, wondering how to escape, and finally climbed over the veranda rail and dropped on to the small square of lawn that ran down to the Irrawaddy. The sweat was running from his forehead. He could have shouted with anger and distress. The accursed luck of it! To be caught out over a thing like that. 'Keeping a Burmese woman' — and it was not even true! But much use it would ever be to deny it. Ah, what damned, evil chance could have brought it to her ears?

But as a matter of fact, it was no chance. It had a perfectly sound cause, which was also the cause of Mrs Lackersteen's curious behaviour at the Club this evening. On the previous night, just before the earthquake, Mrs Lackersteen had been reading the Civil List. The Civil List (which tells you the exact income of every official in Burma) was a source of inexhaustible interest to her. She was in the middle of adding up the pay and allowances of a Conservator of Forests whom she had once met in Mandalay, when it occurred to her to look up the name of Lieutenant Verrall, who, she had heard from Mr Macregor, was arriving at Kyauktada tomorrow with a hundred Military Policemen. When she found the name, she saw in front of it two words that startled her almost out of her wits.

The words were 'The Honourable'!

The HONOURABLE! Lieutenants the Honourable are rare anywhere, rare as diamonds in the Indian Army, rare as dodos in Burma. And when you are the aunt of the only marriageable young woman within fifty miles, and you hear that a lieutenant the Honourable is arriving no later than tomorrow — well! With dismay Mrs Lackersteen remembered that Elizabeth was out in the garden with Flory — that drunken wretch Flory, whose pay was barely seven hundred rupees a month, and who, it was only too probable, was already proposing to her! She hastened immediately to call Elizabeth inside, but at this moment the earthquake intervened. However, on the way home there was an opportunity to speak. Mrs Lackersteen laid her hand affectionately on Elizabeth's arm and said in the tenderest voice she had ever succeeded in producing:

'Of course you know, Elizabeth dear, that Flory is keeping a Burmese woman?'

For a moment this deadly charge actually failed to explode. Elizabeth was so new to the ways of the country that the remark made no impression on her. It sounded hardly more significant than 'keeping a parrot'.

'Keeping a Burmese woman? What for?'

'What FOR? My dear! what DOES a man keep a woman for?'

And, of course, that was that.

For a long time Flory remained standing by the river bank. The moon was up, mirrored in the water like a broad shield of electron. The coolness of the outer air had changed Flory's mood. He had not even the heart to be angry any longer. For he had perceived, with the deadly self-knowledge and self-loathing that come to one at such a time, that what had happened served him perfectly right. For a moment it seemed to him that an endless procession of Burmese women, a regiment of ghosts, were marching past him in the moonlight. Heavens, what numbers of them! A thousand — no, but a full hundred at the least. 'Eyes right!' he thought despondently. Their heads turned towards him, but they had no faces, only featureless discs. He remembered a blue longyi here, a pair of ruby ear-rings there, but hardly a face or a name. The gods are just and of our pleasant vices (pleasant, indeed!) make instruments to plague us. He had dirtied himself beyond redemption, and this was his just punishment.

He made his way slowly through the croton bushes and round the clubhouse. He was too saddened to feel the full pain of the disaster yet. It would begin hurting, as all deep wounds do, long afterwards. As he passed through the gate something stirred the leaves behind him. He started. There was a whisper of harsh Burmese syllables.

'Pike-san pay-like! Pike-san pay-like!'

He turned sharply. The 'pike-san pay-like' ('Give me the money') was repeated. He saw a woman standing under the shadow of the gold mohur tree. It was Ma Hla May. She stepped out into the moonlight warily, with a hostile air, keeping her distance as though afraid that he would strike her. Her face was coated with powder, sickly white in the moon, and it looked as ugly as a skull, and defiant.

She had given him a shock. 'What the devil are you doing here?'

he said angrily in English.

'Pike-san pay-like!'

'What money? What do you mean? Why are you following me about like this?'

'Pike-san pay-like!' she repeated almost in a scream. 'The money you promised me, thakin. You said you would give me more money. I want it now, this instant!'

'How can I give it you now? You shall have it next month. I have given you a hundred and fifty rupees already.'

To his alarm she began shrieking 'Pike-san pay-like!' and a number of similar phrases almost at the top of her voice. She seemed on the verge of hysterics. The volume of noise that she produced was startling.

'Be quiet! They'll hear you in the Club!' he exclaimed, and was instantly sorry for putting the idea into her head.

'Aha! NOW I know what will frighten you! Give me the money this instant, or I will scream for help and bring them all out here. Quick, now, or I begin screaming!'

'You bitch!' he said, and took a step towards her. She sprang nimbly out of reach, whipped off her slipper, and stood defying him.

'Be quick! Fifty rupees now and the rest tomorrow. Out with it! Or I give a scream they can hear as far as the bazaar!'

Flory swore. This was not the time for such a scene. Finally he took out his pocket-book, found twenty-five rupees in it, and threw them on to the ground. Ma Hla May pounced on the notes and counted them.

'I said fifty rupees, thakin!'

'How can I give it you if I haven't got it? Do you think I carry hundreds of rupees about with me?'

'I said fifty rupees!'

'Oh, get out of my way!' he said in English, and pushed past her.

But the wretched woman would not leave him alone. She began to follow him up the road like a disobedient dog, screaming out 'Pike-san pay-like! Pike-san pay-like!' as though mere noise could bring the money into existence. He hurried, partly to draw her away from the Club, partly in hopes of shaking her off, but she seemed ready to follow him as far as the house if necessary. After a while he could

not stand it any longer, and he turned to drive her back.

'Go away this instant! If you follow me any farther you shall never have another anna.'

'Pike-san pay-like!'

'You fool,' he said, 'what good is this doing? How can I give you the money when I have not another pice on me?'

'That is a likely story!'

He felt helplessly in his pockets. He was so wearied that he would have given her anything to be rid of her. His fingers encountered his cigarette-case, which was of gold. He took it out.

'Here, if I give you this will you go away? You can pawn it for thirty rupees.'

Ma Hla May seemed to consider, then said sulkily, 'Give it me.'

He threw the cigarette-case on to the grass beside the road. She grabbed it and immediately sprang back clutching it to her ingyi, as though afraid that he would take it away again. He turned and made for the house, thanking God to be out of the sound of her voice. The cigarette-case was the same one that she had stolen ten days ago.

At the gate he looked back. Ma Hla May was still standing at the bottom of the hill, a greyish figurine in the moonlight. She must have watched him up the hill like a dog watching a suspicious stranger out of sight. It was queer. The thought crossed his mind, as it had a few days earlier when she sent him the blackmailing letter, that her behaviour had been curious and unlike herself. She was showing a tenacity of which he would never have thought her capable — almost, indeed, as though someone else were egging her on.

Chapter 18

After the row overnight Ellis was looking forward to a week of baiting Flory. He had nicknamed him Nancy — short for nigger's Nancy Boy, but the women did not know that — and was already inventing wild scandals about him. Ellis always invented scandals about anyone with whom he had quarrelled — scandals which grew, by repeated embroideries, into a species of saga. Flory's incautious remark that Dr Veraswami was a 'damned good fellow' had swelled before long into a whole Daily Worker-ful of blasphemy and sedition.

'On my honour, Mrs Lackersteen,' said Ellis — Mrs Lackersteen had taken a sudden dislike to Flory after discovering the great secret about Verrall, and she was quite ready to listen to Ellis's tales— 'on my honour, if you'd been there last night and heard the things that man Flory was saying — well, it'd have made you shiver in your shoes!'

'Really! You know, I always thought he had such CURIOUS ideas. What has he been talking about now? Not SOCIALISM, I hope?'

'Worse.'

There were long recitals. However, to Ellis's disappointment, Flory had not stayed in Kyauktada to be baited. He had gone back to camp the day after his dismissal by Elizabeth. Elizabeth heard most of the scandalous tales about him. She understood his character perfectly now. She understood why it was that he had so often bored her and irritated her. He was a highbrow — her deadliest word — a highbrow, to be classed with Lenin, A. J. Cook and the dirty little poets in the Montparnasse cafes. She could have forgiven him even his Burmese mistress more easily than that. Flory wrote to her three days later; a weak, stilted letter, which he sent by hand — his camp was a day's march from Kyauktada. Elizabeth did not answer.

It was lucky for Flory that at present he was too busy to have time to think. The whole camp was at sixes and sevens since his long absence. Nearly thirty coolies were missing, the sick elephant was worse than ever, and a vast pile of teak logs which should have been

sent off ten days earlier were still waiting because the engine would not work. Flory, a fool about machinery, struggled with the bowels of the engine until he was black with grease and Ko S'la told him sharply that white men ought not to do 'coolie-work'. The engine was finally persuaded to run, or at least to totter. The sick elephant was discovered to be suffering from tapeworms. As for the coolies, they had deserted because their supply of opium had been cut off — they would not stay in the jungle without opium, which they took as a prophylactic against fever. U Po Kyin, willing to do Flory a bad turn, had caused the Excise Officers to make a raid and seize the opium. Flory wrote to Dr Veraswami, asking for his help. The doctor sent back a quantity of opium, illegally procured, medicine for the elephant and a careful letter of instructions. A tapeworm measuring twenty-one feet was extracted. Flory was busy twelve hours a day. In the evening if there was no more to do he would plunge into the jungle and walk and walk until the sweat stung his eyes and his knees were bleeding from the briers. The nights were his bad time. The bitterness of what had happened was sinking into him, as it usually does, by slow degrees.

Meanwhile, several days had passed and Elizabeth had not yet seen Verrall at less than a hundred yards' distance. It had been a great disappointment when he had not appeared at the Club on the evening of his arrival. Mr Lackersteen was really quite angry when he discovered that he had been hounded into his dinner-jacket for nothing. Next morning Mrs Lackersteen made her husband send an officious note to the dakbungalow, inviting Verrall to the Club; there was no answer, however. More days passed, and Verrall made no move to join in the local society. He had even neglected his official calls, not even bothering to present himself at Mr Macgregor's office. The dakbungalow was at the other end of the town, near the station, and he had made himself quite comfortable there. There is a rule that one must vacate a dakbungalow after a stated number of days, but Verrall peaceably ignored it. The Europeans only saw him at morning and evening on the maidan. On the second day after his arrival fifty of his men turned out with sickles and cleared a large patch of the maidan, after which Verrall was to be seen galloping to and fro, practising polo strokes. He took not the smallest notice of

any Europeans who passed down the road. Westfield and Ellis were furious, and even Mr Macgregor said that Verrall's behaviour was 'ungracious'. They would all have fallen at the feet of a lieutenant the Honourable if he had shown the smallest courtesy; as it was, everyone except the two women detested him from the start. It is always so with titled people, they are either adored or hated. If they accept one it is charming simplicity, if they ignore one it is loathsome snobbishness; there are no half-measures.

Verrall was the youngest son of a peer, and not at all rich, but by the method of seldom paying a bill until a writ was issued against him, he managed to keep himself in the only things he seriously cared about: clothes and horses. He had come out to India in a British cavalry regiment, and exchanged into the Indian Army because it was cheaper and left him greater freedom for polo. After two years his debts were so enormous that he entered the Burma Military Police, in which it was notoriously possible to save money; however, he detested Burma — it is no country for a horseman — and he had already applied to go back to his regiment. He was the kind of soldier who can get exchanges when he wants them. Meanwhile, he was only to be in Kyauktada for a month, and he had no intention of mixing himself up with all the petty sahiblog of the district. He knew the society of those small Burma stations — a nasty, poodle-faking, horseless riffraff. He despised them.

They were not the only people whom Verrall despised, however. His various contempts would take a long time to catalogue in detail. He despised the entire non-military population of India, a few famous polo players excepted. He despised the entire Army as well, except the cavalry. He despised all Indian regiments, infantry and cavalry alike. It was true that he himself belonged to a native regiment, but that was only for his own convenience. He took no interest in Indians, and his Urdu consisted mainly of swear-words, with all the verbs in the third person singular. His Military Policemen he looked on as no better than coolies. 'Christ, what God-forsaken swine!' he was often heard to mutter as he moved down the ranks inspecting, with the old subahdar carrying his sword behind him. Verrall had even been in trouble once for his outspoken opinions on native troops. It was at a review, and Verrall was among the group of

officers standing behind the general. An Indian infantry regiment approached for the march-past.

'The —— Rifles,' somebody said.

'AND look at it,' said Verrall in his surly boy's voice.

The white-haired colonel of the —— Rifles was standing near. He flushed to the neck, and reported Verrall to the general. Verrall was reprimanded, but the general, a British Army officer himself, did not rub it in very hard. Somehow, nothing very serious ever did happen to Verrall, however offensive he made himself. Up and down India, wherever he was stationed, he left behind him a trail of insulted people, neglected duties and unpaid bills. Yet the disgraces that ought to have fallen on him never did. He bore a charmed life, and it was not only the handle to his name that saved him. There was something in his eye before which duns, burra memsahibs and even colonels quailed.

It was a disconcerting eye, pale blue and a little protuberant, but exceedingly clear. It looked you over, weighed you in the balance and found you wanting, in a single cold scrutiny of perhaps five seconds. If you were the right kind of man — that is, if you were a cavalry officer and a polo player — Verrall took you for granted and even treated you with a surly respect; if you were any other type of man whatever, he despised you so utterly that he could not have hidden it even if he would. It did not even make any difference whether you were rich or poor, for in the social sense he was not more than normally a snob. Of course, like all sons of rich families, he thought poverty disgusting and that poor people are poor because they prefer disgusting habits. But he despised soft living. Spending, or rather owing, fabulous sums on clothes, he yet lived almost as ascetically as a monk. He exercised himself ceaselessly and brutally, rationed his drink and his cigarettes, slept on a camp bed (in silk pyjamas) and bathed in cold water in the bitterest winter. Horsemanship and physical fitness were the only gods he knew. The stamp of hoofs on the maidan, the strong, poised feeling of his body, wedded centaurlike to the saddle, the polo-stick springy in his hand — these were his religion, the breath of his life. The Europeans in Burma — boozing, womanizing, yellow-faced loafers — made him physically sick when he thought of their habits. As for social duties

of all descriptions, he called them poodle-faking and ignored them. Women he abhorred. In his view they were a kind of siren whose one aim was to lure men away from polo and enmesh them in tea-fights and tennis-parties. He was not, however, quite proof against women. He was young, and women of nearly all kinds threw themselves at his head; now and again he succumbed. But his lapses soon disgusted him, and he was too callous when the pinch came to have any difficulty about escaping. He had had perhaps a dozen such escapes during his two years in India.

A whole week went by. Elizabeth had not even succeeded in making Verrall's acquaintance. It was so tantalizing! Every day, morning and evening, she and her aunt walked down to the Club and back again, past the maidan; and there was Verrall, hitting the polo-balls the sepoys threw for him, ignoring the two women utterly. So near and yet so far! What made it even worse was that neither woman would have considered it decent to speak of the matter directly. One evening the polo-ball, struck too hard, came swishing through the grass and rolled across the road in front of them. Elizabeth and her aunt stopped involuntarily. But it was only a sepoy who ran to fetch the ball. Verrall had seen the women and kept his distance.

Next morning Mrs Lackersteen paused as they came out of the gate. She had given up riding in her rickshaw lately. At the bottom of the maidan the Military Policemen were drawn up, a dust-coloured rank with bayonets glittering. Verrall was facing them, but not in uniform — he seldom put on his uniform for morning parade, not thinking it necessary with mere Military Policemen. The two women were looking at everything except Verrall, and at the same time, in some manner, were contriving to look at him.

'The wretched thing is,' said Mrs Lackersteen — this was a propos de bottes, but the subject needed no introduction— 'the wretched thing is that I'm afraid your uncle simply MUST go back to camp before long.'

'Must he really?'

'I'm afraid so. It is so HATEFUL in camp at this time of year! Oh, those mosquitoes!'

'Couldn't he stay a bit longer? A week, perhaps?'

‘I don’t see how he can. He’s been nearly a month in headquarters now. The firm would be furious if they heard of it. And of course both of us will have to go with him. SUCH a bore! The mosquitoes — simply terrible!’

Terrible indeed! To have to go away before Elizabeth had so much as said how-do-you-do to Verrall! But they would certainly have to go if Mr Lackersteen went. It would never do to leave him to himself. Satan finds some mischief still, even in the jungle. A ripple like fire ran down the line of sepoys; they were unfixing bayonets before marching away. The dusty rank turned left, saluted, and marched off in columns of fours. The orderlies were coming from the police lines with the ponies and polo-sticks. Mrs Lackersteen took a heroic decision.

‘I think,’ she said, ‘we’ll take a short-cut across the maidan. It’s SO much quicker than going right round by the road.’

It WAS quicker by about fifty yards, but no one ever went that way on foot, because of the grass-seeds that got into one’s stockings. Mrs Lackersteen plunged boldly into the grass, and then, dropping even the pretence of making for the Club, took a bee-line for Verrall, Elizabeth following. Either woman would have died on the rack rather than admit that she was doing anything but take a short-cut. Verrall saw them coming, swore, and reined in his pony. He could not very well cut them dead now that they were coming openly to accost him. The damned cheek of these women! He rode slowly towards them with a sulky expression on his face, chivvying the polo-ball with small strokes.

‘Good morning, Mr Verrall!’ Mrs Lackersteen called out in a voice of saccharine, twenty yards away.

‘Morning!’ he returned surlily, having seen her face and set her down as one of the usual scraggy old boiling-fowls of an Indian station.

The next moment Elizabeth came level with her aunt. She had taken off her spectacles and was swinging her Terai hat on her hand. What did she care for sunstroke? She was perfectly aware of the prettiness of her cropped hair. A puff of wind — oh, those blessed breaths of wind, coming from nowhere in the stifling hot-weather days! — had caught her cotton frock and blown it against her,

showing the outline of her body, slender and strong like a tree. Her sudden appearance beside the older, sun-scorched woman was a revelation to Verrall. He started so that the Arab mare felt it and would have reared on her hind legs, and he had to tighten the rein. He had not known until this moment, not having bothered to inquire, that there were any YOUNG women in Kyauktada.

'My niece,' Mrs Lackersteen said.

He did not answer, but he had thrown away the polo-stick, and he took off his topi. For a moment he and Elizabeth remained gazing at one another. Their fresh faces were unmarred in the pitiless light. The grass-seeds were tickling Elizabeth's shins so that it was agony, and without her spectacles she could only see Verrall and his horse as a whitish blur. But she was happy, happy! Her heart bounded and the blood flowed into her face, dyeing it like a thin wash of aquarelle. The thought, 'A peach, by Christ!' moved almost fiercely through Verrall's mind. The sullen Indians, holding the ponies' heads, gazed curiously at the scene, as though the beauty of the two young people had made its impression even on them.

Mrs Lackersteen broke the silence, which had lasted half a minute.

'You know, Mr Verrall,' she said somewhat archly, 'we think it RATHER unkind of you to have neglected us poor people all this time. When we're so PINING for a new face at the Club.'

He was still looking at Elizabeth when he answered, but the change in his voice was remarkable.

'I've been meaning to come for some days. Been so fearfully busy — getting my men into their quarters and all that. I'm sorry,' he added — he was not in the habit of apologizing, but really, he had decided, this girl was rather an exceptional bit of stuff— 'I'm sorry about not answering your note.'

'Oh, not at all! We QUITE understood. But we do hope we shall see you at the Club this evening! Because, you know,' she concluded even more archly, 'if you disappoint us any longer, we shall begin to think you rather a NAUGHTY young man!'

'I'm sorry,' he repeated. 'I'll be there this evening.'

There was not much more to be said, and the two women walked on to the Club. But they stayed barely five minutes. The grass-seeds

were causing their shins such torment that they were obliged to hurry home and change their stockings at once.

Verrall kept his promise and was at the Club that evening. He arrived a little earlier than the others, and he had made his presence thoroughly felt before being in the place five minutes. As Ellis entered the Club the old butler darted out of the card-room and waylaid him. He was in great distress, the tears rolling down his cheeks.

'Sir! Sir!'

'What the devil's the matter now!' said Ellis.

'Sir! Sir! New master been beating me, sir!'

'What?'

'BEATING me sir!' His voice rose on the 'beating' with a long tearful wail— 'be-e-e-eating!'

'Beating you? Do you good. Who's been beating you?'

'New master, sir. Military Police sahib. Beating me with his foot, sir — HERE!' He rubbed himself behind.

'Hell!' said Ellis.

He went into the lounge. Verrall was reading the Field, and invisible except for Palm Beach trouser-ends and two lustrous sooty-brown shoes. He did not trouble to stir at hearing someone else come into the room. Ellis halted.

'Here, you — what's your name — Verrall!'

'What?'

'Have you been kicking our butler?'

Verrall's sulky blue eye appeared round the corner of the Field, like the eye of a crustacean peering round a rock.

'What?' he repeated shortly.

'I said, have you been kicking our bloody butler?'

'Yes.'

'Then what the hell do you mean by it?'

'Beggar gave me his lip. I sent him for a whisky and soda, and he brought it warm. I told him to put ice in it, and he wouldn't — talked some bloody rot about saving the last pieces of ice. So I kicked his bottom. Serve him right.'

Ellis turned quite grey. He was furious. The butler was a piece of Club property and not to be kicked by strangers. But what most

angered Ellis was the thought that Verrall quite possibly suspected him of being SORRY for the butler — in fact, of disapproving of kicking AS SUCH.

'Serve him right? I dare say it bloody well did serve him right. But what in hell's that got to do with it? Who are YOU to come kicking our servants?'

'Bosh, my good chap. Needed kicking. You've let your servants get out of hand here.'

'You damned, insolent young tick, what's it got to do with YOU if he needed kicking? You're not even a member of this Club. It's our job to kick the servants, not yours.'

Verrall lowered the Field and brought his other eye into play. His surly voice did not change its tone. He never lost his temper with a European; it was never necessary.

'My good chap, if anyone gives me lip I kick his bottom. Do you want me to kick yours?'

All the fire went out of Ellis suddenly. He was not afraid, he had never been afraid in his life; only, Verrall's eye was too much for him. That eye could make you feel as though you were under Niagara! The oaths wilted on Ellis's lips; his voice almost deserted him. He said querulously and even plaintively:

'But damn it, he was quite right not to give you the last bit of ice. Do you think we only buy ice for you? We can only get the stuff twice a week in this place.'

'Rotten bad management on your part, then,' said Verrall, and retired behind the Field, content to let the matter drop.

Ellis was helpless. The calm way in which Verrall went back to his paper, quite genuinely forgetting Ellis's existence, was maddening. Should he not give the young swab a good, rousing kick?

But somehow, the kick was never given. Verrall had earned many kicks in his life, but he had never received one and probably never would. Ellis seeped helplessly back to the card-room, to work off his feelings on the butler, leaving Verrall in possession of the lounge.

As Mr Macgregor entered the Club gate he heard the sound of music. Yellow chinks of lantern-light showed through the creeper that covered the tennis-screen. Mr Macgregor was in a happy mood

this evening. He had promised himself a good, long talk with Miss Lackersteen — such an exceptionally intelligent girl, that! — and he had a most interesting anecdote to tell her (as a matter of fact, it had already seen the light in one of those little articles of his in Blackwood's) about a dacoity that had happened in Sagaing in 1913. She would love to hear it, he knew. He rounded the tennis-screen expectantly. On the court, in the mingled light of the waning moon and of lanterns slung among the trees, Verrall and Elizabeth were dancing. The chokras had brought out chairs and a table for the gramophone, and round these the other Europeans were sitting or standing. As Mr Macgregor halted at the corner of the court, Verrall and Elizabeth circled round and glided past him, barely a yard away. They were dancing very close together, her body bent backwards under his. Neither noticed Mr Macgregor.

Mr Macgregor made his way round the court. A chilly, desolate feeling had taken possession of his entrails. Good-bye, then, to his talk with Miss Lackersteen! It was an effort to screw his face into its usual facetious good-humour as he came up to the table.

'A Terpsichorean evening!' he remarked in a voice that was doleful in spite of himself.

No one answered. They were all watching the pair on the tennis court. Utterly oblivious of the others, Elizabeth and Verrall glided round and round, round and round, their shoes sliding easily on the slippery concrete. Verrall danced as he rode, with matchless grace. The gramophone was playing 'Show Me the Way to Go Home,' which was then going round the world like a pestilence and had got as far as Burma:

'Show me the way to go home, I'm tired an' I wanna go to bed; I had a little drink 'bout an hour ago, An' it's gone right TO my head!' etc.

The dreary, depressing trash floated out among the shadowy trees and the streaming scents of flowers, over and over again, for Mrs Lackersteen was putting the gramophone needle back to the start when it neared the centre. The moon climbed higher, very yellow, looking, as she rose from the murk of dark clouds at the horizon, like a sick woman creeping out of bed. Verrall and Elizabeth danced on and on, indefatigably, a pale voluptuous shape in the gloom. They

moved in perfect unison like some single animal. Mr Macgregor, Ellis, Westfield and Mr Lackersteen stood watching them, their hands in their pockets, finding nothing to say. The mosquitoes came nibbling at their ankles. Someone called for drinks, but the whisky was like ashes in their mouths. The bowels of all four older men were twisted with bitter envy.

Verrall did not ask Mrs Lackersteen for a dance, nor, when he and Elizabeth finally sat down, did he take any notice of the other Europeans. He merely monopolized Elizabeth for half an hour more, and then, with a brief good night to the Lackersteens and not a word to anyone else, left the Club. The long dance with Verrall had left Elizabeth in a kind of dream. He had asked her to come out riding with him! He was going to lend her one of his ponies! She never even noticed that Ellis, angered by her behaviour, was doing his best to be openly rude. It was late when the Lackersteens got home, but there was no sleep yet for Elizabeth or her aunt. They were feverishly at work till midnight, shortening a pair of Mrs Lackersteen's jodhpurs, and letting out the calves, to fit Elizabeth.

'I hope, dear, you CAN ride a horse?' said Mrs Lackersteen.

'Oh, of course! I've ridden ever such a lot, at home.'

She had ridden perhaps a dozen times in all, when she was sixteen. No matter, she would manage somehow! She would have ridden a tiger, if Verrall were to accompany her.

When at last the jodhpurs were finished and Elizabeth had tried them on, Mrs Lackersteen sighed to see her. She looked ravishing in jodhpurs, simply ravishing! And to think that in only a day or two they had got to go back to camp, for weeks, months perhaps, leaving Kyauktada and this most DESIRABLE young man! The pity of it! As they moved to go upstairs Mrs Lackersteen paused at the door. It had come into her head to make a great and painful sacrifice. She took Elizabeth by the shoulders and kissed her with a more real affection than she had ever shown.

'My dear, it would be such a SHAME for you to go away from Kyauktada just now!'

'It would, rather.'

'Then I'll tell you what, dear. We WON'T go back to that horrid jungle! Your uncle shall go alone. You and I shall stay in

Kyauktada.’

Chapter 19

The heat was growing worse and worse. April was nearly over, but there was no hope of rain for another three weeks, five weeks it might be. Even the lovely transient dawns were spoiled by the thought of the long, blinding hours to come, when one's head would ache and the glare would penetrate through every covering and glue up one's eyelids with restless sleep. No one, Oriental or European, could keep awake in the heat of the day without a struggle; at night, on the other hand, with the howling dogs and the pools of sweat that collected and tormented one's prickly heat, no one could sleep. The mosquitoes at the Club were so bad that sticks of incense had to be kept burning in all the corners, and the women sat with their legs in pillowslips. Only Verrall and Elizabeth were indifferent to the heat. They were young and their blood was fresh, and Verrall was too stoical and Elizabeth too happy to pay any attention to the climate.

There was much bickering and scandal-mongering at the Club these days. Verrall had put everyone's nose out of joint. He had taken to coming to the Club for an hour or two in the evenings, but he ignored the other members, refused the drinks they offered him, and answered attempts at conversation with surly monosyllables. He would sit under the punkah in the chair that had once been sacred to Mrs Lackersteen, reading such of the papers as interested him, until Elizabeth came, when he would dance and talk with her for an hour or two and then make off without so much as a good-night to anybody. Meanwhile Mr Lackersteen was alone in his camp, and, according to the rumours which drifted back to Kyauktada, consoling loneliness with quite a miscellany of Burmese women.

Elizabeth and Verrall went out riding together almost every evening now. Verrall's mornings, after parade, were sacred to polo practice, but he had decided that it was worth while giving up the evenings to Elizabeth. She took naturally to riding, just as she had to shooting; she even had the assurance to tell Verrall that she had 'hunted quite a lot' at home. He saw at a glance that she was lying, but at least she did not ride so badly as to be a nuisance to him.

They used to ride up the red road into the jungle, ford the stream

by the big pyinkado tree covered with orchids, and then follow the narrow cart-track, where the dust was soft and the horses could gallop. It was stifling hot in the dusty jungle, and there were always mutterings of faraway, rainless thunder. Small martins flitted round the horses, keeping pace with them, to hawk for the flies their hooves turned up. Elizabeth rode the bay pony, Verrall the white. On the way home they would walk their sweat-dark horses abreast, so close sometimes his knee brushed against hers, and talk. Verrall could drop his offensive manner and talk amicably enough when he chose, and he did choose with Elizabeth.

Ah, the joy of those rides together! The joy of being on horseback and in the world of horses — the world of hunting and racing, polo and pigsticking! If Elizabeth had loved Verrall for nothing else, she would have loved him for bringing horses into her life. She tormented him to talk about horses as once she had tormented Flory to talk about shooting. Verrall was no talker, it was true. A few gruff, jerky sentences about polo and pigsticking, and a catalogue of Indian stations and the names of regiments, were the best he could do. And yet somehow the little he said could thrill Elizabeth as all Flory's talk had never done. The mere sight of him on horseback was more evocative than any words. An aura of horsemanship and soldiering surrounded him. In his tanned face and his hard, straight body Elizabeth saw all the romance, the splendid panache of a cavalryman's life. She saw the North-West Frontier and the Cavalry Club — she saw the polo grounds and the parched barrack yards, and the brown squadrons of horsemen galloping with their long lances poised and the trains of their pagris streaming; she heard the bugle-calls and the jingle of spurs, and the regimental bands playing outside the messrooms while the officers sat at dinner in their stiff, gorgeous uniforms. How splendid it was, that equestrian world, how splendid! And it was HER world, she belonged to it, she had been born of it. These days, she lived, thought, dreamed horses, almost like Verrall himself. The time came when she not only TOLD her taradiddle about having 'hunted quite a lot', she even came near believing it.

In every possible way they got on so well together. He never bored her and fretted her as Flory had done. (As a matter of fact, she

had almost forgotten Flory, these days; when she thought of him, it was for some reason always his birthmark that she remembered.) It was a bond between them that Verrall detested anything 'highbrow' even more than she did. He told her once that he had not read a book since he was eighteen, and that indeed he 'loathed' books; 'except, of course, Jorrocks and all that'. On the evening of their third or fourth ride they were parting at the Lackersteens' gate. Verrall had successfully resisted all Mrs Lackersteen's invitations to meals; he had not yet set foot inside the Lackersteens' house, and he did not intend to do so. As the syce was taking Elizabeth's pony, Verrall said:

'I tell you what. Next time we come out you shall ride Belinda. I'll ride the chestnut. I think you've got on well enough not to go and cut Belinda's mouth up.'

Belinda was the Arab mare. Verrall had owned her two years, and till this moment he had never once allowed anyone else to mount her, not even the syce. It was the greatest favour that he could imagine. And so perfectly did Elizabeth appreciate Verrall's point of view that she understood the greatness of the favour, and was thankful.

The next evening, as they rode home side by side, Verrall put his arm round Elizabeth's shoulder, lifted her out of the saddle and pulled her against him. He was very strong. He dropped the bridle, and with his free hand, lifted her face up to meet his; their mouths met. For a moment he held her so, then lowered her to the ground and slipped from his horse. They stood embraced, their thin, drenched shirts pressed together, the two bridles held in the crook of his arm.

It was about the same time that Flory, twenty miles away, decided to come back to Kyauktada. He was standing at the jungle's edge by the bank of a dried-up stream, where he had walked to tire himself, watching some tiny, nameless finches eating the seeds of the tall grasses. The cocks were chrome-yellow, the hens like hen sparrows. Too tiny to bend the stalks, they came whirring towards them, seized them in midflight and bore them to the ground by their own weight. Flory watched the birds incuriously, and almost hated them because they could light no spark of interest in him. In his idleness he flung his dah at them, scaring them away. If she were here, if she were

here! Everything — birds, trees, flowers, everything — was deadly and meaningless because she was not here. As the days passed the knowledge that he had lost her had grown surer and more actual until it poisoned every moment.

He loitered a little way into the jungle, flicking at creepers with his dah. His limbs felt slack and leaden. He noticed a wild vanilla plant trailing over a bush, and bent down to sniff at its slender, fragrant pods. The scent brought him a feeling of staleness and deadly ennui. Alone, alone, in the sea of life enisled! The pain was so great that he struck his fist against a tree, jarring his arm and splitting two knuckles. He must go back to Kyauktada. It was folly, for barely a fortnight had passed since the scene between them, and his only chance was to give her time to forget it. Still, he must go back. He could not stay any longer in this deadly place, alone with his thoughts among the endless, mindless leaves.

A happy thought occurred to him. He could take Elizabeth the leopard-skin that was being cured for her in the jail. It would be a pretext for seeing her, and when one comes bearing gifts one is generally listened to. This time he would not let her cut him short without a word. He would explain, extenuate — make her realize that she had been unjust to him. It was not right that she should condemn him because of Ma Hla May, whom he had turned out of doors for Elizabeth's own sake. Surely she must forgive him when she heard the truth of the story? And this time she SHOULD hear it; he would force her to listen to him if he had to hold her by the arms while he did it.

He went back the same evening. It was a twenty-mile journey, by rutted cart-tracks, but Flory decided to march by night, giving the reason that it was cooler. The servants almost mutinied at the idea of a night-march, and at the very last moment old Sammy collapsed in a semi-genuine fit and had to be plied with gin before he could start. It was a moonless night. They made their way by the light of lanterns, in which Flo's eyes gleamed like emeralds and the bullocks' eyes like moonstones. When the sun was up the servants halted to gather sticks and cook breakfast, but Flory was in a fever to be at Kyauktada, and he hurried ahead. He had no feeling of tiredness. The thought of the leopard-skin had filled him with extravagant hopes.

He crossed the glittering river by sampan and went straight to Dr Veraswami's bungalow, getting there about ten.

The doctor invited him to breakfast, and — having shooed the women into some suitable hiding-place — took him into his own bath-room so that he could wash and shave. At breakfast the doctor was very excited and full of denunciations of 'the crocodile'; for it appeared that the pseudo-rebellion was now on the point of breaking out. It was not till after breakfast that Flory had an opportunity to mention the leopard-skin.

'Oh, by the way, doctor. What about that skin I sent to the jail to be cured? Is it done yet?'

'Ah— ' said the doctor in a slightly disconcerted manner, rubbing his nose. He went inside the house — they were breakfasting on the veranda, for the doctor's wife had protested violently against Flory being brought indoors — and came back in a moment with the skin rolled up in a bundle.

'Ass a matter of fact— ' he began, unrolling it.

'Oh, doctor!'

The skin had been utterly ruined. It was as stiff as cardboard, with the leather cracked and the fur discoloured and even rubbed off in patches. It also stank abominably. Instead of being cured, it had been converted into a piece of rubbish.

'Oh, doctor! What a mess they've made of it! How the devil did it happen?'

'I am so sorry, my friend! I wass about to apologize. It wass the best we could do. There iss no one at the jail who knows how to cure skins now.'

'But, damn it, that convict used to cure them so beautifully!'

'Ah, yes. But he iss gone from us these three weeks, alas.'

'Gone? I thought he was doing seven years?'

'What? Did you not hear, my friend? I thought you knew who it wass that used to cure the skins. It was Nga Shwe O.'

'Nga Shwe O?'

'The dacoit who escaped with U Po Kyin's assistance.'

'Oh, hell!'

The mishap had daunted him dreadfully. Nevertheless, in the afternoon, having bathed and put on a clean suit, he went up to the

Lackersteens' house, at about four. It was very early to call, but he wanted to make sure of catching Elizabeth before she went down to the Club. Mrs Lackersteen, who had been asleep and was not prepared for visitors, received him with an ill grace, not even asking him to sit down.

'I'm afraid Elizabeth isn't down yet. She's dressing to go out riding. Wouldn't it be better if you left a message?'

'I'd like to see her, if you don't mind. I've brought her the skin of that leopard we shot together.'

Mrs Lackersteen left him standing up in the drawing-room, feeling lumpish and abnormally large as one does at such times. However, she fetched Elizabeth, taking the opportunity of whispering to her outside the door: 'Get rid of that dreadful man as soon as you can, dear. I can't bear him about the house at this time of day.'

As Elizabeth entered the room Flory's heart pounded so violently that a reddish mist passed behind his eyes. She was wearing a silk shirt and jodhpurs, and she was a little sunburned. Even in his memory she had never been so beautiful. He quailed; on the instant he was lost — every scrap of his screwed-up courage had fled. Instead of stepping forward to meet her he actually backed away. There was a fearful crash behind him; he had upset an occasional table and sent a bowl of zinnias hurtling across the floor.

'I'm so sorry!' he exclaimed in horror.

'Oh, not at ALL! PLEASE don't worry about it!'

She helped him to pick up the table, chattering all the while as gaily and easily as though nothing had happened: 'You HAVE been away a long time, Mr Flory! You're quite a STRANGER! We've SO missed you at the Club!' etc., etc. She was italicizing every other word, with that deadly, glittering brightness that a woman puts on when she is dodging a moral obligation. He was terrified of her. He could not even look her in the face. She took up a box of cigarettes and offered him one, but he refused it. His hand was shaking too much to take it.

'I've brought you that skin,' he said flatly.

He unrolled it on the table they had just picked up. It looked so shabby and miserable that he wished he had never brought it. She

came close to him to examine the skin, so close that her flower-like cheek was not a foot from his own, and he could feel the warmth of her body. So great was his fear of her that he stepped hurriedly away. And in the same moment she too stepped back with a wince of disgust, having caught the foul odour of the skin. It shamed him terribly. It was almost as though it had been himself and not the skin that stank.

'Thank you EVER so much, Mr Flory!' She had put another yard between herself and the skin. 'Such a LOVELY big skin, isn't it?'

'It was, but they've spoiled it, I'm afraid.'

'Oh no! I shall love having it! — Are you back in Kyauktada for long? How dreadfully hot it must have been in camp!'

'Yes, it's been very hot.'

For three minutes they actually talked of the weather. He was helpless. All that he had promised himself to say, all his arguments and pleadings, had withered in his throat. 'You fool, you fool,' he thought, 'what are you doing? Did you come twenty miles for this? Go on, say what you came to say! Seize her in your arms; make her listen, kick her, beat her — anything sooner than let her choke you with this drivel!' But it was hopeless, hopeless. Not a word could his tongue utter except futile trivialities. How could he plead or argue, when that bright easy air of hers, that dragged every word to the level of Club-chatter silenced him before he spoke? Where do they learn it, that dreadful tee-heeing brightness? In these brisk modern girls' schools, no doubt. The piece of carrion on the table made him more ashamed every moment. He stood there almost voiceless, lumpishly ugly with his face yellow and creased after the sleepless night, and his birthmark like a smear of dirt.

She got rid of him after a very few minutes. 'And now, Mr Flory, if you DON'T mind, I ought really— '

He mumbled rather than said, 'Won't you come out with me again some time? Walking, shooting — something?'

'I have so LITTLE time nowadays! ALL my evenings seem to be full. This evening I'm going out riding. With Mr Verrall,' she added.

It was possible that she added that in order to wound him. This was the first that he had heard of her friendship with Verrall. He could not keep the dread, flat tone of envy out of his voice as he said:

‘Do you go out riding much with Verrall?’

‘Almost every evening. He’s such a wonderful horseman! And he has absolute STRINGS of polo ponies!’

‘Ah. And of course I have no polo ponies.’

It was the first thing he had said that even approached seriousness, and it did no more than offend her. However, she answered him with the same gay easy air as before, and then showed him out. Mrs Lackersteen came back to the drawing-room, sniffed the air, and immediately ordered the servants to take the reeking leopard-skin outside and burn it.

Flory lounged at his garden gate, pretending to feed the pigeons. He could not deny himself the pain of seeing Elizabeth and Verrall start on their ride. How vulgarly, how cruelly she had behaved to him! It is dreadful when people will not even have the decency to quarrel. Presently Verrall rode up to the Lackersteens’ house on the white pony, with a syce riding the chestnut, then there was a pause, then they emerged together, Verrall on the chestnut pony, Elizabeth on the white, and trotted quickly up the hill. They were chattering and laughing, her silk-shirted shoulder very close to his. Neither looked towards Flory.

When they had disappeared into the jungle, Flory still loafed in the garden. The glare was waning to yellow. The mali was at work grubbing up the English flowers, most of which had died, slain by too much sunshine, and planting balsams, cockscombs, and more zinnias. An hour passed, and a melancholy, earth-coloured Indian loitered up the drive, dressed in a loin-cloth and a salmon-pink pagri on which a washing-basket was balanced. He laid down his basket and salaamed to Flory.

‘Who are you?’

‘Book-wallah, sahib.’

The book-wallah was an itinerant peddler of books who wandered from station to station throughout Upper Burma. His system of exchange was that for any book in his bundle you gave him four annas, and any other book. Not quite ANY book, however, for the book-wallah, though analphabetic, had learned to recognize and refuse a Bible.

‘No, sahib,’ he would say plaintively, ‘no. This book (he would

turn it over disapprovingly in his flat brown hands) this book with a black cover and gold letters — this one I cannot take. I know not how it is, but all sahibs are offering me this book, and none are taking it. What can it be that is in this black book? Some evil, undoubtedly.'

'Turn out your trash,' Flory said.

He hunted among them for a good thriller — Edgar Wallace or Agatha Christie or something; anything to still the deadly restlessness that was at his heart. As he bent over the books he saw that both Indians were exclaiming and pointing towards the edge of the jungle.

'Dekko!' said the mali in his plum-in-the-mouth voice.

The two ponies were emerging from the jungle. But they were riderless. They came trotting down the hill with the silly guilty air of a horse that has escaped from its master, with the stirrups swinging and clashing under their bellies.

Flory remained unconsciously clasping one of the books against his chest. Verrall and Elizabeth had dismounted. It was not an accident; by no effort of the mind could one imagine Verrall falling off his horse. They had dismounted, and the ponies had escaped.

They had dismounted — for what? Ah, but he knew for what! It was not a question of suspecting; he KNEW. He could see the whole thing happening, in one of those hallucinations that are so perfect in detail, so vilely obscene, that they are past bearing. He threw the book violently down and made for the house, leaving the book-wallah disappointed. The servants heard him moving about indoors, and presently he called for a bottle of whisky. He had a drink and it did him no good. Then he filled a tumbler two-thirds full, added enough water to make it drinkable, and swallowed it. The filthy, nauseous dose was no sooner down his throat than he repeated it. He had done the same thing in camp once, years ago, when he was tortured by toothache and three hundred miles from a dentist. At seven Ko S'la came in as usual to say that the bath-water was hot. Flory was lying in one of the long chairs, with his coat off and his shirt torn open at the throat.

'Your bath, thakin,' said Ko S'la.

Flory did not answer, and Ko S'la touched his arm, thinking him

asleep. Flory was much too drunk to move. The empty bottle had rolled across the floor, leaving a trail of whisky-drops behind it. Ko S'la called for Ba Pe and picked up the bottle, clicking his tongue.

'Just look at this! He has drunk more than three-quarters of a bottle!'

'What, again? I thought he had given up drinking?'

'It is that accursed woman, I suppose. Now we must carry him carefully. You take his heels, I'll take his head. That's right. Hoist him up!'

They carried Flory into the other room and laid him gently on the bed.

'Is he really going to marry this "Ingaleikma"?' said Ba Pe.

'Heaven knows. She is the mistress of the young police officer at present, so I was told. Their ways are not our ways. I think I know what he will be wanting tonight,' he added as he undid Flory's braces — for Ko S'la had the art, so necessary in a bachelor's servant, of undressing his master without waking him.

The servants were rather more pleased than not to see this return to bachelor habits. Flory woke about midnight, naked in a pool of sweat. His head felt as though some large, sharp-cornered metal object were bumping about inside it. The mosquito net was up, and a young woman was sitting beside the bed fanning him with a wicker fan. She had an agreeable negroid face, bronze-gold in the candlelight. She explained that she was a prostitute, and that Ko S'la had engaged her on his own responsibility for a fee of ten rupees.

Flory's head was splitting. 'For God's sake get me something to drink,' he said feebly to the woman. She brought him some soda-water which Ko S'la had cooled in readiness and soaked a towel and put a wet compress round his forehead. She was a fat, good-tempered creature. She told him that her name was Ma Sein Galay, and that besides plying her other trade she sold paddy baskets in the bazaar near Li Yeik's shop. Flory's head felt better presently, and he asked for a cigarette; whereupon Ma Sein Galay, having fetched the cigarette, said naively, 'Shall I take my clothes off now, thakin?'

Why not? he thought dimly. He made room for her in the bed. But when he smelled the familiar scent of garlic and coco-nut oil, something painful happened within him, and with his head pillowed

on Ma Sein Galay's fat shoulder he actually wept, a thing he had not done since he was fifteen years old.

Chapter 20

Next morning there was great excitement in Kyauktada, for the long-rumoured rebellion had at last broken out. Flory heard only a vague report of it at the time. He had gone back to camp as soon as he felt fit to march after the drunken night, and it was not until several days later that he learned the true history of the rebellion, in a long, indignant letter from Dr Veraswami.

The doctor's epistolary style was queer. His syntax was shaky and he was as free with capital letters as a seventeenth-century divine, while in the use of italics he rivalled Queen Victoria. There were eight pages of his small but sprawling handwriting.

MY DEAR FRIEND [the letter ran], — You will much regret to hear that the WILES OF THE CROCODILE have matured. The rebellion — the SO-CALLED rebellion — is all over and finished. And it has been, alas! a more Bloody affair than I had hoped should have been the case.

All has fallen out as I have prophesied to you it would be. On the day when you came back to Kyauktada U Po Kyin's SPIES have informed him that the poor unfortunate men whom he have Deluded are assembling in the jungle near Thongwa. The same night he sets out secretly with U Lugale, the Police Inspector, who is as great a Rogue as he, if that could be, and twelve constables. They make a swift raid upon Thongwa and surprise the rebels, of whom they are only Seven!! in a ruined field hut in the jungle. Also Mr Maxwell, who have heard rumours of the rebellion, came across from his camp bringing his Rifle and was in time to join U Po Kyin and the police in their attack on the hut. The next morning the clerk Ba Sein, who is U Po Kyin's JACKALL and DIRTY WORKER, have orders to raise the cry of rebellion as Sensationally as possible, which was done, and Mr Macgregor, Mr Westfield and Lieutenant Verrall all rush out to Thongwa carrying fifty sepoys armed with rifles besides Civil Police. But they arrive to find it is all over and U Po Kyin was sitting under a big teak tree in the middle of the village and PUTTING ON AIRS and lecturing the villages, whereat they are all bowing very frightened and touching the ground with their foreheads and

swearing they will be forever loyal to the Government, and the rebellion is already at an end. The SO-CALLED weiksa, who is no other than a circus conjurer and the MINION of U Po Kyin, have vanished for parts unknown, but six rebels have been Caught. So there is an end.

Also I should inform you that there was most regrettably a Death. Mr Maxwell was I think TOO ANXIOUS to use his Rifle and when one of the rebels try to run away he fired and shoot him in the abdomen, at which he died. I think the villagers have some BAD FEELING towards Mr Maxwell because of it. But from the point of view legal all is well for Mr Maxwell, because the men were undoubtedly conspiring against the Government.

Ah, but, my Friend, I trust that you understand how disastrous may all this be for me! You will realise, I think, what is its bearing upon the Contest between U Po Kyin and myself, and the supreme LEG-UP it must give to him. It is the TRIUMPH OF THE CROCODILE. U Po Kyin is now the Hero of the district. He is the PET of the Europeans. I am told that even Mr Ellis has praised his conduct. If you could witness the abominable Conceitedness and the LIES he is now telling as to how there were not seven rebels but Two Hundred!! and how he crushed upon them revolver in hand — he who only directing operations from a SAFE DISTANCE while the police and Mr Maxwell creep up upon the hut — you would find is veritably Nauseous I assure you. He has had the effrontery to send in an official report of the matter which started, 'By my loyal promptitude and reckless daring', and I hear that positively he had had this Conglomeration of lies written out in readiness days BEFORE THE OCCURRENCE. It is Disgusting. And to think that now when he is at the Height of his triumph he will again begin to calumniate me with all the venom at his disposal etc. etc.

The rebels' entire stock of weapons had been captured. The armoury with which, when their followers were assembled, they had proposed to march upon Kyauktada, consisted of the following:

Item, one shotgun with a damaged left barrel, stolen from a Forest Officer three years earlier.

Item, six home-made guns with barrels of zinc piping stolen from the railway. These could be fired, after a fashion, by thrusting a nail

through the touch-hole and striking it with a stone.

Item, thirty-nine twelve-bore cartridges.

Item, eleven dummy guns carved out of teakwood.

Item, some large Chinese crackers which were to have been fired in terrorem.

Later, two of the rebels were sentenced to fifteen years' transportation, three to three years' imprisonment and twenty-five lashes, and one to two years' imprisonment.

The whole miserable rebellion was so obviously at an end that the Europeans were not considered to be in any danger, and Maxwell had gone back to his camp unguarded. Flory intended to stay in camp until the rains broke, or at least until the general meeting at the Club. He had promised to be in for that, to propose the doctor's election; though now, with his own trouble to think of, the whole business of the intrigue between U Po Kyin and the doctor sickened him.

More weeks crawled by. The heat was dreadful now. The overdue rain seemed to have bred a fever in the air. Flory was out of health, and worked incessantly, worrying over petty jobs that should have been left to the overseer, and making the coolies and even the servants hate him. He drank gin at all hours, but not even drinking could distract him now. The vision of Elizabeth in Verrall's arms haunted him like a neuralgia or an earache. At any moment it would come upon him, vivid and disgusting, scattering his thoughts, wrenching him back from the brink of sleep, turning his food to dust in his mouth. At times he flew into savage rages, and once even struck Ko S'la. What was worse than all was the DETAIL — the always filthy detail — in which the imagined scene appeared. The very perfection of the detail seemed to prove that it was true.

Is there anything in the world more graceless, more dishonouring, than to desire a woman whom you will never have? Throughout all these weeks Flory's mind held hardly a thought which was not murderous or obscene. It is the common effect of jealousy. Once he had loved Elizabeth spiritually, sentimentally indeed, desiring her sympathy more than her caresses; now, when he had lost her, he was tormented by the basest physical longing. He did not even idealize her any longer. He saw her now almost as she was — silly, snobbish, heartless — and it made no difference to his longing for her. Does it

ever make any difference? At nights when he lay awake, his bed dragged outside the tent for coolness, looking at the velvet dark from which the barking of a gyi sometimes sounded, he hated himself for the images that inhabited his mind. It was so base, this envying of the better man who had beaten him. For it was only envy — even jealousy was too good a name for it. What right had he to be jealous? He had offered himself to a girl who was too young and pretty for him, and she had turned him down — rightly. He had got the snub he deserved. Nor was there any appeal from that decision; nothing would ever make him young again, or take away his birthmark and his decade of lonely debaucheries. He could only stand and look on while the better man took her, and envy him, like — but the simile was not even mentionable. Envy is a horrible thing. It is unlike all other kinds of suffering in that there is no disguising it, no elevating it into tragedy. It is more than merely painful, it is disgusting.

But meanwhile, was it true, what he suspected? Had Verrall really become Elizabeth's lover? There is no knowing, but on the whole the chances were against it, for, had it been so, there would have been no concealing it in such a place as Kyauktada. Mrs Lackersteen would probably have guessed it, even if the others had not. One thing was certain, however, and that was that Verrall had as yet made no proposal of marriage. A week went by, two weeks, three weeks; three weeks is a very long time in a small Indian station. Verrall and Elizabeth rode together every evening, danced together every night; yet Verrall had never so much as entered the Lackersteens' house. There was endless scandal about Elizabeth, of course. All the Orientals of the town had taken it for granted that she was Verrall's mistress. U Po Kyin's version (he had a way of being essentially right even when he was wrong in detail) was that Elizabeth had been Flory's concubine and had deserted him for Verrall because Verrall paid her more. Ellis, too, was inventing tales about Elizabeth that made Mr Macgregor squirm. Mrs Lackersteen, as a relative, did not hear these scandals, but she was growing nervous. Every evening when Elizabeth came home from her ride she would meet her hopefully, expecting the 'Oh, aunt! What DO you think!' — and then the glorious news. But the news never came, and however carefully she studied Elizabeth's face, she could divine nothing.

When three weeks had passed Mrs Lackersteen became fretful and finally half angry. The thought of her husband, alone — or rather, not alone — in his camp, was troubling her. After all, she had sent him back to camp in order to give Elizabeth her chance with Verrall (not that Mrs Lackersteen would have put it so vulgarly as that). One evening she began lecturing and threatening Elizabeth in her oblique way. The conversation consisted of a sighing monologue with very long pauses — for Elizabeth made no answer whatever.

Mrs Lackersteen began with some general remarks, apropos of a photograph in the Tatler, about these fast MODERN girls who went about in beach pyjamas and all that and made themselves so dreadfully CHEAP with men. A girl, Mrs Lackersteen said, should NEVER make herself too cheap with a man; she should make herself — but the opposite of 'cheap' seemed to be 'expensive', and that did not sound at all right, so Mrs Lackersteen changed her tack. She went on to tell Elizabeth about a letter she had had from home with further news of that poor, POOR dear girl who was out in Burma for a while and had so foolishly neglected to get married. Her sufferings had been quite heartrending, and it just showed how glad a girl ought to be to marry anyone, literally ANYONE. It appeared that the poor, poor dear girl had lost her job and been practically STARVING for a long time, and now she had actually had to take a job as a common kitchen maid under a horrid, vulgar cook who bullied her most shockingly. And it seemed that the black beetles in the kitchen were simply beyond belief! Didn't Elizabeth think it too absolutely dreadful? BLACK BEETLES!

Mrs Lackersteen remained silent for some time, to allow the black beetles to sink in, before adding:

'SUCH a pity that Mr Verrall will be leaving us when the rains break. Kyauktada will seem quite EMPTY without him!'

'When do the rains break, usually?' said Elizabeth as indifferently as she could manage.

'About the beginning of June, up here. Only a week or two now. . . . My dear, it seems absurd to mention it again, but I cannot get out of my head the thought of that poor, poor dear girl in the kitchen among the BLACK BEETLES!'

Black beetles recurred more than once in Mrs Lackersteen's

conversation during the rest of the evening. It was not until the following day that she remarked in the tone of someone dropping an unimportant piece of gossip:

'By the way, I believe Flory is coming back to Kyauktada at the beginning of June. He said he was going to be in for the general meeting at the Club. Perhaps we might invite him to dinner some time.'

It was the first time that either of them had mentioned Flory since the day when he had brought Elizabeth the leopard-skin. After being virtually forgotten for several weeks, he had returned to each woman's mind, a depressing pis aller.

Three days later Mrs Lackersteen sent word to her husband to come back to Kyauktada. He had been in camp long enough to earn a short spell in headquarters. He came back, more florid than ever — sunburn, he explained — and having acquired such a trembling of the hands that he could barely light a cigarette. Nevertheless, that evening he celebrated his return by manoeuvring Mrs Lackersteen out of the house, coming into Elizabeth's bedroom and making a spirited attempt to rape her.

During all this time, unknown to anyone of importance, further sedition was afoot. The 'weiksa' (now far away, peddling the philosopher's stone to innocent villagers in Martaban) had perhaps done his job a little better than he intended. At any rate, there was a possibility of fresh trouble — some isolated, futile outrage, probably. Even U Po Kyin knew nothing of this yet. But as usual the gods were fighting on his side, for any further rebellion would make the first seem more serious than it had been, and so add to his glory.

Chapter 21

O western wind, when wilt thou blow, that the small rain down can rain? It was the first of June, the day of the general meeting, and there had not been a drop of rain yet. As Flory came up the Club path the sun of afternoon, slanting beneath his hat-brim, was still savage enough to scorch his neck uncomfortably. The mali staggered along the path, his breast-muscles slippery with sweat, carrying two kerosene-tins of water on a yoke. He dumped them down, slopping a little water over his lank brown feet, and salaamed to Flory.

'Well, mali, is the rain coming?'

The man gestured vaguely towards the west. 'The hills have captured it, sahib.'

Kyauktada was ringed almost round by hills, and these caught the earlier showers, so that sometimes no rain fell till almost the end of June. The earth of the flower-beds, hoed into large untidy lumps, looked grey and hard as concrete. Flory went into the lounge and found Westfield loafing by the veranda, looking out over the river, for the chicks had been rolled up. At the foot of the veranda a chokra lay on his back in the sun, pulling the punkah rope with his heel and shading his face with a broad strip of banana leaf.

'Hullo, Flory! You've got thin as a rake.'

'So've you.'

'H'm, yes. Bloody weather. No appetite except for booze. Christ, won't I be glad when I hear the frogs start croaking. Let's have a spot before the others come. Butler!'

'Do you know who's coming to the meeting?' Flory said, when the butler had brought whisky and tepid soda.

'Whole crowd, I believe. Lackersteen got back from camp three days ago. By God, that man's been having the time of his life away from his missus! My inspector was telling me about the goings-on at his camp. Tarts by the score. Must have imported 'em specially from Kyauktada. He'll catch it all right when the old woman sees his Club bill. Eleven bottles of whisky sent out to his camp in a fortnight.'

'Is young Verrall coming?'

'No, he's only a temporary member. Not that he'd trouble to come

anyway, young tick. Maxwell won't be here either. Can't leave camp just yet, he says. He sent word Ellis was to speak for him if there's any voting to be done. Don't suppose there'll be anything to vote about, though eh?' he added, looking at Flory obliquely, for both of them remembered their previous quarrel on this subject.

'I suppose it lies with Macgregor.'

'What I mean is, Macgregor'll have dropped that bloody rot about electing a native member, eh? Not the moment for it just now. After the rebellion and all that.'

'What about the rebellion, by the way?' said Flory. He did not want to start wrangling about the doctor's election yet. There was going to be trouble and to spare in a few minutes. 'Any more news — are they going to have another try, do you think?'

'No. All over, I'm afraid. They caved in like the funks they are. The whole district's as quiet as a bloody girls' school. Most disappointing.'

Flory's heart missed a beat. He had heard Elizabeth's voice in the next room. Mr Macgregor came in at this moment, Ellis and Mr Lackersteen following. This made up the full quota, for the women members of the Club had no votes. Mr Macgregor was already dressed in a silk suit, and was carrying the Club account books under his arm. He managed to bring a sub-official air even into such petty business as a Club meeting.

'As we seem to be all here,' he said after the usual greetings, 'shall we — ah — proceed with our labours?'

'Lead on, Macduff,' said Westfield, sitting down.

'Call the butler, someone, for Christ's sake,' said Mr Lackersteen. 'I daren't let my missus hear me calling him.'

'Before we apply ourselves to the agenda,' said Mr Macgregor when he had refused a drink and the others had taken one, 'I expect you will want me to run through the accounts for the half-year?'

They did not want it particularly, but Mr Macgregor, who enjoyed this kind of thing, ran through the accounts with great thoroughness. Flory's thoughts were wandering. There was going to be such a row in a moment — oh, such a devil of a row! They would be furious when they found that he was proposing the doctor after all. And Elizabeth was in the next room. God send she didn't hear the noise of

the row when it came. It would make her despise him all the more to see the others baiting him. Would he see her this evening? Would she speak to him? He gazed across the quarter-mile of gleaming river. By the far bank a knot of men, one of them wearing a green gaungbaung, were waiting beside a sampan. In the channel, by the nearer bank, a huge, clumsy Indian barge struggled with desperate slowness against the racing current. At each stroke the ten rowers, Dravidian starvelings, ran forward and plunged their long primitive oars, with heart-shaped blades, into the water. They braced their meagre bodies, then tugged, writhed, strained backwards like agonized creatures of black rubber, and the ponderous hull crept onwards a yard or two. Then the rowers sprang forward, panting, to plunge their oars again before the current should check her.

'And now,' said Mr Macgregor more gravely, 'we come to the main point of the agenda. That, of course, is this — ah — distasteful question, which I am afraid must be faced, of electing a native member to this Club. When we discussed the matter before— '

'What the hell!'

It was Ellis who had interrupted. He was so excited that he had sprung to his feet.

'What the hell! Surely we aren't starting THAT over again? Talk about electing a damned nigger so this Club, after everything that's happened! Good God, I thought even Flory had dropped it by this time!'

'Our friend Ellis appears surprised. The matter has been discussed before, I believe.'

'I should think it damned well was discussed before! And we all said what we thought of it. By God— '

'If our friend Ellis will sit down for a few moments— ' said Mr Macgregor tolerantly.

Ellis threw himself into his chair again, exclaiming, 'Bloody rubbish!' Beyond the river Flory could see the group of Burmans embarking. They were lifting a long, awkward-shaped bundle into the sampan. Mr Macregor had produced a letter from his file of papers.

'Perhaps I had better explain how this question arose in the first place. The Commissioner tells me that a circular has been sent round

by the Government, suggesting that in those Clubs where there are no native members, one at least shall be co-opted; that is, admitted automatically. The circular says — ah yes! here it is: "It is mistaken policy to offer social affronts to native officials of high standing." I may say that I disagree most emphatically. No doubt we all do. We who have to do the actual work of government see things very differently from these — ah — Paget M.P.s who interfere with us from above. The Commissioner quite agrees with me. However— '

'But it's all bloody rot!' broke in Ellis. 'What's it got to do with the Commissioner or anyone else? Surely we can do as we like in our own bloody Club? They've no right to dictate to us when we're off duty.'

'Quite,' said Westfield.

'You anticipate me. I told the Commissioner that I should have to put the matter before the other members. And the course he suggests is this. If the idea finds any support in the Club, he thinks it would be better if we co-opted our native member. On the other hand, if the entire Club is against it, it can be dropped. That is, if opinion is quite unanimous.'

'Well, it damned well is unanimous,' said Ellis.

'D'you mean,' said Westfield, 'that it depends on ourselves whether we have 'em in here or no?'

'I fancy we can take it as meaning that.'

'Well, then, let's say we're against it to a man.'

'And say it bloody firmly, by God. We want to put our foot down on this idea once and for all.'

'Hear, hear!' said Mr Lackersteen gruffly. 'Keep the black swabs out of it. Esprit de corps and all that.'

Mr Lackersteen could always be relied upon for sound sentiments in a case like this. In his heart he did not care and never had cared a damn for the British Raj, and he was as happy drinking with an Oriental as with a white man; but he was always ready with a loud 'Hear, hear!' when anyone suggested the bamboo for disrespectful servants or boiling oil for Nationalists. He prided himself that though he might booze a bit and all that, dammit, he WAS loyal. It was his form of respectability. Mr Macgregor was secretly rather relieved by the general agreement. If any Oriental member were co-opted, that

member would have to be Dr Veraswami, and he had had the deepest distrust of the doctor ever since Nga Shwe O's suspicious escape from the jail.

'Then I take it that you are all agreed?' he said. 'If so, I will inform the Commissioner. Otherwise, we must begin discussing the candidate for election.'

Flory stood up. He had got to say his say. His heart seemed to have risen into his throat and to be choking him. From what Mr Macgregor had said, it was clear that it was in his power to secure the doctor's election by speaking the word. But oh, what a bore, what a nuisance it was! What an infernal uproar there would be! How he wished he had never given the doctor that promise! No matter, he had given it, and he could not break it. So short a time ago he would have broken it, en bon pukka sahib, how easily! But not now. He had got to see this thing through. He turned himself sidelong so that his birthmark was away from the others. Already he could feel his voice going flat and guilty.

'Our friend Flory has something to suggest?'

'Yes. I propose Dr Veraswami as a member of this Club.'

There was such a yell of dismay from three of the others that Mr Macgregor had to rap sharply on the table and remind them that the ladies were in the next room. Ellis took not the smallest notice. He had sprung to his feet again, and the skin round his nose had gone quite grey. He and Flory remained facing one another, as though on the point of blows.

'Now, you damned swab, will you take that back?'

'No, I will not.'

'You oily swine! You nigger's Nancy Boy! You crawling, sneaking, — bloody bastard!'

'Order!' exclaimed Mr Macgregor.

'But look at him, look at him!' cried Ellis almost tearfully. 'Letting us all down for the sake of a pot-bellied nigger! After all we've said to him! When we've only got to hang together and we can keep the stink of garlic out of this Club for ever. My God, wouldn't it make you spew your guts up to see anyone behaving like such a — ?'

'Take it back, Flory, old man!' said Westfield. 'Don't be a bloody

fool!'

'Downright Bolshevism, dammit!' said Mr Lackersteen.

'Do you think I care what you say? What business is it of yours? It's for Macgregor to decide.'

'Then do you — ah — adhere to your decision?' said Mr Macgregor gloomily.

'Yes.'

Mr Macgregor sighed. 'A pity! Well, in that case I suppose I have no choice— '

'No, no, no!' cried Ellis, dancing about in his rage. 'Don't give in to him! Put it to the vote. And if that son of a bitch doesn't put in a black ball like the rest of us, we'll first turf him out of the Club himself, and then — well! Butler!'

'Sahib!' said the butler, appearing.

'Bring the ballot box and the balls. Now clear out!' he added roughly when the butler had obeyed.

The air had gone very stagnant; for some reason the punkah had stopped working. Mr Macgregor stood up with a disapproving but judicial mien, taking the two drawers of black and white balls out of the ballot box.

'We must proceed in order. Mr Flory proposes Dr Veraswami, the Civil Surgeon, as a member of this Club. Mistaken, in my opinion, greatly mistaken; however — ! Before putting the matter to the vote — '

'Oh, why make a song and dance about it?' said Ellis. 'Here's my contribution! And another for Maxwell.' He plumped two black balls into the box. Then one of his sudden spasms of rage seized him, and he took the drawer of white balls and pitched them across the floor. They went flying in all directions. 'There! Now pick one up if you want to use it!'

'You damned fool! What good do you think that does?'

'Sahib!'

They all started and looked round. The chokra was goggling at them over the veranda rail, having climbed up from below. With one skinny arm he clung to the rail and with the other gesticulated towards the river.

'Sahib! Sahib!'

‘What’s up?’ said Westfield.

They all moved for the window. The sampan that Flory had seen across the river was lying under the bank at the foot of the lawn, one of the men clinging to a bush to steady it. The Burman in the green gaungbaung was climbing out.

‘That’s one of Maxwell’s Forest Rangers!’ said Ellis in quite a different voice. ‘By God! something’s happened!’

The Forest Ranger saw Mr Macgregor, shikoed in a hurried, preoccupied way and turned back to the sampan. Four other men, peasants, climbed out after him, and with difficulty lifted ashore the strange bundle that Flory had seen in the distance. It was six feet long, swathed in cloths, like a mummy. Something happened in everybody’s entrails. The Forest Ranger glanced at the veranda, saw that there was no way up, and led the peasants round the path to the front of the Club. They had hoisted the bundle on to their shoulders as funeral bearers hoist a coffin. The butler had flitted into the lounge again, and even his face was pale after its fashion — that is, grey.

‘Butler!’ said Mr Macgregor sharply.

‘Sir!’

‘Go quickly and shut the door of the card-room. Keep it shut. Don’t let the memsahibs see.’

‘Yes, sir!’

The Burmans, with their burden, came heavily down the passage. As they entered the leading man staggered and almost fell; he had trodden on one of the white balls that were scattered about the floor. The Burmans knelt down, lowered their burden to the floor and stood over it with a strange reverent air, slightly bowing, their hands together in a shiko. Westfield had fallen on his knees, and he pulled back the cloth.

‘Christ! Just look at him!’ he said, but without much surprise. ‘Just look at the poor little b — !’

Mr Lackersteen had retreated to the other end of the room, with a bleating noise. From the moment when the bundle was lifted ashore they had all known what it contained. It was the body of Maxwell, cut almost to pieces with dahs by two relatives of the man whom he had shot.

Chapter 22

Maxwell's death had caused a profound shock in Kyauktada. It would cause a shock throughout the whole of Burma, and the case—'the Kyauktada case, do you remember?' — would still be talked of years after the wretched youth's name was forgotten. But in a purely personal way no one was much distressed. Maxwell had been almost a nonentity — just a 'good fellow' like any other of the ten thousand ex colore good fellows of Burma — and with no close friends. No one among the Europeans genuinely mourned for him. But that is not to say that they were not angry. On the contrary, for the moment they were almost mad with rage. For the unforgivable had happened — A WHITE MAN had been killed. When that happens, a sort of shudder runs through the English of the East. Eight hundred people, possibly, are murdered every year in Burma; they matter nothing; but the murder of A WHITE MAN is a monstrosity, a sacrilege. Poor Maxwell would be avenged, that was certain. But only a servant or two, and the Forest Ranger who had brought in his body and who had been fond of him, shed any tears for his death.

On the other hand, no one was actually pleased, except U Po Kyin.

'This is a positive gift from heaven!' he told Ma Kin. 'I could not have arranged it better myself. The one thing I needed to make them take my rebellion seriously was a little bloodshed. And here it is! I tell you, Ma Kin, every day I grow more certain that some higher power is working on my behalf.'

'Ko Po Kyin, truly you are without shame! I do not know how you dare to say such things. Do you not shudder to have murder upon your soul?'

'What! I? Murder upon my soul? What are you talking about? I have never killed so much as a chicken in my life.'

'But you are profiting by this poor boy's death.'

'Profiting by it! Of course I am profiting by it! And why not, indeed? Am I to blame if somebody else choose to commit murder? The fisherman catches fish, and he is damned for it. But are we damned for eating the fish? Certainly not. Why NOT eat the fish,

once it is dead? You should study the Scriptures more carefully, my dear Kin Kin.'

The funeral took place next morning, before breakfast. All the Europeans were present, except Verrall, who was careering about the maidan quite as usual, almost opposite the cemetery. Mr Macgregor read the burial service. The little group of Englishmen stood round the grave, their topis in their hands, sweating into the dark suits that they had dug out from the bottom of their boxes. The harsh morning light beat without mercy upon their faces, yellower than ever against the ugly, shabby clothes. Every face except Elizabeth's looked lined and old. Dr Veraswami and half a dozen other Orientals were present, but they kept themselves decently in the background. There were sixteen gravestones in the little cemetery; assistants of timber firms, officials, soldiers killed in forgotten skirmishes.

'Sacred to the memory of John Henry Spagnall, late of the Indian Imperial Police, who was cut down by cholera while in the unremitting exercise of' etc., etc., etc.

Flory remembered Spagnall dimly. He had died very suddenly in camp after his second go of delirium tremens. In a corner there were some graves of Eurasians, with wooden crosses. The creeping jasmine, with tiny orange-hearted flowers, had overgrown everything. Among the jasmine, large rat-holes led down into the graves.

Mr Macgregor concluded the burial service in a ripe, reverent voice, and led the way out of the cemetery, holding his grey topi — the Eastern equivalent of a top hat — against his stomach. Flory lingered by the gate, hoping that Elizabeth would speak to him, but she passed him without a glance. Everyone had shunned him this morning. He was in disgrace; the murder had made his disloyalty of last night seem somehow horrible. Ellis had caught Westfield by the arm, and they halted at the grave-side, taking out their cigarette-cases. Flory could hear their slangy voices coming across the open grave.

'My God, Westfield, my God, when I think of that poor little b — lying down there — oh, my God, how my blood does boil! I couldn't sleep all night, I was so furious.'

'Pretty bloody, I grant. Never mind, promise you a couple of

chaps shall swing for it. Two corpses against their one — best we can do.'

'Two! It ought to be fifty! We've got to raise heaven and hell to get these fellows hanged. Have you got their names yet?'

'Yes, rather!! Whole blooming district knows who did it. We always do know who's done it in these cases. Getting the bloody villagers to talk — that's the only trouble.'

'Well, for God's sake get them to talk this time. Never mind the bloody law. Whack it out of them. Torture them — anything. If you want to bribe any witnesses, I'm good for a couple of hundred chips.'

Westfield sighed. 'Can't do that sort of thing, I'm afraid. Wish we could. My chaps'd know how to put the screw on a witness if you gave 'em the word. Tie 'em down on an ant-hill. Red peppers. But that won't do nowadays. Got to keep our own bloody silly laws. But never mind, those fellows'll swing all right. We've got all the evidence we want.'

'Good! And when you've arrested them, if you aren't sure of getting a conviction, shoot them, jolly well shoot them! Fake up an escape or something. Anything sooner than let those b — s go free.'

'They won't go free, don't you fear. We'll get 'em. Get SOMEBODY, anyhow. Much better hang wrong fellow than no fellow,' he added, unconsciously quoting.

'That's the stuff! I'll never sleep easy again till I've seen them swinging,' said Ellis as they moved away from the grave. 'Christ! Let's get out of this sun! I'm about perishing with thirst.'

Everyone was perishing, more or less, but it seemed hardly decent to go down to the Club for drinks immediately after the funeral. The Europeans scattered for their houses, while four sweepers with mamooties flung the grey, cement-like earth back into the grave, and shaped it into a rough mound.

After breakfast, Ellis was walking down to his office, cane in hand. It was blinding hot. Ellis had bathed and changed back into shirt and shorts, but wearing a thick suit even for an hour had brought on his prickly heat abominably. Westfield had gone out already, in his motor launch, with an inspector and half a dozen men, to arrest the murderers. He had ordered Verrall to accompany him — not that Verrall was needed, but, as Westfield said, it would do the

young swab good to have a spot of work.

Ellis wriggled his shoulders — his prickly heat was almost beyond bearing. The rage was stewing in his body like a bitter juice. He had brooded all night over what had happened. They had killed a white man, killed A WHITE MAN, the bloody sods, the sneaking, cowardly hounds! Oh, the swine, the swine, how they ought to be made to suffer for it! Why did we make these cursed kid-glove laws? Why did we take everything lying down? Just suppose this had happened in a German colony, before the War! The good old Germans! They knew how to treat the niggers. Reprisals! Rhinoceros hide whips! Raid their villages, kill their cattle, burn their crops, decimate them, blow them from the guns.

Ellis gazed into the horrible cascades of light that poured through the gaps in the trees. His greenish eyes were large and mournful. A mild, middle-aged Burman came by, balancing a huge bamboo, which he shifted from one shoulder to the other with a grunt as he passed Ellis. Ellis's grip tightened on his stick. If that swine, now, would only attack you! Or even insult you — anything, so that you had the right to smash him! If only these gutless curs would ever show fight in any conceivable way! Instead of just sneaking past you, keeping within the law so that you never had a chance to get back at them. Ah, for a real rebellion — martial law proclaimed and no quarter given! Lovely, sanguinary images moved through his mind. Shrieking mounds of natives, soldiers slaughtering them. Shoot them, ride them down, horses' hooves trample their guts out, whips cut their faces in slices!

Five High School boys came down the road abreast. Ellis saw them coming, a row of yellow, malicious faces — epicene faces, horribly smooth and young, grinning at him with deliberate insolence. It was in their minds to bait him, as a white man. Probably they had heard of the murder, and — being Nationalists, like all schoolboys — regarded it as a victory. They grinned full in Ellis's face as they passed him. They were trying openly to provoke him, and they knew that the law was on their side. Ellis felt his breast swell. The look of their faces, jeering at him like a row of yellow images, was maddening. He stopped short.

'Here! What are you laughing at, you young ticks?'

The boys turned.

'I said what the bloody hell are you laughing at?'

One of the boys answered, insolently — but perhaps his bad English made him seem more insolent than he intended.

'Not your business.'

There was about a second during which Ellis did not know what he was doing. In that second he had hit out with all his strength, and the cane landed, crack! right across the boy's eyes. The boy recoiled with a shriek, and in the same instant the other four had thrown themselves upon Ellis. But he was too strong for them. He flung them aside and sprang back, lashing out with his stick so furiously that none of them dared come near.

'Keep your distance, you — s! Keep off, or by God I'll smash another of you!' Though they were four to one he was so formidable that they surged back in fright. The boy who was hurt had fallen on his knees with his arms across his face, and was screaming 'I am blinded! I am blinded!' Suddenly the other four turned and darted for a pile of laterite, used for road-mending, which was twenty yards away. One of Ellis's clerks had appeared on the veranda of the office and was leaping up and down in agitation.

'Come up, sir come up at once. They will murder you!'

Ellis disdained to run, but he moved for the veranda steps. A lump of laterite came sailing through the air and shattered itself against a pillar, whereat the clerk scooted indoors. But Ellis turned on the veranda to face the boys, who were below, each carrying an armful of laterite. He was cackling with delight.

'You damned, dirty little niggers!' he shouted down at them. 'You got a surprise that time, didn't you? Come up on this veranda and fight me, all four of you! You daren't. Four to one and you daren't face me! Do you call yourselves men? You sneaking, mangy little rats!'

He broke into Burmese, calling them the incestuous children of pigs. All the while they were pelting him with lumps of laterite, but their arms were feeble and they threw ineptly. He dodged the stones, and as each one missed him he cackled in triumph. Presently there was a sound of shouts up the road, for the noise had been heard at the police station, and some constables were emerging to see what was

the matter. The boys took fright and bolted, leaving Ellis a complete victor.

Ellis had heartily enjoyed the affray, but he was furiously angry as soon as it was over. He wrote a violent note to Mr Macgregor, telling him that he had been wantonly assaulted and demanding vengeance. Two clerks who had witnessed the scene, and a chaprassi, were sent along to Mr Macgregor's office to corroborate the story. They lied in perfect unison. 'The boys had attacked Mr Ellis without any provocation whatever, he had defended himself,' etc., etc. Ellis, to do him justice, probably believed this to be a truthful version of the story. Mr Macgregor was somewhat disturbed, and ordered the police to find the four schoolboys and interrogate them. The boys, however, had been expecting something of the kind, and were lying very low; the police searched the bazaar all day without finding them. In the evening the wounded boy was taken to a Burmese doctor, who, by applying some poisonous concoction of crushed leaves to his left eye, succeeded in blinding him.

The Europeans met at the Club as usual that evening, except for Westfield and Verrall, who had not yet returned. Everyone was in a bad mood. Coming on top of the murder, the unprovoked attack on Ellis (for that was the accepted description of it) had scared them as well as angered them. Mrs Lackersteen was twittering to the tune of 'We shall all be murdered in our beds'. Mr Macgregor, to reassure her, told her in cases of riot the European ladies were always locked inside the jail until everything was over; but she did not seem much comforted. Ellis was offensive to Flory, and Elizabeth cut him almost dead. He had come down to the Club in the insane hope of making up their quarrel, and her demeanour made him so miserable that for the greater part of the evening he skulked in the library. It was not till eight o'clock when everyone had swallowed a number of drinks, that the atmosphere grew a little more friendly, and Ellis said:

'What about sending a couple of chokras up to our houses and getting our dinners sent down here? We might as well have a few rubbers of bridge. Better than mooning about at home.'

Mrs Lackersteen, who was in dread of going home, jumped at the suggestion. The Europeans occasionally dined at the Club when they wanted to stay late. Two of the chokras were sent for, and on being

told what was wanted of them, immediately burst into tears. It appeared that if they went up the hill they were certain of encountering Maxwell's ghost. The mali was sent instead. As the man set out Flory noticed that it was again the night of the full moon — four weeks to a day since that evening, now unutterably remote, when he had kissed Elizabeth under the frangipani tree.

They had just sat down at the bridge table, and Mrs Lackersteen had just revoked out of pure nervousness, when there was a heavy thump on the roof. Everyone started and look up.

'A coco-nut falling!' said Mr Macgregor.

'There aren't any coco-nut trees here,' said Ellis.

The next moment a number of things happened all together. There was another and much louder bang, one of the petrol lamps broke from its hook and crashed to the ground, narrowly missing Mr Lackersteen, who jumped aside with a yelp, Mrs Lackersteen began screaming, and the butler rushed into the room, bareheaded, his face the colour of bad coffee.

'Sir, sir! Bad men come! Going to murder us all, sir!'

'What? Bad men? What do you mean?'

'Sir, all the villagers are outside! Big stick and dah in their hands, and all dancing about! Going to cut master's throat, sir!'

Mrs Lackersteen threw herself backwards in her chair. She was setting up such a din of screams as to drown the butler's voice.

'Oh, be quiet!' said Ellis sharply, turning on her. 'Listen, all of you! Listen to that!'

There was a deep, murmurous, dangerous sound outside, like the humming of an angry giant. Mr Macgregor, who had stood up, stiffened as he heard it, and settled his spectacles pugnaciously on his nose.

'This is some kind of disturbance! Butler, pick that lamp up. Miss Lackersteen, look to your aunt. See if she is hurt. The rest of you come with me!'

They all made for the front door, which someone, presumably the butler, had closed. A fusillade of small pebbles was rattling against it like hail. Mr Lackersteen wavered at the sound and retreated behind the others.

'I say, dammit, bolt that bloody door, someone!' he said.

‘No, no!’ said Mr Macgregor. ‘We must go outside. It’s fatal not to face them!’

He opened the door and presented himself boldly at the top of the steps. There were about twenty Burmans on the path, with dahs or sticks in their hands. Outside the fence, stretching up the road in either direction and far out on to the maidan, was an enormous crowd of people. It was like a sea of people, two thousand at the least, black and white in the moon, with here and there a curved dah glittering. Ellis had coolly placed himself beside Mr Macgregor, with his hands in his pockets. Mr Lackersteen had disappeared.

Mr Macgregor raised his hand for silence. ‘What is the meaning of this?’ he shouted sternly.

There were yells, and some lumps of laterite the size of cricket balls came sailing from the road, but fortunately hit no one. One of the men on the path turned and waved his arms to the others, shouting that they were not to begin throwing yet. Then he stepped forward to address the Europeans. He was a strong debonair fellow of about thirty, with down-curving moustaches, wearing a singlet, with his longyi kilted to the knee.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ Mr Macgregor repeated.

The man spoke up with a cheerful grin, and not very insolently.

‘We have no quarrel with you, min gyi. We have come for the timber merchant, Ellis.’ (He pronounced it Ellit.) ‘The boy whom he struck this morning has gone blind. You must send Ellit out to us here, so that we can punish him. The rest of you will not be hurt.’

‘Just remember that fellow’s face,’ said Ellis over his shoulder to Flory. ‘We’ll get him seven years for this afterwards.’

Mr Macgregor had turned temporarily quite purple. His rage was so great that it almost choked him. For several moments he could not speak, and when he did so it was in English.

‘Whom do you think you are speaking to? In twenty years I have never heard such insolence! Go away this instant, or I shall call out the Military Police!’

‘You’d better be quick, min gyi. We know that there is no justice for us in your courts, so we must punish Ellit ourselves. Send him out to us here. Otherwise, all of you will weep for it.’

Mr Macgregor made a furious motion with his fist, as though

hammering in a nail, ‘Go away, son of a dog!’ he cried, using his first oath in many years.

There was a thunderous roar from the road, and such a shower of stones, that everyone was hit, including the Burmans on the path. One stone took Mr Macgregor full in the face, almost knocking him down. The Europeans bolted hastily inside and barred the door. Mr Macgregor’s spectacles were smashed and his nose streaming blood. They got back to the lounge to find Mrs Lackersteen looping about in one of the long chairs like a hysterical snake, Mr Lackersteen standing irresolutely in the middle of the room, holding an empty bottle, the butler on his knees in the corner, crossing himself (he was a Roman Catholic), the chokras crying, and only Elizabeth calm, though she was very pale.

‘What’s happened?’ she exclaimed.

‘We’re in the soup, that’s what’s happened!’ said Ellis angrily, feeling at the back of his neck where a stone had hit him. ‘The Burmans are all round, shying rocks. But keep calm! They haven’t the guts to break the doors in.’

‘Call out the police at once!’ said Mr Macgregor indistinctly, for he was stanching his nose with his handkerchief.

‘Can’t!’ said Ellis. ‘I was looking round while you were talking to them. They’ve cut us off, rot their damned souls! No one could possibly get to the police lines. Veraswami’s compound is full of men.’

‘Then we must wait. We can trust them to turn out of their own accord. Calm yourself, my dear Mrs Lackersteen, PLEASE calm yourself! The danger is very small.’

It did not sound small. There were no gaps in the noise now, and the Burmans seemed to be pouring into the compounds by hundreds. The din swelled suddenly to such a volume that no one could make himself heard except by shouting. All the windows in the lounge had been shut, and some perforated zinc shutters within, which were sometimes used for keeping out insects, pulled to and bolted. There was a series of crashes as the windows were broken, and then a ceaseless thudding of stones from all sides, that shook the thin wooden walls and seemed likely to split them. Ellis opened a shutter and flung a bottle viciously among the crowd, but a dozen stones

came hurtling in and he had to close the shutter hurriedly. The Burmans seemed to have no plan beyond flinging stones, yelling and hammering at the walls, but the mere volume of noise was unnerving. The Europeans were half dazed by it at first. None of them thought to blame Ellis, the sole cause of this affair; their common peril seemed, indeed, to draw them closer together for the while. Mr Macgregor, half-blind without his spectacles, stood distractedly in the middle of the room, yielding his right hand to Mrs Lackersteen, who was caressing it, while a weeping chokra clung to his left leg. Mr Lackersteen had vanished again. Ellis was stamping furiously up and down, shaking his fist in the direction of the police lines.

'Where are the police, the f — cowardly sods?' he yelled, heedless of the women. 'Why don't they turn out? My God, we won't get another chance like this in a hundred years! If we'd only ten rifles here, how we could slosh these b — s!'

'They'll be here presently!' Mr Macgregor shouted back. 'It will take them some minutes to penetrate that crowd.'

'But why don't they use their rifles, the miserable sons of bitches? They could slaughter them in bloody heaps if they'd only open fire. Oh, God, to think of missing a chance like this!'

A lump of rock burst one of the zinc shutters. Another followed through the hole it had made, stove in a 'Bonzo' picture, bounced off, cut Elizabeth's elbow, and finally landed on the table. There was a roar of triumph from outside, and then a succession of tremendous thumps on the roof. Some children had climbed into the trees and were having the time of their lives sliding down the roof on their bottoms. Mrs Lackersteen outdid all previous efforts with a shriek that rose easily above the din outside.

'Choke that bloody hag, somebody!' cried Ellis. 'Anyone'd think a pig was being killed. We've got to do something. Flory, Macgregor, come here! Think of a way out of this mess, someone!'

Elizabeth had suddenly lost her nerve and begun crying. The blow from the stone had hurt her. To Flory's astonishment, he found her clinging tightly to his arm. Even in that moment it made his heart turn over. He had been watching the scene almost with detachment — dazed by the noise, indeed, but not much frightened. He always

found it difficult to believe Orientals could be really dangerous. Only when he felt Elizabeth's hand on his arm did he grasp the seriousness of the situation.

'Oh, Mr Flory, please, please think of something! You can, you can! Anything sooner than let those dreadful men get in here!'

'If only one of us could get to the police lines!' groaned Mr Macgregor. 'A British officer to lead them! At the worst I must try and go myself.'

'Don't be a fool! Only get your throat cut!' yelled Ellis. '*I*'ll go if they really look like breaking in. But, oh, to be killed by swine like that! How furious it'd make me! And to think we could murder the whole bloody crowd if only we could get the police here!'

'Couldn't someone get along the river bank?' Flory shouted despairingly.

'Hopeless! Hundreds of them prowling up and down. We're cut off — Burmans on three sides and the river on the other!'

'The river!'

One of those startling ideas that are overlooked simply because they are so obvious had sprung into Flory's mind.

'The river! Of course! We can get to the police lines as easy as winking. Don't you see?'

'How?'

'Why, down the river — in the water! Swim!'

'Oh, good man!' cried Ellis, and smacked Flory on the shoulder. Elizabeth squeezed his arm and actually danced a step or two in glee. 'I'll go if you like!' Ellis shouted, but Flory shook his head. He had already begun slipping his shoes off. There was obviously no time to be lost. The Burmans had behaved like fools hitherto, but there was no saying what might happen if they succeeded in breaking in. The butler, who had got over his first fright, prepared to open the window that gave on the lawn, and glanced obliquely out. There were barely a score of Burmans on the lawn. They had left the back of the Club unguarded, supposing that the river cut off retreat.

'Rush down the lawn like hell!' Ellis shouted in Flory's ear. 'They'll scatter all right when they see you.'

'Order the police to open fire at once!' shouted Mr Macgregor from the other side. 'You have my authority.'

‘And tell them to aim low! No firing over their heads. Shoot to kill. In the guts for choice!’

Flory leapt down from the veranda, hurting his feet on the hard earth, and was at the river bank in six paces. As Ellis had said, the Burmans recoiled for a moment when they saw him leaping down. A few stones followed him, but no one pursued — they thought, no doubt, that he was only attempting to escape, and in the clear moonlight they could see that it was not Ellis. In another moment he had pushed his way through the bushes and was in the water.

He sank deep down, and the horrible river ooze received him, sucking him knee-deep so that it was several seconds before he could free himself. When he came to the surface a tepid froth, like the froth on stout, was lapping round his lips, and some spongy thing had floated into his throat and was choking him. It was a sprig of water hyacinth. He managed to spit it out, and found that the swift current had floated him twenty yards already. Burmans were rushing rather aimlessly up and down the bank, yelling. With his eye at the level of the water, Flory could not see the crowd besieging the Club; but he could hear their deep, devilish roaring, which sounded even louder than it had sounded on shore. By the time he was opposite the Military Police lines the bank seemed almost bare of men. He managed to struggle out of the current and flounder through the mud, which sucked off his left sock. A little way down the bank two old men were sitting beside a fence, sharpening fence-posts, as though there had not been a riot within a hundred miles of them. Flory crawled ashore, clambered over the fence and ran heavily across the moonwhite parade-ground, his wet trousers sagging. As far as he could tell in the noise, the lines were quite empty. In some stalls over to the right Verrall’s horses were plunging about in a panic. Flory ran out on to the road, and saw what had happened.

The whole body of policemen, military and civil, about a hundred and fifty men in all, had attacked the crowd from the rear, armed only with sticks. They had been utterly engulfed. The crowd was so dense that it was like an enormous swarm of bees seething and rotating. Everywhere one could see policemen wedged helplessly among the hordes of Burmans, struggling furiously but uselessly, and too cramped even to use their sticks. Whole knots of men were tangled

Laocoon-like in the folds of unrolled pagris. There was a terrific bellowing of oaths in three or four languages, clouds of dust, and a suffocating stench of sweat and marigolds — but no one seemed to have been seriously hurt. Probably the Burmans had not used their daks for fear of provoking rifle-fire. Flory pushed his way into the crowd and was immediately swallowed up like the others. A sea of bodies closed in upon him and flung him from side to side, bumping his ribs and choking him with their animal heat. He struggled onwards with an almost dreamlike feeling, so absurd and unreal was the situation. The whole riot had been ludicrous from the start, and what was most ludicrous of all was that the Burmans, who might have killed him, did not know what to do with him now he was among them. Some yelled insults in his face, some jostled him and stamped on his feet, some even tried to make way for him, as a white man. He was not certain whether he was fighting for his life, or merely pushing his way through the crowd. For quite a long time he was jammed, helpless, with his arms pinned against his sides, then he found himself wrestling with a stumpy Burman much stronger than himself, then a dozen men rolled against him like a wave and drove him deeper into the heart of the crowd. Suddenly he felt an agonizing pain in his right big toe — someone in boots had trodden on it. It was the Military Police subahdar, a Rajput, very fat, moustachioed, with his pagri gone. He was grasping a Burman by the throat and trying to hammer his face, while the sweat rolled off his bare, bald crown. Flory threw his arm round the subahdar's neck and managed to tear him away from his adversary and shout in his ear. His Urdu deserted him, and he bellowed in Burmese:

'Why did you not open fire?'

For a long time he could not hear the man's answer. Then he caught it:

'Hukm ne aya'— 'I have had no order!'

'Idiot!'

At this moment another bunch of men drove against them, and for a minute or two they were pinned and quite unable to move. Flory realized that the subabdar had a whistle in his pocket and was trying to get at it. Finally he got it loose and blew piercing blasts, but there was no hope of rallying any men until they could get into a clear

space. It was a fearful labour to struggle our of the crowd — it was like wading neck-deep through a viscous sea. At times the exhaustion of Flory's limbs was so complete that he stood passive, letting the crowd hold him and even drive him backwards. At last, more from the natural eddying of the crowd than by his own effort, he found himself flung out into the open. The subahdar had also emerged, ten or fifteen sepoys, and a Burmese Inspector of Police. Most of the sepoys collapsed on their haunches almost falling with fatigue, and limping, their feet having been trampled on.

'Come on, get up! Run like hell for the lines! Get some rifles and a clip of ammunition each.'

He was too overcome even to speak in Burmese, but the men understood him and lopped heavily towards the police lines. Flory followed them, to get away from the crowd before they turned on him again. When he reached the gate the sepoys were returning with their rifles and already preparing to fire.

'The sahib will give the order!' the subahdar panted.

'Here you!' cried Flory to the Inspector. 'Can you speak Hindustani?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then tell them to fire high, right over the people's heads. And above all, to fire all together. Make them understand that.'

The fat Inspector, whose Hindustani was even worse than Flory's, explained what was wanted, chiefly by leaping up and down and gesticulating. The sepoys raised their rifles, there was a roar, and a rolling echo from the hillside. For a moment Flory thought that his order had been disregarded, for almost the entire section of the crowd nearest them had fallen like a swath of hay. However, they had only flung themselves down in panic. The sepoys fired a second volley, but it was not needed. The crowd had immediately begun to surge outwards from the Club like a river changing its course. They came pouring down the road, saw the armed men barring their way, and tried to recoil, whereupon there was a fresh battle between those in front and those behind; finally the whole crowd bulged outwards and began to roll slowly up the maidan. Flory and the sepoys moved slowly towards the Club on the heels of the retreating crowd. The policemen who had been engulfed were straggling back by ones and

twos. Their pagris were gone and their puttees trailing yards behind them, but they had no damage worse than bruises. The Civil Policemen were dragging a very few prisoners among them. When they reached the Club compound the Burmans were still pouring out, an endless line of young men leaping gracefully through a gap in the hedge like a procession of gazelles. It seemed to Flory that it was getting very dark. A small white-clad figure extricated itself from the last of the crowd and tumbled limply into Flory's arms. It was Dr Veraswami, with his tie torn off but his spectacles miraculously unbroken.

'Doctor!'

'Ach, my friend! Ach, how I am exhausted!'

'What are you doing here? Were you right in the middle of that crowd?'

'I was trying to restrain them, my friend. It was hopeless until you came. But there is at least one man who bears the mark of this, I think!'

He held out a small fist for Flory to see the damaged knuckles. But it was certainly quite dark now. At the same moment Flory heard a nasal voice behind him.

'Well, Mr Flory, so it's all over already! A mere flash in the pan as usual. You and I together were a little too much for them — ha, ha!'

It was U Po Kyin. He came towards them with a martial air, carrying a huge stick, and with a revolver thrust into his belt. His dress was a studious negligee — singlet and Shan trousers — to give the impression that he had rushed out of his house post-haste. He had been lying low until the danger should be over, and was now hurrying forth to grab a share of any credit that might be going.

'A smart piece of work, sir!' he said enthusiastically. 'Look how they are flying up the hillside! We have routed them most satisfactory.'

'WE!' panted the doctor indignantly.

'Ah, my dear doctor! I did not perceive that you were there. It is possible that YOU also have been in the fighting? YOU — risking your most valuable life! Who would have believed such a thing?'

'You've taken your time getting here yourself!' said Flory

angrily.

'Well, well sir, it is enough that we have dispersed them. Although,' he added with a touch of satisfaction, for he had noticed Flory's tone, 'they are going in the direction of the European houses, you will observe. I fancy that it will occur to them to do a little plundering on their way.'

One had to admire the man's impudence. He tucked his great stick under his arm and strolled beside Flory in an almost patronizing manner, while the doctor dropped behind, abashed in spite of himself. At the Club gate all three men halted. It was now extraordinarily dark, and the moon had vanished. Low overhead, just visible, black clouds were streaming eastward like a pack of hounds. A wind, almost cold, blew down the hillside and swept a cloud of dust and fine water-vapour before it. There was a sudden intensely rich scent of damp. The wind quickened, the trees rustled, then began beating themselves furiously together, the big frangipani tree by the tennis court flinging out a nebula of dimly seen blossom. All three men turned and hurried for shelter, the Orientals to their houses, Flory to the Club. It had begun raining.

Chapter 23

Next day the town was quieter than a cathedral city on Monday morning. It is usually the case after a riot. Except for the handful of prisoners, everyone who could possibly have been concerned in the attack on the Club had a watertight alibi. The Club garden looked as though a herd of bison had stampeded across it, but the houses had not been plundered, and there were no new casualties among the Europeans, except that after everything was over Mr Lackersteen had been found very drunk under the billiard-table, where he had retired with a bottle of whisky. Westfield and Verrall came back early in the morning, bringing Maxwell's murderers under arrest; or at any rate, bringing two people who would presently be hanged for Maxwell's murder. Westfield, when he heard the news of the riot, was gloomy but resigned. AGAIN it happened — a veritable riot, and he not there to quell it! It seemed fated that he should never kill a man. Depressing, depressing. Verrall's only comment was that it had been 'damned lip' on the part of Flory (a civilian) to give orders to the Military Police.

Meanwhile, it was raining almost without cease. As soon as he woke up and heard the rain hammering on the roof Flory dressed and hurried out, Flo following. Out of sight of the houses he took off his clothes and let the rain sluice down on his bare body. To his surprise, he found that he was covered with bruises from last night; but the rain had washed away every trace of his prickly heat within three minutes. It is wonderful, the healing power of rainwater. Flory walked down to Dr Veraswami's house, with his shoes squelching and periodical jets of water flowing down his neck from the brim of his Terai hat. The sky was leaden, and innumerable whirling storms chased one another across the maidan like squadrons of cavalry. Burmans passed, under vast wooden hats in spite of which their bodies streamed water like the bronze gods in the fountains. A network of rivulets was already washing the stones of the road bare. The doctor had just got home when Flory arrived, and was shaking a wet umbrella over the veranda rail. He hailed Flory excitedly.

'Come up, Mr Flory, come up at once! You are just apropos. I

was on the point of opening a bottle of Old Tommy Gin. Come up and let me drink to your health, ass the saviour of Kyauktada!'

They had a long talk together. The doctor was in a triumphant mood. It appeared that what had happened last night had righted his troubles almost miraculously. U Po Kyin's schemes were undone. The doctor was no longer at his mercy — in fact, it was the other way about. The doctor explained to Flory:

'You see, my friend, this riot — or rather, your most noble behaviour in it — wass quite outside U Po Kyin's programme. He had started the SO-CALLED rebellion and had the glory of crushing it, and he calculated that any further outbreak would simply mean more glory still. I am told that when he heard of Mr Maxwell's death, hiss joy was positively' — the doctor nipped his thumb and forefinger together— 'what iss the word I want?'

'Obscene?'

'Ah yes. Obscene. It iss said that actually he attempted to dance — can you imagine such a disgusting spectacle? — and exclaimed, "Now at least they will take my rebellion seriously!" Such iss his regard for human life. But now hiss triumph iss at an end. The riot hass tripped up in mid-career.'

'How?'

'Because, do you not see, the honours of the riot are not hiss, but yours! And I am known to be your friend. I stand, so to speak, in the reflection of your glory. Are you not the hero of the hour? Did not your European friends receive you with open arms when you returned to the Club last night?'

'They did, I must admit. It was quite a new experience for me. Mrs Lackersteen was all over me. "DEAR Mr Flory", she calls me now. And she's got her knife properly in Ellis. She hasn't forgotten that he called her a bloody hag and told her to stop squealing like a pig.'

'Ah, Mr Ellis iss sometimes over-emphatic in hiss expressions. I have noticed it.'

'The only fly in the ointment is that I told the police to fire over the crowd's heads instead of straight at them. It seems that's against all the Government regulations. Ellis was a little vexed about it. "Why didn't you plug some of the b — s when you had the chance?"

he said. I pointed out that it would have meant hitting the police who were in the middle of the crowd; but as he said, they were only niggers anyway. However, all my sins are forgiven me. And Macgregor quoted something in Latin — Horace, I believe.'

It was half an hour later when Flory walked along to the Club. He had promised to see Mr Macgregor and settle the business of the doctor's election. But there would be no difficulty about it now. The others would eat out of his hand until the absurd riot was forgotten; he could have gone into the Club and made a speech in favour of Lenin, and they would have put up with it. The lovely rain streamed down, drenching him from head to foot, and filling his nostrils with the scent of earth, forgotten during the bitter months of drought. He walked up the wrecked garden, where the mali, bending down with the rain splashing on his bare back, was trowelling holes for zinnias. Nearly all the flowers had been trampled out of existence. Elizabeth was there, on the side veranda, almost as though she were waiting for him. He took off his hat, spilling a pool of water from the brim, and went round to join her.

'Good morning!' he said, raising his voice because of the rain that beat noisily on the low roof.

'Good morning! ISN'T it coming down? Simply PELTING!'

'Oh, this isn't real rain. You wait till July. The whole Bay of Bengal is going to pour itself on us, by instalments.'

It seemed that they must never meet without talking of the weather. Nevertheless, her face said something very different from the banal words. Her demeanour had changed utterly since last night. He took courage.

'How is the place where that stone hit you?'

She held her arm out to him and let him take it. Her air was gentle, even submissive. He realized that his exploit of last night had made him almost a hero in her eyes. She could not know how small the danger had really been, and she forgave him everything, even Ma Hla May, because he had shown courage at the right moment. It was the buffalo and the leopard over again. His heart thumped in his breast. He slipped his hand down her arm and clasped her fingers in his own.

'Elizabeth— '

‘Someone will see us!’ she said, and she withdrew her hand, but not angrily.

‘Elizabeth, I’ve something I want to say to you. Do you remember a letter I wrote you from the jungle, after our — some weeks ago?’

‘Yes.’

‘You remember what I said in it?’

‘Yes. I’m sorry I didn’t answer it. Only— ‘

‘I couldn’t expect you to answer it, then. But I just wanted to remind you of what I said.’

In the letter, of course, he had only said, and feebly enough, that he loved her — would always love her, no matter what happened. They were standing face to face, very close together. On an impulse — and it was so swiftly done that afterwards he had difficulty in believing that it had ever happened — he took her in his arms and drew her towards him. For a moment she yielded and let him lift up her face and kiss her; then suddenly she recoiled and shook her head. Perhaps she was frightened that someone would see them, perhaps it was only because his moustache was so wet from the rain. Without saying anything more she broke from him and hurried away into the Club. There was a look of distress or compunction in her face; but she did not seem angry.

He followed her more slowly into the Club, and ran into Mr Macgregor, who was in a very good humour. As soon as he saw Flory he boomed genially, ‘Aha! The conquering hero comes!’ and then, in a more serious vein, offered him fresh congratulations. Flory improved the occasion by saying a few words on behalf of the doctor. He painted quite a lively picture of the doctor’s heroism in the riot. ‘He was right in the middle of the crowd, fighting like a tiger,’ etc., etc. It was not too much exaggerated — for the doctor had certainly risked his life. Mr Macgregor was impressed, and so were the others when they heard of it. At all times the testimony of one European can do an Oriental more good than that of a thousand of his fellow countrymen; and at this moment Flory’s opinion carried weight. Practically, the doctor’s good name was restored. His election to the Club could be taken as assured.

However, it was not finally agreed upon yet, because Flory was returning to camp. He set out the same evening, marching by night,

and he did not see Elizabeth again before leaving. It was quite safe to travel in the jungle now, for the futile rebellion was obviously finished. There is seldom any talk of rebellion after the rains have started — the Burmans are too busy ploughing, and in any case the waterlogged fields are impassable for large bodies of men. Flory was to return to Kyauktada in ten days, when the padre's six-weekly visit fell due. The truth was that he did not care to be in Kyauktada while both Elizabeth and Verrall were there. And yet, it was strange, but all the bitterness — all the obscene, crawling envy that had tormented him before — was gone now that he knew she had forgiven him. It was only Verrall who stood between them now. And even the thought of her in Verrall's arms could hardly move him, because he knew that at the worst the affair must have an end. Verrall, it was quite certain, would never marry Elizabeth; young men of Verrall's stamp do not marry penniless girls met casually at obscure Indian stations. He was only amusing himself with Elizabeth. Presently he would desert her, and she would return to him — to Flory. It was enough — it was far better than he had hoped. There is a humility about genuine love that is rather horrible in some ways.

U Po Kyin was furiously angry. The miserable riot had taken him unawares, so far as anything ever took him unawares, and it was like a handful of grit thrown into the machinery of his plans. The business of disgracing the doctor had got to be begun all over again. Begun it was, sure enough, with such a spate of anonymous letters that Hla Pe had to absent himself from office for two whole days — it was bronchitis this time — to get them written. The doctor was accused of every crime from pederasty to stealing Government postage stamps. The prison warder who had let Nga Shwe O escape had now come up for trial. He was triumphantly acquitted, U Po Kyin having spent as much as two hundred rupees in bribing the witnesses. More letters showered up on Mr Macgregor, proving in detail that Dr Veraswami, the real author of the escape, had tried to shift the blame on to a helpless subordinate. Nevertheless, the results were disappointing. The confidential letter which Mr Macgregor wrote to the Commissioner, reporting on the riot, was steamed open, and its tone was so alarming — Mr Macgregor had spoken of the doctor as 'behaving most creditably' on the night of the riot — that

U Po Kyin called a council of war.

'The time has come for a vigorous move,' he said to the others — they were in conclave on the front veranda, before breakfast. Ma Kin was there, and Ba Sein and Hla Pe — the latter a bright-faced, promising boy of eighteen, with the manner of one who will certainly succeed in life.

'We are hammering against a brick wall,' U Po Kyin continued; 'and that wall is Flory. Who could have foreseen that that miserable coward would stand by his friend? However, there it is. So long as Veraswami has his backing, we are helpless.'

'I have been talking to the Club butler, sir,' said Ba Sein. 'He tells me that Mr Ellis and Mr Westfield still do not want the doctor to be elected to the Club. Do you not think they will quarrel with Flory again as soon as this business of the riot is forgotten?'

'Of course they will quarrel, they always quarrel. But in the meantime the harm is done. Just suppose that man WERE elected! I believe I should die of rage if it happened. No, there is only one move left. We must strike at Flory himself!'

'At Flory, sir! But he is a white man!'

'What do I care? I have ruined white men before now. Once let Flory be disgraced, and there is an end of the doctor. And he shall be disgraced! I will shame him so that he will never dare show his face in that Club again!'

'But, sir! A white man! What are we to accuse him of? Who would believe anything against a white man?'

'You have no strategy, Ko Ba Sein. One does not ACCUSE a white man; one has got to catch him in the act. Public disgrace, in flagrante delicto. I shall know how to set about it. Now be silent while I think.'

There was a pause. U Po Kyin stood gazing out into the rain with his small hands clasped behind him and resting on the natural plateau of his posterior. The other three watched him from the end of the veranda, almost frightened by this talk of attacking a white man, and waiting for some masterstroke to cope with a situation that was beyond them. It was a little like the familiar picture (is it Meissonier's?) of Napoleon at Moscow, poring over his maps while his marshals wait in silence, with their cocked hats in their hands.

But of course U Po Kyin was more equal to the situation than Napoleon. His plan was ready within two minutes. When he turned round his vast face was suffused with excessive joy. The doctor had been mistaken when he described U Po Kyin as attempting to dance; U Po Kyin's figure was not designed for dancing; but, had it been so designed, he would have danced at this moment. He beckoned to Ba Sein and whispered in his ear for a few seconds.

'That is the correct move, I think?' he concluded.

A broad, unwilling, incredulous grin stole slowly across Ba Sein's face.

'Fifty rupees ought to cover all the expenses,' added U Po Kyin, beaming.

The plan was unfolded in detail. And when the others had taken it in, all of them, even Ba Sein, who seldom laughed, even Ma Kin, who disapproved from the bottom of her soul, burst into irrepressible peals of laughter. The plan was really too good to be resisted. It was genius.

All the while it was raining, raining. The day after Flory went back to camp it rained for thirty-eight hours at a stretch, sometimes slowing to the pace of English rain, sometimes pouring down in such cataracts that one thought the whole ocean must by now have been sucked up into the clouds. The rattling on the roof became maddening after a few hours. In the intervals between the rain the sun glared as fiercely as ever, the mud began to crack and steam, and patches of prickly heat sprang out all over one's body. Hordes of flying beetles had emerged from their cocoons as soon as the rain started; there was a plague of loathly creatures known as stink-bugs, which invaded the houses in incredible numbers, littered themselves over the dining-table and made one's food uneatable. Verrall and Elizabeth still went out riding in the evenings, when the rain was not too fierce. To Verrall, all climates were alike, but he did not like to see his ponies plastered with mud. Nearly a week went by. Nothing was changed between them — they were neither less nor more intimate than they had been before. The proposal of marriage, still confidently expected, was still unuttered. Then an alarming thing happened. The news filtered to the Club, through Mr Macgregor, that Verrall was leaving Kyauktada; the Military Police were to be kept at

Kyauktada, but another officer was coming in Verrall's place, no one was certain when. Elizabeth was in horrible suspense. Surely, if he was going away, he must say something definite soon? She could not question him — dared not even ask him whether he was really going; she could only wait for him to speak. He said nothing. Then one evening, without warning, he failed to turn up at the Club. And two whole days passed during which Elizabeth did not see him at all.

It was dreadful, but there was nothing that could be done. Verrall and Elizabeth had been inseparable for weeks, and yet in a way they were almost strangers. He had kept himself so aloof from them all — had never even seen the inside of the Lackersteens' house. They did not know him well enough to seek him out at the dakbungalow, or write to him; nor did he reappear at morning parade on the maidan. There was nothing to do except wait until he chose to present himself again. And when he did, would he ask her to marry him? Surely, surely he must! Both Elizabeth and her aunt (but neither of them had even spoken of it openly) held it as an article of faith that he must ask her. Elizabeth looked forward to their next meeting with a hope that was almost painful. Please God it would be a week at least before he went! If she rode with him four times more, or three times — even if it were only twice, all might yet be well. Please God he would come back to her soon! It was unthinkable that when he came, it would only be to say good-bye! The two women went down to the Club each evening and sat there until quite late, listening for Verrall's footsteps outside while seeming not to listen; but he never appeared. Ellis, who understood the situation perfectly, watched Elizabeth with spiteful amusement. What made it worst of all was that Mr Lackersteen was now pestering Elizabeth unceasingly. He had become quite reckless. Almost under the eyes of the servants he would waylay her, catch hold of her and begin pinching and fondling her in the most revolting way. Her sole defence was to threaten that she would tell her aunt; happily he was too stupid to realize that she would never dare do it.

On the third morning Elizabeth and her aunt arrived at the Club just in time to escape a violent storm of rain. They had been sitting in the lounge for a few minutes when they heard the sound of someone stamping the water off his shoes in the passage. Each woman's heart

stirred, for this might be Verrall. Then a young man entered the lounge, unbuttoning a long raincoat as he came. He was a stout, rollicking, chuckle-headed youth of about twenty-five, with fat fresh cheeks, butter-coloured hair, no forehead, and, as it turned out afterwards, a deafening laugh.

Mrs Lackersteen made some inarticulate sound — it was jerked out of her by her disappointment. The youth, however, hailed them with immediate bonhomie, being one of those who are on terms of slangy intimacy with everyone from the moment of meeting them.

'Hullo, hullo!' he said 'Enter the fairy prince! Hope I don't sort of intrude and all that? Not shoving in on any family gatherings or anything?'

'Not at all!' said Mrs Lackersteen in surprise.

'What I mean to say — thought I'd just pop in at the Club and have a glance round, don't you know. Just to get acclimatized to the local brand of whisky. I only got here last night.'

'Are you STATIONED here?' said Mrs Lackersteen, mystified — for they had not been expecting any newcomers.

'Yes, rather. Pleasure's mine, entirely.'

'But we hadn't heard. . . . Oh, of course! I suppose you're from the Forest Department? In place of poor Mr Maxwell?'

'What? Forest Department? No fear! I'm the new Military Police bloke, you know.'

'The — what?'

'New Military Police bloke. Taking over from dear ole Verrall. The dear ole chap got orders to go back to his regiment. Going off in a fearful hurry. And a nice mess he's left everything in for yours truly, too.'

The Military Policeman was a crass youth, but even he noticed that Elizabeth's face turned suddenly sickly. She found herself quite unable to speak. It was several seconds before Mrs Lackersteen managed to exclaim:

'Mr Verrall — going? Surely he isn't going away YET?'

'Going? He's gone!'

'GONE?'

'Well, what I mean to say — train's due to start in about half an hour. He'll be along at the station now. I sent a fatigue party to look

after him. Got to get his ponies aboard and all that.'

There were probably further explanations, but neither Elizabeth nor her aunt heard a word of them. In any case, without even a good-bye to the Military Policeman, they were out on the front steps within fifteen seconds. Mrs Lackersteen called sharply for the butler.

'Butler! Send my rickshaw round to the front at once! To the station, jaldi!' she added as the rickshaw-man appeared, and, having settled herself in the rickshaw, poked him in the back with the ferrule of her umbrella to start him.

Elizabeth had put on her raincoat and Mrs Lackersteen was cowering in the rickshaw behind her umbrella, but neither was much use against the rain. It came driving towards them in such sheets that Elizabeth's frock was soaked before they had reached the gate, and the rickshaw almost overturned in the wind. The rickshaw-wallah put his head down and struggled into it, groaning. Elizabeth was in agony. It was a mistake, SURELY it was a mistake. He had written to her and the letter had gone astray. That was it, that MUST be it! It could not be that he had meant to leave her without even saying good-bye! And if it were so — no, not even then would she give up hope! When he saw her on the platform, for the last time, he could not be so brutal as to forsake her! As they neared the station she fell behind the rickshaw and pinched her cheeks to bring the blood into them. A squad of Military Police sepoys shuffled hurriedly by, their thin uniforms sodden into rags, pushing a handcart among them. Those would be Verrall's fatigue party. Thank God, there was a quarter of an hour yet. The train was not due to leave for another quarter of an hour. Thank God, at least, for this last chance of seeing him!

They arrived on the platform just in time to see the train draw out of the station and gather speed with a series of deafening snorts. The stationmaster, a little round, black man, was standing on the line looking ruefully after the train, and holding his waterproof-covered topi on to his head with one hand, while with the other he fended off two clamorous Indians who were bobbing at him and trying to thrust something upon his attention. Mrs Lackersteen leaned out of the rickshaw and called agitatedly through the rain.

'Stationmaster!'

‘Madam!’

‘What train is that?’

‘That is the Mandalay train, madam.’

‘The Mandalay train! It can’t be!’

‘But I assure you, madam! It is precisely the Mandalay train.’ He came towards them, removing his topi.

‘But Mr Verrall — the Police officer? Surely he’s not on it?’

‘Yes, madam, he have departed.’ He waved his hand towards the train, now receding rapidly in a cloud of rain and steam.

‘But the train wasn’t due to start yet!’

‘No, madam. Not due to start for another ten minutes.’

‘Then why has it gone?’

The stationmaster waved his topi apologetically from side to side. His dark, squabby face looked quite distressed.

‘I know, madam, I know! MOST unprecedented! But the young Military Police officer have positively COMMANDED me to start the train! He declare that all is ready and he do not wish to be kept waiting. I point out the irregularity. He say he do not care about irregularity. I expostulate. He insist. And in short— ‘

He made another gesture. It meant that Verrall was the kind of man who would have his way, even when it came to starting a train ten minutes early. There was a pause. The two Indians, imagining that they saw their chance, suddenly rushed forward, wailing, and offered some grubby notebooks for Mrs Lackersteen’s inspection.

‘What DO these men want?’ cried Mrs Lackersteen distractedly.

‘They are grass-wallahs, madam. They say that Lieutenant Verrall have departed owing them large sums of money. One for hay, the other for corn. Of mine it is no affair.’

There was a hoot from the distant train. It rolled round the bend, like a black-behinded caterpillar that looks over its shoulder as it goes, and vanished. The stationmaster’s wet white trousers flapped forlornly about his legs. Whether Verrall had started the train early to escape Elizabeth, or to escape the grass-wallahs, was an interesting question that was never cleared up.

They made their way back along the road, and then struggled up the hill in such a wind that sometimes they were driven several paces backwards. When they gained the veranda they were quite out of

breath. The servants took their streaming raincoats, and Elizabeth shook some of the water from her hair. Mrs Lackersteen broke her silence for the first time since they had left the station:

'WELL! Of all the unmannerly — of the simply ABOMINABLE . . .!'

Elizabeth looked pale and sickly, in spite of the rain and wind that had beaten into her face. But she would betray nothing.

'I think he might have waited to say good-bye to us,' she said coldly.

'Take my word for it, dear, you are thoroughly well rid of him! . . . As I said from the start, a most ODIOUS young man!'

Some time later, when they were sitting down to breakfast, having bathed and got into dry clothes, and feeling better, she remarked:

'Let me see, what day is this?'

'Saturday, Aunt.'

'Ah, Saturday. Then the dear padre will be arriving this evening. How many shall we be for the service tomorrow? Why, I think we shall ALL be here! How very nice! Mr Flory will be here too. I think he said he was coming back from the jungle tomorrow.' She added almost lovingly, 'DEAR Mr Flory!'

Chapter 24

It was nearly six o'clock in the evening, and the absurd bell in the six-foot tin steeple of the church went clank-clank, clank-clank! as old Mattu pulled the rope within. The rays of the setting sun, refracted by distant rainstorms, flooded the maidan with a beautiful, lurid light. It had been raining earlier in the day, and would rain again. The Christian community of Kyauktada, fifteen in number, were gathering at the church door for the evening service.

Flory was already there, and Mr Macgregor, grey topi and all, and Mr Francis and Mr Samuel, frisking about in freshly laundered drill suits — for the six-weekly church service was the great social event of their lives. The padre, a tall man with grey hair and a refined, discoloured face, wearing pince-nez, was standing on the church steps in his cassock and surplice, which he had put on in Mr Macgregor's house. He was smiling in an amiable but rather helpless way at four pink-cheeked Karen Christians who had come to make their bows to him; for he did not speak a word of their language nor they of his. There was one other Oriental Christian, a mournful, dark Indian of uncertain race, who stood humbly in the background. He was always present at the church services, but no one knew who he was or why he was a Christian. Doubtless he had been captured and baptized in infancy by the missionaries, for Indians who are converted when adults almost invariably lapse.

Flory could see Elizabeth coming down the hill, dressed in lilac-colour, with her aunt and uncle. He had seen her that morning at the Club — they had had just a minute alone together before the others came in. He had only asked her one question.

'Has Verrall gone — for good?'

'Yes.'

There had been no need to say any more. He had simply taken her by the arms and drawn her towards him. She came willingly, even gladly — there in the clear daylight, merciless to his disfigured face. For a moment she had clung to him almost like a child. It was a though he had saved her or protected her from something. He raised her face to kiss her, and found with surprise that she was crying.

There had been no time to talk then, not even to say, 'Will you marry me?' No matter, after the service there would be time enough. Perhaps at his next visit, only six weeks hence, the padre would marry them.

Ellis and Westfield and the new Military Policeman were approaching from the Club, where they had been having a couple of quick ones to last them through the service. The Forest Officer who had been sent to take Maxwell's place, a sallow, tall man, completely bald except for two whisker-like tufts in front of his ears, was following them. Flory had not time to say more than 'Good evening' to Elizabeth when she arrived. Mattu, seeing that everyone was present, stopped ringing the bell, and the clergyman led the way inside, followed by Mr Macgregor, with his topi against his stomach, and the Lackersteens and the native Christians. Ellis pinched Flory's elbow and whispered boozily in his ear:

'Come on, line up. Time for the snivel-parade. Quick march!'

He and the Military Policeman went in behind the others, arm-in-arm, with a dancing step — the policeman, till they got inside, wagging his fat behind in imitation of a pwe-dancer. Flory sat down in the same pew as these two, opposite Elizabeth, on her right. It was the first time that he had ever risked sitting with his birthmark towards her. 'Shut your eyes and count twenty-five', whispered Ellis as they sat down, drawing a snigger from the policeman. Mrs Lackersteen had already taken her place at the harmonium, which was no bigger than a writing-desk. Mattu stationed himself by the door and began to pull the punkah — it was so arranged that it only flapped over the front pews, where the Europeans sat. Flo came nosing up the aisle, found Flory's pew and settled down underneath it. The service began.

Flory was only attending intermittently. He was dimly aware of standing and kneeling and muttering 'Amen' to interminable prayers, and of Ellis nudging him and whispering blasphemies behind his hymn book. But he was too happy to collect his thoughts. Hell was yielding up Eurydice. The yellow light flooded in through the open door, gilding the broad back of Mr Macgregor's silk coat like cloth-of-gold. Elizabeth, across the narrow aisle, was so close to Flory that he could hear every rustle of her dress and feel, as it seemed to him,

the warmth of her body; yet he would not look at her even once, lest the others should notice it. The harmonium quavered bronchitically as Mrs Lackersteen struggled to pump sufficient air into it with the sole pedal that worked. The singing was a queer, ragged noise — an earnest booming from Mr Macgregor, a kind of shamefaced muttering from the other Europeans, and from the back a loud, wordless lowing, for the Karen Christians knew the tunes of the hymns but not the words.

They were kneeling down again. 'More bloody knee-drill,' Ellis whispered. The air darkened, and there was a light patter of rain on the roof; the trees outside rustled, and a cloud of yellow leaves whirled past the window. Flory watched them through the chinks of his fingers. Twenty years ago, on winter Sundays in his pew in the parish church at home, he used to watch the yellow leaves, as at this moment, drifting and fluttering against leaden skies. Was it not possible, now, to begin over again as though those grimy years had never touched him? Through his fingers he glanced sidelong at Elizabeth, kneeling with her head bent and her face hidden in her youthful, mottled hands. When they were married, when they were married! What fun they would have together in this alien yet kindly land! He saw Elizabeth in his camp, greeting him as he came home tired from work and Ko S'la hurried from the tent with a bottle of beer; he saw her walking in the forest with him, watching the hornbills in the peepul trees and picking nameless flowers, and in the marshy grazing-grounds, tramping through the cold-weather mist after snipe and teal. He saw his home as she would remake it. He saw his drawing-room, sluttish and bachelor-like no longer, with new furniture from Rangoon, and a bowl of pink balsams like rosebuds on the table, and books and water-colours and a black piano. Above all the piano! His mind lingered upon the piano — symbol, perhaps because he was unmusical, of civilized and settled life. He was delivered for ever from the sub-life of the past decade — the debaucheries, the lies, the pain of exile and solitude, the dealings with whores and moneylenders and pukka sahibs.

The clergyman stepped to the small wooden lectern that also served as a pulpit, slipped the band from a roll of sermon paper, coughed, and announced a text. 'In the name of the Father, the Son

and the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

'Cut it short, for Christ's sake,' murmured Ellis.

Flory did not notice how many minutes passed. The words of the sermon flowed peacefully through his head, an indistinct burbling sound, almost unheard. When they were married, he was still thinking, when they were married —

Hullo! What was happening?

The clergyman had stopped short in the middle of a word. He had taken off his pince-nez and was shaking them with a distressed air at someone in the doorway. There was a fearful, raucous scream.

'Pike-san pay-like! Pike-san pay-like!'

Everyone jumped in their seats and turned round. It was Ma Hla May. As they turned she stepped inside the church and shoved old Mattu violently aside. She shook her fist at Flory.

'Pike-san pay-like! Pike-san pay-like! Yes, THAT'S the one I mean — Flory, Flory! (She pronounced it Porley.) That one sitting in front there, with the black hair! Turn round and face me, you coward! Where is the money you promised me?'

She was shrieking like a maniac. The people gaped at her, too astounded to move or speak. Her face was grey with powder, her greasy hair was tumbling down, her longyi was ragged at the bottom. She looked like a screaming hag of the bazaar. Flory's bowels seemed to have turned to ice. Oh God, God! Must they know — must Elizabeth know — that THAT was the woman who had been his mistress? But there was not a hope, not the vestige of a hope, of any mistake. She had screamed his name over and over again. Flo, hearing the familiar voice, wriggled from under the pew, walked down the aisle and wagged her tail at Ma Hla May. The wretched woman was yelling out a detailed account of what Flory had done to her.

'Look at me, you white men, and you women, too, look at me! Look how he has ruined me! Look at these rags I am wearing! And he is sitting there, the liar, the coward, pretending not to see me! He would let me starve at his gate like a pariah dog. Ah, but I will shame you! Turn round and look at me! Look at this body that you have kissed a thousand times — look — look— '

She began actually to tear her clothes open — the last insult of a

base-born Burmese woman. The harmonium squeaked as Mrs Lackersteen made a convulsive movement. People had at last found their wits and began to stir. The clergyman, who had been bleating ineffectually, recovered his voice, 'Take that woman outside!' he said sharply.

Flory's face was ghastly. After the first moment he had turned his head away from the door and set his teeth in a desperate effort to look unconcerned. But it was useless, quite useless. His face was as yellow as bone, and the sweat glistened on his forehead. Francis and Samuel, doing perhaps the first useful deed of their lives, suddenly sprang from their pew, grabbed Ma Hla May by the arms and hauled her outside, still screaming.

It seemed very silent in the church when they had finally dragged her out of hearing. The scene had been so violent, so squalid, that everyone was upset by it. Even Ellis looked disgusted. Flory could neither speak nor stir. He sat staring fixedly at the altar, his face rigid and so bloodless that the birth-mark seemed to glow upon it like a streak of blue paint. Elizabeth glanced across the aisle at him, and her revulsion made her almost physically sick. She had not understood a word of what Ma Hla May was saying, but the meaning of the scene was perfectly clear. The thought that he had been the lover of that grey-faced, maniacal creature made her shudder in her bones. But worse than that, worse than anything, was his ugliness at this moment. His face appalled her, it was so ghastly, rigid and old. It was like a skull. Only the birthmark seemed alive in it. She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonouring, how unforgivable a thing it was.

Like the crocodile, U Po Kyin had struck at the weakest spot. For, needless to say, this scene was U Po Kyin's doing. He had seen his chance, as usual, and tutored Ma Hla May for her part with considerable care. The clergyman brought his sermon to an end almost at once. As soon as it was over Flory hurried outside, not looking at any of the others. It was getting dark, thank God. At fifty yards from the church he halted, and watched the others making in couples for the Club. It seemed to him that they were hurrying. Ah, they would, of course! There would be something to talk about at the Club tonight! Flo rolled belly-upwards against his ankles, asking for

a game. ‘Get out, you bloody brute!’ he said, and kicked her. Elizabeth had stopped at the church door. Mr Macgregor, happy chance, seemed to be introducing her to the clergyman. In a moment the two men went on in the direction of Mr Macgregor’s house, where the clergyman was to stay for the night, and Elizabeth followed the others, thirty yards behind them. Flory ran after her and caught up with her almost at the Club gate.

‘Elizabeth!’

She looked round, saw him, turned white, and would have hurried on without a word. But his anxiety was too great, and he caught her by the wrist.

‘Elizabeth! I must — I’ve got to speak to you!’

‘Let me go, will you!’

They began to struggle, and then stopped abruptly. Two of the Karens who had come out of the church were standing fifty yards away, gazing at them through the half-darkness with deep interest. Flory began again in a lower tone:

‘Elizabeth, I know I’ve no right to stop you like this. But I must speak to you, I must! Please hear what I’ve got to say. Please don’t run away from me!’

‘What are you doing? Why are you holding on to my arm? Let me go this instant!’

‘I’ll let you go — there, look! But do listen to me, please! Answer me this one thing. After what’s happened, can you ever forgive me?’

‘Forgive you? What do you mean, FORGIVE you?’

‘I know I’m disgraced. It was the vilest thing to happen! Only, in a sense it wasn’t my fault. You’ll see that when you’re calmer. Do you think — not now, it was too bad, but later — do you think you can forget it?’

‘I really don’t know what you’re talking about. Forget it? What has it got to do with ME? I thought it was very disgusting, but it’s not MY business. I can’t think why you’re questioning me like this at all.’

He almost despaired at that. Her tone and even her words were the very ones she had used in that earlier quarrel of theirs. It was the same move over again. Instead of hearing him out she was going to evade him and put him off — snub him by pretending that he had no

claim upon her.

'Elizabeth! Please answer me. Please be fair to me! It's serious this time. I don't expect you to take me back all at once. You couldn't, when I'm publicly disgraced like this. But, after all, you virtually promised to marry me— '

'What! Promised to marry you? WHEN did I promise to marry you?'

'Not in words, I know. But it was understood between us.'

'Nothing of the kind was understood between us! I think you are behaving in the most horrible way. I'm going along to the Club at once. Good evening!'

'Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Listen. It's not fair to condemn me unheard. You knew before what I'd done, and you knew that I'd lived a different life since I met you. What happened this evening was only an accident. That wretched woman, who, I admit, was once my — well— '

'I won't listen, I won't listen to such things! I'm going!'

He caught her by the wrists again, and this time held her. The Karens had disappeared, fortunately.

'No, no, you shall hear me! I'd rather offend you to the heart than have this uncertainty. It's gone on week after week, month after month, and I've never once been able to speak straight out to you. You don't seem to know or care how much you make me suffer. But this time you've got to answer me.'

She struggled in his grip, and she was surprisingly strong. Her face was more bitterly angry than he had ever seen or imagined it. She hated him so that she would have struck him if her hands were free.

'Let me go! Oh, you beast, you beast, let me go!'

'My God, my God, that we should fight like this! But what else can I do? I can't let you go without even hearing me. Elizabeth, you MUST listen to me!'

'I will not! I will not discuss it! What right have you to question me? Let me go!'

'Forgive me, forgive me! This one question. Will you — not now, but later, when this vile business is forgotten — will you marry me?'

'No, never, never!'

‘Don’t say it like that! Don’t make it final. Say no for the present if you like — but in a month, a year, five years— ‘

‘Haven’t I said no? Why must you keep on and on?’

‘Elizabeth, listen to me. I’ve tried again and again to tell you what you mean to me — oh, it’s so useless talking about it! But do try and understand. Haven’t I told you something of the life we live here? The sort of horrible death-in-life! The decay, the loneliness, the self-pity? Try and realize what it means, and that you’re the sole person on earth who could save me from it.’

‘Will you let me go? Why do you have to make this dreadful scene?’

‘Does it mean nothing to you when I say that I love you? I don’t believe you’ve ever realized what it is that I want from you. If you like, I’d marry you and promise never even touch you with my finger. I wouldn’t mind even that, so long as you were with me. But I can’t go on with my life alone, always alone. Can’t you bring yourself ever to forgive me?’

‘Never, never! I wouldn’t marry you if you were the last man on earth. I’d as soon marry the — the sweeper!’

She had begun crying now. He saw that she meant what she said. The tears came into his own eyes. He said again:

‘For the last time. Remember that it’s something to have one person in the world who loves you. Remember that though you’ll find men who are richer, and younger, and better in every way than I, you’ll never find one who cares for you so much. And though I’m not rich, at least I could make you a home. There’s a way of living — civilized, decent— ‘

‘Haven’t we said enough?’ she said more calmly. ‘Will you let me go before somebody comes?’

He relaxed his grip on her wrists. He had lost her, that was certain. Like a hallucination, painfully clear, he saw again their home as he had imagined it; he saw their garden, and Elizabeth feeding Nero and the pigeons on the drive by the sulphur-yellow phloxes that grew as high as her shoulder; and the drawing-room, with the water-colours on the walls, and the balsams in the china bowl mirrored by the table, and the book-shelves, and the black piano. The impossible, mythical piano — symbol of everything that that futile accident had

wrecked!

'You should have a piano,' he said despairingly.

'I don't play the piano.'

He let her go. It was no use continuing. She was no sooner free of him than she took to her heels and actually ran into the Club garden, so hateful was his presence to her. Among the trees she stopped to take off her spectacles and remove the signs of tears from her face. Oh, the beast, the beast! He had hurt her wrists abominably. Oh, what an unspeakable beast he was! When she thought of his face as it had looked in church, yellow and glistening with the hideous birthmark upon it, she could have wished him dead. It was not what he had done that horrified her. He might have committed a thousand abominations and she could have forgiven him. But not after that shameful, squalid scene, and the devilish ugliness of his disfigured face in that moment. It was, finally, the birthmark that had damned him.

Her aunt would be furious when she heard that she had refused Flory. And there was her uncle and his leg-pinching — between the two of them, life here would become impossible. Perhaps she would have to go Home unmarried after all. Black beetles! No matter. Anything — spinsterhood, drudgery, anything — sooner than the alternative. Never, never, would she yield to a man who had been so disgraced! Death sooner, far sooner. If there had been mercenary thoughts in her mind an hour ago, she had forgotten them. She did not even remember that Verrall had jilted her and that to have married Flory would have saved her face. She knew only that he was dishonoured and less than a man, and that she hated him as she would have hated a leper or a lunatic. The instinct was deeper than reason or even self-interest, and she could no more have disobeyed it than she could have stopped breathing.

Flory, as he turned up the hill, did not run, but he walked as fast as he could. What he had to do must be done quickly. It was getting very dark. The wretched Flo, who even now had not grasped that anything serious was the matter, trotted close to his heels, whimpering in a self-pitying manner to reproach him for the kick he had given her. As he came up the path a wind blew through the plaintain trees, rattling the tattered leaves and bringing a scent of

damp. It was going to rain again. Ko S'la had laid the dinner-table and was removing some flying beetles that had committed suicide against the petrol-lamp. Evidently he had not heard about the scene in church yet.

'The holy one's dinner is ready. Will the holy one dine now?'

'No, not yet. Give me that lamp.'

He took the lamp, went into the bedroom and shut the door, The stale scent of dust and cigarette-smoke met him, and in the white, unsteady glare of the lamp he could see the mildewed books and the lizards on the wall. So he was back again to this — to the old, secret life — after everything, back where he had been before.

Was it not possible to endure it! He had endured it before. There were palliatives — books, his garden, drink, work, whoring, shooting, conversations with the doctor.

No, it was not endurable any longer. Since Elizabeth's coming the power to suffer and above all to hope, which he had thought dead in him, had sprung to new life. The half-comfortable lethargy in which he had lived was broken. And if he suffered now, there was far worse to come. In a little while someone else would marry her. How he could picture it — the moment when he heard the news!— 'Did you hear the Lackersteen kid's got off at last? Poor old So-and-so — booked for the altar, God help him,' etc., etc. And the casual question — 'Oh, really? When is it to be?' — stiffening one's face, pretending to be uninterested. And then her wedding day approaching, her bridal night — ah, not that! Obscene, obscene. Keep your eyes fixed on that. Obscene. He dragged his tin uniform-case from under the bed, took out his automatic pistol, slid a clip of cartridges into the magazine, and pulled one into the breech.

Ko S'la was remembered in his will. There remained Flo. He laid his pistol on the table and went outside. Flo was playing with Ba Shin, Ko S'la's youngest son, under the lee of the cookhouse, where the servants had left the remains of a woodfire. She was dancing round him with her small teeth bared, pretending to bite him, while the tiny boy, his belly red in the glow of the embers, smacked weakly at her, laughing, and yet half frightened.

'Flo! Come here, Flo!'

She heard him and came obediently, and then stopped short at the

bedroom door. She seemed to have grasped now that there was something wrong. She backed a little and stood looking timorously up at him, unwilling to enter the bedroom.

'Come in here!'

She wagged her tail, but did not move.

'Come on, Flo! Good old Flo! Come on!'

Flo was suddenly stricken with terror. She whined, her tail went down, and she shrank back. 'Come here, blast you!' he cried, and he took her by the collar and flung her into the room, shutting the door behind her. He went to the table for the pistol.

'No come here! Do as you're told!'

She crouched down and whined for forgiveness. It hurt him to hear it. 'Come on, old girl! Dear old Flo! Master wouldn't hurt you. Come here!' She crawled very slowly towards his feet, flat on her belly, whining, her head down as though afraid to look at him. When she was a yard away he fired, blowing her skull to fragments.

Her shattered brain looked like red velvet. Was that what he would look like? The heart, then, not the head. He could hear the servants running out of their quarters and shouting — they must have heard the sound of the shot. He hurriedly tore open his coat and pressed the muzzle of the pistol against his shirt. A tiny lizard, translucent like a creature of gelatine, was stalking a white moth along the edge of the table. Flory pulled the trigger with his thumb.

As Ko S'la burst into the room, for a moment he saw nothing but the dead body of the dog. Then he saw his master's feet, heels upwards, projecting from beyond the bed. He yelled to the others to keep the children out of the room, and all of them surged back from the doorway with screams. Ko S'la fell on his knees behind Flory's body, at the same moment as Ba Pe came running through the veranda.

'Has he shot himself?'

'I think so. Turn him over on his back. Ah, look at that! Run for the Indian doctor! Run for your life!'

There was a neat hole, no bigger than that made by a pencil passing through a sheet of blotting-paper, in Flory's shirt. He was obviously quite dead. With great difficulty Ko S'la managed to drag him on to the bed, for the other servants refused to touch the body. It

was only twenty minutes before the doctor arrived. He had heard only a vague report that Flory was hurt, and had bicycled up the hill at top speed through a storm of rain. He threw his bicycle down in the flower-bed and hurried in through the veranda. He was out of breath, and could not see through his spectacles. He took them off, peering myopically at the bed. 'What iss it, my friend?' he said anxiously. 'Where are you hurt?' Then, coming closer, he saw what was on the bed, and uttered a harsh sound.

'Ach, what is this? What has happened to him?'

The doctor fell on his knees, tore Flory's shirt open and put his ear to his chest. An expression of agony came into his face, and he seized the dead man by the shoulders and shook him as though mere violence could bring him to life. One arm fell limply over the edge of the bed. The doctor lifted it back again, and then, with the dead hand between his own, suddenly burst into tears. Ko S'la was standing at the foot of the bed, his brown face full of lines. The doctor stood up, and then losing control of himself for a moment, leaned against the bedpost and wept noisily and grotesquely his back turned on Ko S'la. His fat shoulders were quivering. Presently he recovered himself and turned round again.

'How did this happen?'

'We heard two shots. He did it himself, that is certain. I do not know why.'

'How did you know that he did it on purpose? How do you know that it was not an accident?'

For answer, Ko S'la pointed silently to Flo's corpse. The doctor thought for a moment, and then, with gentle, practised hands, swathed the dead man in the sheet and knotted it at foot and head. With death, the birthmark had faded immediately, so that it was no more than a faint grey stain.

'Bury the dog at once. I will tell Mr Macgregor that this happened accidentally while he was cleaning his revolver. Be sure that you bury the dog. Your master was my friend. It shall not be written on his tombstone that he committed suicide.'

Chapter 25

It was lucky that the padre should have been at Kyauktada, for he was able, before catching the train on the following evening, to read the burial service in due form and even to deliver a short address on the virtues of the dead man. All Englishmen are virtuous when they are dead. 'Accidental death' was the official verdict (Dr Veraswami had proved with all his medico-legal skill that the circumstances pointed to accident) and it was duly inscribed upon the tombstone. Not that anyone believed it, of course. Flory's real epitaph was the remark, very occasionally uttered — for an Englishman who dies in Burma is so soon forgotten— 'Flory? Oh yes, he was a dark chap, with a birthmark. He shot himself in Kyauktada in 1926. Over a girl, people said. Bloody fool.' Probably no one, except Elizabeth, was much surprised at what had happened. There is a rather large number of suicides among the Europeans in Burma, and they occasion very little surprise.

Flory's death had several results. The first and most important of them was that Dr Veraswami was ruined, even as he had foreseen. The glory of being a white man's friend — the one thing that had saved him before — had vanished. Flory's standing with the other Europeans had never been good, it is true; but he was after all a white man, and his friendship conferred a certain prestige. Once he was dead, the doctor's ruin was assured. U Po Kyin waited the necessary time, and then struck again, harder than ever. It was barely three months before he had fixed it in the head of every European in Kyauktada that the doctor was an unmitigated scoundrel. No public accusation was ever made against him — U Po Kyin was most careful of that. Even Ellis would have been puzzled to say just what scoundrelism the doctor had been guilty of; but still, it was agreed that he was a scoundrel. By degrees, the general suspicion of him crystallized in a single Burmese phrase— 'shok de'. Veraswami, it was said, was quite a clever little chap in his way — quite a good doctor for a native — but he was THOROUGHLY shok de. Shok de means, approximately, untrustworthy, and when a 'native' official comes to be known as shok de, there is an end of him.

The dreaded nod and wink passed somewhere in high places, and the doctor was reverted to the rank of Assistant Surgeon and transferred to Mandalay General Hospital. He is still there, and is likely to remain. Mandalay is rather a disagreeable town — it is dusty and intolerably hot, and it is said to have five main products all beginning with P, namely, pagodas, pariahs, pigs, priests and prostitutes — and the routine-work of the hospital is a dreary business. The doctor lives just outside the hospital grounds in a little bake-house of a bungalow with a corrugated iron fence round its tiny compound, and in the evenings he runs a private clinic to supplement his reduced pay. He has joined a second-rate club frequented by Indian pleaders. Its chief glory is a single European member — a Glasgow electrician named Macdougall, sacked from the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company for drunkenness, and now making a precarious living out of a garage. Macdougall is a dull lout, only interested in whisky and magnetos. The doctor, who will never believe that a white man can be a fool, tries almost every night to engage him in what he still calls 'cultured conversation'; but the results are very unsatisfying.

Ko S'la inherited four hundred rupees under Flory's will, and with his family he set up a tea-shop in the bazaar. But the shop failed, as it was bound to do with the two women fighting in it at all hours, and Ko S'la and Ba Pe were obliged to go back to service. Ko S'la was an accomplished servant. Besides the useful arts of pimping, dealing with money-lenders, carrying master to bed when drunk and making pick-me-ups known as prairie oysters on the following morning, he could sew, darn, refill cartridges, attend to a horse, press a suit, and decorate a dinner-table with wonderful, intricate patterns of chopped leaves and dyed rice-grains. He was worth fifty rupees a month. But he and Ba Pe had fallen into lazy ways in Flory's service, and, they were sacked from one job after another. They had a bad year of poverty, and little Ba Shin developed a cough, and finally coughed himself to death one stifling hot-weather night. Ko S'la is now a second boy to a Rangoon rice-broker with a neurotic wife who makes unending kit-kit, and Ba Pe is pani-wallah in the same house at sixteen rupees a month. Ma Hla May is in a brothel in Mandalay. Her good looks are all but gone, and her clients pay her only four annas

and sometimes kick her and beat her. Perhaps more bitterly than any of the others, she regrets the good time when Flory was alive, and when she had not the wisdom to put aside any of the money she extracted from him.

U Po Kyin realized all his dreams except one. After the doctor's disgrace, it was inevitable that U Po Kyin should be elected to the Club, and elected he was, in spite of bitter protests from Ellis. In the end the other Europeans came to be rather glad that they had elected him, for he was a bearable addition to the Club. He did not come too often, was ingratiating in his manner, stood drinks freely, and developed almost at once into a brilliant bridge-player. A few months later he was transferred from Kyauktada and promoted. For a whole year, before his retirement, he officiated as Deputy Commissioner, and during that year alone he made twenty thousand rupees in bribes. A month after his retirement he was summoned to a durbar in Rangoon, to receive the decoration that had been awarded to him by the Indian Government.

It was an impressive scene, that durbar. On the platform, hung with flags and flowers, sat the Governor, frock-coated, upon a species of throne, with a bevy of aides-de-camp and secretaries behind him. All round the hall, like glittering waxworks, stood the tall, bearded sowars of the Governor's bodyguard, with pennoned lances in their hands. Outside, a band was blaring at intervals. The gallery was gay with the white ingyis and pink scarves of Burmese ladies, and in the body of the hall a hundred men or more were waiting to receive their decorations. There were Burmese officials in blazing Mandalay pasos, and Indians in cloth-of-gold pagris, and British officers in full-dress uniform with clanking sword-scabbards, and old thugyis with their grey hair knotted behind their heads and silver-hilted dahs slung from their shoulders. In a high, clear voice a secretary was reading out the list of awards, which varied from the C.I.E. to certificates of honour in embossed silver cases. Presently U Po Kyin's turn came and the secretary read from his scroll:

'To U Po Kyin, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, retired, for long and loyal service and especially for his timely aid in crushing a most dangerous rebellion in Kyauktada district' — and so on and so on.

Then two henchmen, placed there for the purpose hoisted U Po

Kyin upright, and he waddled to the platform, bowed as low as his belly would permit, and was duly decorated and felicitated, while Ma Kin and other supporters clapped wildly and fluttered their scarves from the gallery.

U Po Kyin had done all that mortal man could do. It was time now to be making ready for the next world — in short, to begin building pagodas. But unfortunately, this was the very point at which his plans went wrong. Only three days after the Governor's durbar, before so much as a brick of those atoning pagodas had been laid, U Po Kyin was stricken with apoplexy and died without speaking again. There is no armour against fate. Ma Kin was heartbroken at the disaster. Even if she had built the pagodas herself, it would have availed U Po Kyin nothing; no merit can be acquired save by one's own act. She suffers greatly to think of U Po Kyin where he must be now — wandering in God knows what dreadful subterranean hell of fire, and darkness, and serpents, and genii. Or even if he has escaped the worst, his other fear has been realized, and he has returned to the earth in the shape of a rat or a frog. Perhaps at this very moment a snake is devouring him.

As to Elizabeth, things fell out better than she had expected. After Flory's death Mrs Lackersteen, dropping all pretences for once, said openly that there were no men in this dreadful place and the only hope was to go and stay several months in Rangoon or Maymyo. But she could not very well send Elizabeth to Rangoon or Maymyo alone, and to go with her practically meant condemning Mr Lackersteen to death from delirium tremens. Months passed, and the rains reached their climax, and Elizabeth had just made up her mind that she must go home after all, penniless and unmarried, when — Mr Macgregor proposed to her. He had had it in his mind for a long time; indeed, he had only been waiting for a decent interval to elapse after Flory's death.

Elizabeth accepted him gladly. He was rather old, perhaps, but a Deputy Commissioner is not to be despised — certainly he was a far better match than Flory. They are very happy. Mr Macgregor was always a good-hearted man, but he has grown more human and likeable since his marriage. His voice booms less, and he has given up his morning exercises. Elizabeth has grown mature surprisingly

quickly, and a certain hardness of manner that always belonged to her has become accentuated. Her servants live in terror of her, though she speaks no Burmese. She has an exhaustive knowledge of the Civil List, gives charming little dinner-parties and knows how to put the wives of subordinate officials in their places — in short, she fills with complete success the position for which Nature had designed her from the first, that of a burra memsahib.

A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER

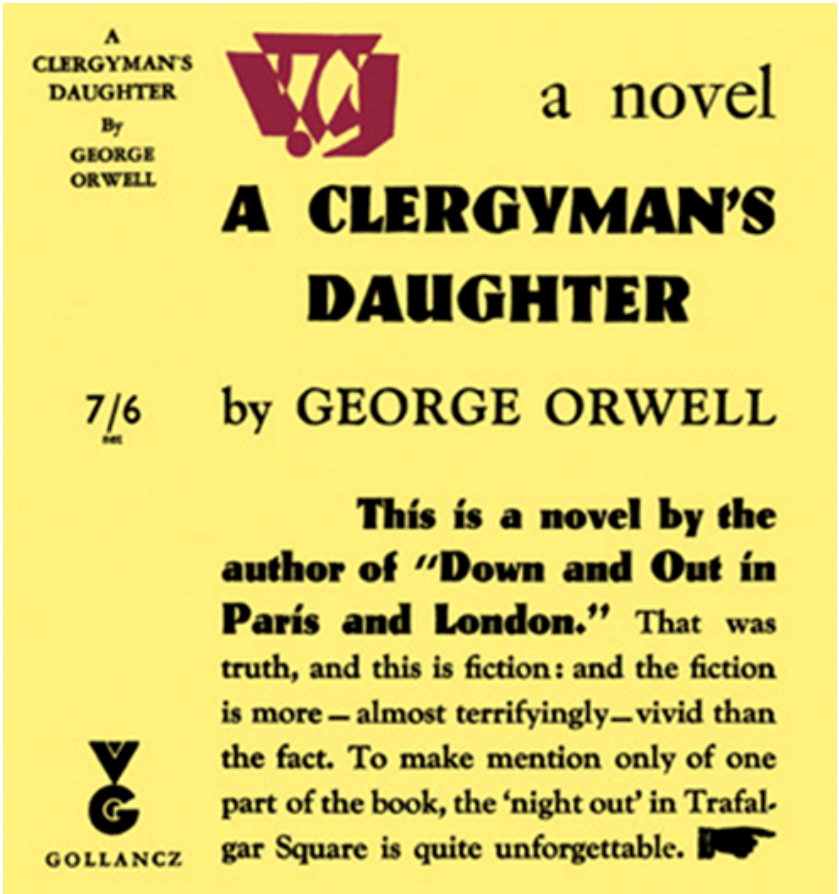
A Clergyman's Daughter was published in March 1935 by Victor Gollancz, a publisher of left-wing and socialist leaning texts. Orwell was unhappy with the novel and requested that after his death the book would not be reprinted. Orwell started writing it in January 1934 and completed the novel nine months later at the beginning of October. It was a period of convalescence for the author who had left teaching after suffering from a bout of pneumonia. A significant section of the work is based on journal entries from his work as a hop picker in the summer of 1931 and his time teaching at schools. This caused Orwell and his publisher to fear libel over the text.

Dorothy Hare is the eponymous Clergyman's daughter who lives a life of self-abnegation and sacrifice. She is a hapless and even ridiculous figure whom Orwell never allows to have real control or agency over her existence. Dorothy's father is an unpleasant clergyman for whom she tirelessly works with nothing but self-effacement. She attempts to suppress any desire and maintain her faith through acts of self -mortification. One evening, she is invited to dine with a local man called Mr Warburton, who is lecherous and attempts to force himself on her. She resists but the encounter is witnessed by a local gossip through her window.

The novel follows Dorothy through five episodes in her life, including an abrupt change of circumstances when she suffers from amnesia and finds herself impoverished on the streets. There is an experience teaching at a private school and a chapter that chronicles just one night spent in Trafalgar Square.

A Clergyman's Daughter is by far Orwell's most experimental work and was influenced by James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The novel is critical of the capitalist system which exploits workers and exhausts them to the point that they are unable to challenge or even question their circumstances. Orwell also highlights the damaging effect of capitalism on education where pupils become customers, and schools are run for a profit. Dorothy suffers a crisis of faith but it is not a

topic that Orwell examines with much vigour which contrasts with his vivid and frightening detailing of totalitarianism in his most famous works.


A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER By GEORGE ORWELL
a novel
A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER
7/6 net
by GEORGE ORWELL
This is a novel by the author of "Down and Out in Paris and London." That was truth, and this is fiction: and the fiction is more — almost terrifyingly — vivid than the fact. To make mention only of one part of the book, the 'night out' in Trafalgar Square is quite unforgettable.
GOLLANCZ

The first edition

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George Orwell

A Clergyman's Daughter

A later Penguin edition

CHAPTER 1

As the alarm clock on the chest of drawers exploded like a horrid little bomb of bell metal, Dorothy, wrenched from the depths of some complex, troubling dream, awoke with a start and lay on her back looking into the darkness in extreme exhaustion.

The alarm clock continued its nagging, feminine clamour, which would go on for five minutes or thereabouts if you did not stop it. Dorothy was aching from head to foot, and an insidious and contemptible self-pity, which usually seized upon her when it was time to get up in the morning, caused her to bury her head under the bedclothes and try to shut the hateful noise out of her ears. She struggled against her fatigue, however, and, according to her custom, exhorted herself sharply in the second person plural. Come on, Dorothy, up you get! No snoozing, please! Proverbs vi, 9. Then she remembered that if the noise went on any longer it would wake her father, and with a hurried movement she bounded out of bed, seized the clock from the chest of drawers, and turned off the alarm. It was kept on the chest of drawers precisely in order that she should have to get out of bed to silence it. Still in darkness, she knelt down at her bedside and repeated the Lord's Prayer, but rather distractedly, her feet being troubled by the cold.

It was just half past five, and coldish for an August morning. Dorothy (her name was Dorothy Hare, and she was the only child of the Reverend Charles Hare, Rector of St Athelstan's, Knype Hill, Suffolk) put on her aged flannelette dressing-gown and felt her way downstairs. There was a chill morning smell of dust, damp plaster, and the fried dabs from yesterday's supper, and from either side of the passage on the second floor she could hear the antiphonal snoring of her father and of Ellen, the maid of all work. With care — for the kitchen table had a nasty trick of reaching out of the darkness and banging you on the hip-bone — Dorothy felt her way into the kitchen, lighted the candle on the mantelpiece, and, still aching with fatigue, knelt down and raked the ashes out of the range.

The kitchen fire was a 'beast' to light. The chimney was crooked and therefore perpetually half choked, and the fire, before it would

light, expected to be dosed with a cupful of kerosene, like a drunkard's morning nip of gin. Having set the kettle to boil for her father's shaving-water, Dorothy went upstairs and turned on her bath. Ellen was still snoring, with heavy youthful snores. She was a good hard-working servant once she was awake, but she was one of those girls whom the Devil and all his angels cannot get out of bed before seven in the morning.

Dorothy filled the bath as slowly as possible — the splashing always woke her father if she turned on the tap too fast — and stood for a moment regarding the pale, unappetizing pool of water. Her body had gone goose-flesh all over. She detested cold baths; it was for that very reason that she made it a rule to take all her baths cold from April to November. Putting a tentative hand into the water — and it was horribly cold — she drove herself forward with her usual exhortations. Come on, Dorothy! In you go! No funking, please! Then she stepped resolutely into the bath, sat down and let the icy girdle of water slide up her body and immerse her all except her hair, which she had twisted up behind her head. The next moment she came to the surface gasping and wriggling, and had no sooner got her breath back than she remembered her 'memo list', which she had brought down in her dressing-gown pocket and intended to read. She reached out for it, and, leaning over the side of the bath, waist deep in icy water, read through the 'memo list' by the light of the candle on the chair.

It ran:

7 oc. H.C.
Mrs T baby? Must visit.
BREAKFAST. Bacon. MUST ask father money. (P)
Ask Ellen what stuff kitchen father's tonic NB. to ask about stuff for curtains at Solepipe's.
Visiting call on Mrs P cutting from Daily M angelica tea good for rheumatism Mrs L's cornplaster.
12 oc. Rehearsal Charles I. NB. to order 1/2 lb glue 1 pot aluminium paint.
DINNER (crossed out) LUNCHEON . . .?
Take round Parish Mag NB. Mrs F owes 3/6d.

4.30 pm Mothers' U tea don't forget 2 1/2 yards casement cloth.
Flowers for church NB. 1 tin Brasso.
SUPPER. Scrambled eggs.
Type Father's sermon what about new ribbon typewriter?
NB. to fork between peas bindweed awful.

Dorothy got out of her bath, and as she dried herself with a towel hardly bigger than a table napkin — they could never afford decent-sized towels at the Rectory — her hair came unpinned and fell down over her collar-bones in two heavy strands. It was thick, fine, exceedingly pale hair, and it was perhaps as well that her father had forbidden her to bob it, for it was her only positive beauty. For the rest, she was a girl of middle height, rather thin, but strong and shapely, and her face was her weak point. It was a thin, blonde, unremarkable kind of face, with pale eyes and a nose just a shade too long; if you looked closely you could see crow's feet round the eyes, and the mouth, when it was in repose, looked tired. Not definitely a spinsterish face as yet, but it certainly would be so in a few years' time. Nevertheless, strangers commonly took her to be several years younger than her real age (she was not quite twenty-eight) because of the expression of almost childish earnestness in her eyes. Her left forearm was spotted with tiny red marks like insect bites.

Dorothy put on her nightdress again and cleaned her teeth — plain water, of course; better not to use toothpaste before H.C. After all, either you are fasting or you aren't. The R.C.s are quite right there — and, even as she did so, suddenly faltered and stopped. She put her toothbrush down. A deadly pang, an actual physical pang, had gone through her viscera.

She had remembered, with the ugly shock with which one remembers something disagreeable for the first time in the morning, the bill at Cargill's, the butcher's, which had been owing for seven months. That dreadful bill — it might be nineteen pounds or even twenty, and there was hardly the remotest hope of paying it — was one of the chief torments of her life. At all hours of the night or day it was waiting just round the corner of her consciousness, ready to spring upon her and agonize her; and with it came the memory of a score of lesser bills, mounting up to a figure of which she dared not

even think. Almost involuntarily she began to pray, 'Please God, let not Cargill send in his bill again today!' but the next moment she decided that this prayer was worldly and blasphemous, and she asked forgiveness for it. Then she put on her dressing- gown and ran down to the kitchen in hopes of putting the bill out of mind.

The fire had gone out, as usual. Dorothy relaid it, dirtying her hands with coal-dust, dosed it afresh with kerosene and hung about anxiously until the kettle boiled. Father expected his shaving- water to be ready at a quarter past six. Just seven minutes late, Dorothy took the can upstairs and knocked at her father's door.

'Come in, come in!' said a muffled, irritable voice.

The room, heavily curtained, was stuffy, with a masculine smell. The Rector had lighted the candle on his bed-table, and was lying on his side, looking at his gold watch, which he had just drawn from beneath his pillow. His hair was as white and thick as thistledown. One dark bright eye glanced irritably over his shoulder at Dorothy.

'Good morning, father.'

'I do wish, Dorothy,' said the Rector indistinctly — his voice always sounded muffled and senile until he put his false teeth in— 'you would make some effort to get Ellen out of bed in the mornings. Or else be a little more punctual yourself.'

'I'm so sorry, Father. The kitchen fire kept going out.'

'Very well! Put it down on the dressing-table. Put it down and draw those curtains.'

It was daylight now, but a dull, clouded morning. Dorothy hastened up to her room and dressed herself with the lightning speed which she found necessary six mornings out of seven. There was only a tiny square of mirror in the room, and even that she did not use. She simply hung her gold cross about her neck — plain gold cross; no crucifixes, please! — twisted her hair into a knot behind, stuck a number of hairpins rather sketchily into it, and threw her clothes (grey jersey, threadbare Irish tweed coat and skirt, stockings not quite matching the coat and skirt, and much-worn brown shoes) on to herself in the space of about three minutes. She had got to 'do out' the dining-room and her father's study before church, besides saying her prayers in preparation for Holy Communion, which took her not less than twenty minutes.

When she wheeled her bicycle out of the front gate the morning was still overcast, and the grass sodden with heavy dew. Through the mist that wreathed the hillside St Athelstan's Church loomed dimly, like a leaden sphinx, its single bell tolling funereally boom! boom! boom! Only one of the bells was now in active use; the other seven had been unswung from their cage and had lain silent these three years past, slowly splintering the floor of the belfry beneath their weight. In the distance, from the mists below, you could hear the offensive clatter of the bell in the R.C. church — a nasty, cheap, tinny little thing which the Rector of St Athelstan's used to compare with a muffin-bell.

Dorothy mounted her bicycle and rode swiftly up the hill, leaning over her handlebars. The bridge of her thin nose was pink in the morning cold. A redshank whistled overhead, invisible against the clouded sky. Early in the morning my song shall rise to Thee! Dorothy propped her bicycle against the lychgate, and, finding her hands still grey with coal-dust, knelt down and scrubbed them clean in the long wet grass between the graves. Then the bell stopped ringing, and she jumped up and hastened into church, just as Proggett, the sexton, in ragged cassock and vast labourer's boots, was clumping up the aisle to take his place at the side altar.

The church was very cold, with a scent of candle-wax and ancient dust. It was a large church, much too large for its congregation, and ruinous and more than half empty. The three narrow islands of pews stretched barely half-way down the nave, and beyond them were great wastes of bare stone floor in which a few worn inscriptions marked the sites of ancient graves. The roof over the chancel was sagging visibly; beside the Church Expenses box two fragments of riddled beam explained mutely that this was due to that mortal foe of Christendom, the death-watch beetle. The light filtered, pale-coloured, through windows of anaemic glass. Through the open south door you could see a ragged cypress and the boughs of a lime-tree, greyish in the sunless air and swaying faintly.

As usual, there was only one other communicant — old Miss Mayfill, of The Grange. The attendance at Holy Communion was so bad that the Rector could not even get any boys to serve him, except on Sunday mornings, when the boys liked showing off in front of the

congregation in their cassocks and surplices. Dorothy went into the pew behind Miss Mayfill, and, in penance for some sin of yesterday, pushed away the hassock and knelt on the bare stones. The service was beginning. The Rector, in cassock and short linen surplice, was reciting the prayers in a swift practised voice, clear enough now that his teeth were in, and curiously ungenial. In his fastidious, aged face, pale as a silver coin, there was an expression of aloofness, almost of contempt. 'This is a valid sacrament,' he seemed to be saying, 'and it is my duty to administer it to you. But remember that I am only your priest, not your friend. As a human being I dislike you and despise you.' Proggett, the sexton, a man of forty with curly grey hair and a red, harassed face, stood patiently by, uncomprehending but reverent, fiddling with the little communion bell which was lost in his huge red hands.

Dorothy pressed her fingers against her eyes. She had not yet succeeded in concentrating her thoughts — indeed, the memory of Cargill's bill was still worrying her intermittently. The prayers, which she knew by heart, were flowing through her head unheeded. She raised her eyes for a moment, and they began immediately to stray. First upwards, to the headless roof-angels on whose necks you could still see the sawcuts of the Puritan soldiers, then back again, to Miss Mayfill's black, quasi-pork-pie hat and tremulous jet ear-rings. Miss Mayfill wore a long musty black overcoat, with a little collar of greasy-looking astrakhan, which had been the same ever since Dorothy could remember. It was of some very peculiar stuff, like watered silk but coarser, with rivulets of black piping wandering all over it in no discoverable pattern. It might even have been that legendary and proverbial substance, black bombazine. Miss Mayfill was very old, so old that no one remembered her as anything but an old woman. A faint scent radiated from her — an ethereal scent, analysable as eau-de-Cologne, mothballs, and a sub-flavour of gin.

Dorothy drew a long glass-headed pin from the lapel of her coat, and furtively, under cover of Miss Mayfill's back, pressed the point against her forearm. Her flesh tingled apprehensively. She made it a rule, whenever she caught herself not attending to her prayers, to prick her arm hard enough to make blood come. It was her chosen form of self-discipline, her guard against irreverence and sacrilegious

thoughts.

With the pin poised in readiness she managed for several moments to pray more collectedly. Her father had turned one dark eye disapprovingly upon Miss Mayfill, who was crossing herself at intervals, a practice he disliked. A starling chattered outside. With a shock Dorothy discovered that she was looking vaingloriously at the pleats of her father's surplice, which she herself had sewn two years ago. She set her teeth and drove the pin an eighth of an inch into her arm.

They were kneeling again. It was the General Confession. Dorothy recalled her eyes — wandering, alas! yet again, this time to the stained-glass window on her right, designed by Sir Warde Tooke, A.R.A., in 1851 and representing St Athelstan's welcome at the gate of heaven by Gabriel and a legion of angels all remarkably like one another and the Prince Consort — and pressed the pinpoint against a different part of her arm. She began to meditate conscientiously upon the meaning of each phrase of the prayer, and so brought her mind back to a more attentive state. But even so she was all but obliged to use the pin again when Proggett tinkled the bell in the middle of 'Therefore with Angels and Archangels' — being visited, as always, by a dreadful temptation to begin laughing at that passage. It was because of a story her father had told her once, of how when he was a little boy, and serving the priest at the altar, the communion bell had a screw-on clapper, which had come loose; and so the priest had said: 'Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name; evermore praising Thee, and saying, Screw it up, you little fat-head, screw it up!'

As the Rector finished the consecration Miss Mayfill began to struggle to her feet with extreme difficulty and slowness, like some disjointed wooden creature picking itself up by sections, and disengaging at each movement a powerful whiff of mothballs. There was an extraordinary creaking sound — from her stays, presumably, but it was a noise as of bones grating against one another. You could have imagined that there was only a dry skeleton inside that black overcoat.

Dorothy remained on her feet a moment longer. Miss Mayfill was

creeping towards the altar with slow, tottering steps. She could barely walk, but she took bitter offence if you offered to help her. In her ancient, bloodless face her mouth was surprisingly large, loose, and wet. The underlip, pendulous with age, slobbered forward, exposing a strip of gum and a row of false teeth as yellow as the keys of an old piano. On the upper lip was a fringe of dark, dewy moustache. It was not an appetizing mouth; not the kind of mouth that you would like to see drinking out of your cup. Suddenly, spontaneously, as though the Devil himself had put it there, the prayer slipped from Dorothy's lips: O God, let me not have to take the chalice after Miss Mayfill!

The next moment, in self-horror, she grasped the meaning of what she had said, and wished that she had bitten her tongue in two rather than utter that deadly blasphemy upon the altar steps. She drew the pin again from her lapel and drove it into her arm so hard that it was all she could do to suppress a cry of pain. Then she stepped to the altar and knelt down meekly on Miss Mayfill's left, so as to make quite sure of taking the chalice after her.

Kneeling, with head bent and hands clasped against her knees, she set herself swiftly to pray for forgiveness before her father should reach her with the wafer. But the current of her thoughts had been broken. Suddenly it was quite useless attempting to pray; her lips moved, but there was neither heart nor meaning in her prayers. She could hear Proggett's boots shuffling and her father's clear low voice murmuring 'Take and eat', she could see the worn strip of red carpet beneath her knees, she could smell dust and eau-de-Cologne and mothballs; but of the Body and Blood of Christ, of the purpose for which she had come here, she was as though deprived of the power to think. A deadly blankness had descended upon her mind. It seemed to her that actually she COULD not pray. She struggled, collected her thoughts, uttered mechanically the opening phrases of a prayer; but they were useless, meaningless — nothing but the dead shells of words. Her father was holding the wafer before her in his shapely, aged hand. He held it between finger and thumb, fastidiously, somehow distastefully, as though it had been a spoon of medicine. His eye was upon Miss Mayfill, who was doubling herself up like a geometrid caterpillar, with many creakings and crossing

herself so elaborately that one might have imagined that she was sketching a series of braid frogs on the front of her coat. For several seconds Dorothy hesitated and did not take the wafer. She dared not take it. Better, far better to step down from the altar than to accept the sacrament with such chaos in her heart!

Then it happened that she glanced sidelong, through the open south door. A momentary spear of sunlight had pierced the clouds. It struck downwards through the leaves of the limes, and a spray of leaves in the doorway gleamed with a transient, matchless green, greener than jade or emerald or Atlantic waters. It was as though some jewel of unimaginable splendour had flashed for an instant, filling the doorway with green light, and then faded. A flood of joy ran through Dorothy's heart. The flash of living colour had brought back to her, by a process deeper than reason, her peace of mind, her love of God, her power to worship. Somehow, because of the greenness of the leaves, it was again possible to pray. O all ye green things upon the earth, praise ye the Lord! She began to pray, ardently, joyfully, thankfully. The wafer melted upon her tongue. She took the chalice from her father, and tasted with repulsion, even with an added joy in this small act of self- abasement, the wet imprint of Miss Mayfill's lips on its silver rim.

2

St Athelstan's Church stood at the highest point of Knype Hill, and if you chose to climb the tower you could see ten miles or so across the surrounding country. Not that there was anything worth looking at — only the low, barely undulating East Anglian landscape, intolerably dull in summer, but redeemed in winter by the recurring patterns of the elms, naked and fanshaped against leaden skies.

Immediately below you lay the town, with the High Street running east and west and dividing unequally. The southern section of the town was the ancient, agricultural, and respectable section. On the northern side were the buildings of the Blifil-Gordon sugar- beet refinery, and all round and leading up to them were higgledy-piggledy rows of vile yellow brick cottages, mostly inhabited by the employees of the factory. The factory employees, who made up more

than half of the town's two thousand inhabitants, were newcomers, townfolk, and godless almost to a man.

The two pivots, or foci, about which the social life of the town moved were Knype Hill Conservative Club (fully licensed), from whose bow window, any time after the bar was open, the large, rosy-gilled faces of the town's elite were to be seen gazing like chubby goldfish from an aquarium pane; and Ye Olde Tea Shoppe, a little farther down the High Street, the principal rendezvous of the Knype Hill ladies. Not to be present at Ye Olde Tea Shoppe between ten and eleven every morning, to drink your 'morning coffee' and spend your half-hour or so in that agreeable twitter of upper-middle- class voices ('My dear, he had NINE spades to the ace-queen and he went one no trump, if you please. What, my dear, you don't mean to say you're paying for my coffee AGAIN? Oh, but my dear, it is simply TOO sweet of you! Now tomorrow I shall SIMPLY INSIST upon paying for yours. And just LOOK at dear little Toto sitting up and looking such a CLEVER little man with his little black nose wiggling, and he would, would he, the darling duck, he would, he would, and his mother would give him a lump of sugar, she would, she would. THERE, Toto!'), was to be definitely out of Knype Hill society. The Rector in his acid way nicknamed these ladies 'the coffee brigade'. Close to the colony of sham-picturesque villas inhabited by the coffee brigade, but cut off from them by its larger grounds, was The Grange, Miss Mayfill's house. It was a curious, machicolated, imitation castle of dark red brick — somebody's Folly, built about 1870 — and fortunately almost hidden among dense shrubberies.

The Rectory stood half way up the hill, with its face to the church and its back to the High Street. It was a house of the wrong age, inconveniently large, and faced with chronically peeling yellow plaster. Some earlier Rector had added, at one side, a large greenhouse which Dorothy used as a workroom, but which was constantly out of repair. The front garden was choked with ragged fir-trees and a great spreading ash which shadowed the front rooms and made it impossible to grow any flowers. There was a large vegetable garden at the back. Proggett did the heavy digging of the garden in the spring and autumn, and Dorothy did the sowing, planting, and weeding in such spare time as she could command; in

spite of which the vegetable garden was usually an impenetrable jungle of weeds.

Dorothy jumped off her bicycle at the front gate, upon which some officious person had stuck a poster inscribed 'Vote for Blifil-Gordon and Higher Wages!' (There was a by-election going on, and Mr Blifil-Gordon was standing in the Conservative interest.) As Dorothy opened the front door she saw two letters lying on the worn coconut mat. One was from the Rural Dean, and the other was a nasty, thin-looking letter from Catkin & Palm, her father's clerical tailors. It was a bill undoubtedly. The Rector had followed his usual practice of collecting the letters that interested him and leaving the others. Dorothy was just bending down to pick up the letters, when she saw, with a horrid shock of dismay, an unstamped envelope sticking to the letter flap.

It was a bill — for certain it was a bill! Moreover, as soon as she set eyes on it she 'knew' that it was that horrible bill from Cargill's, the butcher's. A sinking feeling passed through her entrails. For a moment she actually began to pray that it might not be Cargill's bill — that it might only be the bill for three and nine from Solepipe's, the draper's, or the bill from the International or the baker's or the dairy — anything except Cargill's bill! Then, mastering her panic, she took the envelope from the letter-flap and tore it open with a convulsive movement.

'To account rendered: L21 7S. 9d.'

This was written in the innocuous handwriting of Mr Cargill's accountant. But underneath, in thick, accusing-looking letters, was added and heavily underlined: 'Shd. like to bring to your notice that this bill has been owing a VERY LONG TIME. The EARLIEST POSSIBLE settlement will oblige, S. Cargill.'

Dorothy had turned a shade paler, and was conscious of not wanting any breakfast. She thrust the bill into her pocket and went into the dining-room. It was a smallish, dark room, badly in need of repapering, and, like every other room in the Rectory, it had the air of having been furnished from the sweepings of an antique shop. The furniture was 'good', but battered beyond repair, and the chairs were so worm-eaten that you could only sit on them in safety if you knew their individual foibles. There were old, dark, defaced steel

engravings hanging on the walls, one of them — an engraving of Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I — probably of some value if it had not been ruined by damp.

The Rector was standing before the empty grate, warming himself at an imaginary fire and reading a letter that came from a long blue envelope. He was still wearing his cassock of black watered silk, which set off to perfection his thick white hair and his pale, fine, none too amiable face. As Dorothy came in he laid the letter aside, drew out his gold watch and scrutinized it significantly.

'I'm afraid I'm a bit late, Father.'

'Yes, Dorothy, you are A BIT LATE,' said the Rector, repeating her words with delicate but marked emphasis. 'You are twelve minutes late, to be exact. Don't you think, Dorothy, that when I have to get up at a quarter past six to celebrate Holy Communion, and come home exceedingly tired and hungry, it would be better if you could manage to come to breakfast without being A BIT LATE?'

It was clear that the Rector was in what Dorothy called, euphemistically, his 'uncomfortable mood'. He had one of those weary, cultivated voices which are never definitely angry and never anywhere near good humour — one of those voices which seem all the while to be saying, 'I really CANNOT see what you are making all this fuss about!' The impression he gave was of suffering perpetually from other people's stupidity and tiresomeness.

'I'm so sorry, Father! I simply had to go and ask after Mrs Tawney.' (Mrs Tawney was the 'Mrs T' of the 'memo list'.) 'Her baby was born last night, and you know she promised me she'd come and be churched after it was born. But of course she won't if she thinks we aren't taking any interest in her. You know what these women are — they seem so to hate being churched. They'll never come unless I coax them into it.'

The Rector did not actually grunt, but he uttered a small dissatisfied sound as he moved towards the breakfast table. It was intended to mean, first, that it was Mrs Tawney's duty to come and be churched without Dorothy's coaxing; secondly, that Dorothy had no business to waste her time visiting all the riffraff of the town, especially before breakfast. Mrs Tawney was a labourer's wife and lived in partibus infidelium, north of the High Street. The Rector laid

his hand on the back of his chair, and, without speaking, cast Dorothy a glance which meant: 'Are we ready NOW? Or are there to be any MORE delays?'

'I think everything's here, Father,' said Dorothy. 'Perhaps if you'd just say grace— '

'Benedictus benedicat,' said the Rector, lifting the worn silver coverlet off the breakfast dish. The silver coverlet, like the silver-gilt marmalade spoon, was a family heirloom; the knives and forks, and most of the crockery, came from Woolworths. 'Bacon again, I see,' the Rector added, eyeing the three minute rashers that lay curled up on squares of fried bread.

'It's all we've got in the house, I'm afraid,' Dorothy said.

The Rector picked up his fork between finger and thumb, and with a very delicate movement, as though playing at spillikins, turned one of the rashers over.

'I know, of course,' he said, 'that bacon for breakfast is an English institution almost as old as parliamentary government. But still, don't you think we might OCCASIONALLY have a change, Dorothy?'

'Bacon's so cheap now,' said Dorothy regretfully. 'It seems a sin not to buy it. This was only fivepence a pound, and I saw some quite decent-looking bacon as low as threepence.'

'Ah, Danish, I suppose? What a variety of Danish invasions we have had in this country! First with fire and sword, and now with their abominable cheap bacon. Which has been responsible for the more deaths, I wonder?'

Feeling a little better after this witticism, the Rector settled himself in his chair and made a fairly good breakfast off the despised bacon, while Dorothy (she was not having any bacon this morning — a penance she had set herself yesterday for saying 'Damn' and idling for half an hour after lunch) meditated upon a good conversational opening.

There was an unspeakably hateful job in front of her — a demand for money. At the very best of times getting money out of her father was next door to impossible, and it was obvious that this morning he was going to be even more 'difficult' than usual. 'Difficult' was another of her euphemisms. He's had bad news, I suppose, she

thought despondently, looking at the blue envelope.

Probably no one who had ever spoken to the Rector for as long as ten minutes would have denied that he was a 'difficult' kind of man. The secret of his almost unfailing ill humour really lay in the fact that he was an anachronism. He ought never to have been born into the modern world; its whole atmosphere disgusted and infuriated him. A couple of centuries earlier, a happy pluralist writing poems or collecting fossils while curates at 40 pounds a year administered his parishes, he would have been perfectly at home. Even now, if he had been a richer man, he might have consoled himself by shutting the twentieth century out of his consciousness. But to live in past ages is very expensive; you can't do it on less than two thousand a year. The Rector, tethered by his poverty to the age of Lenin and the Daily Mail, was kept in a state of chronic exasperation which it was only natural that he should work off on the person nearest to him — usually, that is, on Dorothy.

He had been born in 1871, the younger son of the younger son of a baronet, and had gone into the Church for the outmoded reason that the Church is the traditional profession for younger sons. His first cure had been in a large, slummy parish in East London — a nasty, hooliganish place it had been, and he looked back on it with loathing. Even in those days the lower class (as he made a point of calling them) were getting decidedly out of hand. It was a little better when he was curate-in-charge at some remote place in Kent (Dorothy had been born in Kent), where the decently down- trodden villagers still touched their hats to 'parson'. But by that time he had married, and his marriage had been diabolically unhappy; moreover, because clergymen must not quarrel with their wives, its unhappiness had been secret and therefore ten times worse. He had come to Knype Hill in 1908, aged thirty-seven and with a temper incurably soured — a temper which had ended by alienating every man, woman, and child in the parish.

It was not that he was a bad priest, merely AS a priest. In his purely clerical duties he was scrupulously correct — perhaps a little too correct for a Low Church East Anglian parish. He conducted his services with perfect taste, preached admirable sermons, and got up at uncomfortable hours of the morning to celebrate Holy

Communion every Wednesday and Friday. But that a clergyman has any duties outside the four walls of the church was a thing that had never seriously occurred to him. Unable to afford a curate, he left the dirty work of the parish entirely to his wife, and after her death (she died in 1921) to Dorothy. People used to say, spitefully and untruly, that he would have let Dorothy preach his sermons for him if it had been possible. The 'lower classes' had grasped from the first what was his attitude towards them, and if he had been a rich man they would probably have licked his boots, according to their custom; as it was, they merely hated him. Not that he cared whether they hated him or not, for he was largely unaware of their existence. But even with the upper classes he had got on no better. With the County he had quarrelled one by one, and as for the petty gentry of the town, as the grandson of a baronet he despised them, and was at no pains to hide it. In twenty-three years he had succeeded in reducing the congregation of St Athelstan's from six hundred to something under two hundred.

This was not solely due to personal reasons. It was also because the old-fashioned High Anglicanism to which the Rector obstinately clung was of a kind to annoy all parties in the parish about equally. Nowadays, a clergyman who wants to keep his congregation has only two courses open to him. Either it must be Anglo- Catholicism pure and simple — or rather, pure and not simple; or he must be daringly modern and broad-minded and preach comforting sermons proving that there is no Hell and all good religions are the same. The Rector did neither. On the one hand, he had the deepest contempt for the Anglo-Catholic movement. It had passed over his head, leaving him absolutely untouched; 'Roman Fever' was his name for it. On the other hand, he was too 'high' for the older members of his congregation. From time to time he scared them almost out of their wits by the use of the fatal word 'Catholic', not only in its sanctified place in the Creeds, but also from the pulpit. Naturally the congregation dwindled year by year, and it was the Best People who were the first to go. Lord Pockthorne of Pockthorne Court, who owned a fifth of the county, Mr Leavis, the retired leather merchant, Sir Edward Huson of Crabtree Hall, and such of the petty gentry as owned motor-cars, had all deserted St Athelstan's. Most of them

drove over on Sunday mornings to Millborough, five miles away. Millborough was a town of five thousand inhabitants, and you had your choice of two churches, St Edmund's and St Wedekind's. St Edmund's was Modernist — text from Blake's 'Jerusalem' blazoned over the altar, and communion wine out of liqueur glasses — and St Wedekind's was Anglo-Catholic and in a state of perpetual guerrilla warfare with the Bishop. But Mr Cameron, the secretary of the Knype Hill Conservative Club, was a Roman Catholic convert, and his children were in the thick of the Roman Catholic literary movement. They were said to have a parrot which they were teaching to say 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus'. In effect, no one of any standing remained true to St Athelstan's, except Miss Mayfill, of The Grange. Most of Miss Mayfill's money was bequeathed to the Church — so she said; meanwhile, she had never been known to put more than sixpence in the collection bag, and she seemed likely to go on living for ever.

The first ten minutes of breakfast passed in complete silence. Dorothy was trying to summon up courage to speak — obviously she had got to start SOME kind of conversation before raising the money- question — but her father was not an easy man with whom to make small talk. At times he would fall into such deep fits of abstraction that you could hardly get him to listen to you; at other times he was all too attentive, listened carefully to what you said and then pointed out, rather wearily, that it was not worth saying. Polite platitudes — the weather, and so forth — generally moved him to sarcasm. Nevertheless, Dorothy decided to try the weather first.

'It's a funny kind of day, isn't it?' she said — aware, even as she made it, of the inanity of this remark.

'WHAT is funny?' inquired the Rector.

'Well, I mean, it was so cold and misty this morning, and now the sun's come out and it's turned quite fine.'

'IS there anything particularly funny about that?'

That was no good, obviously. He MUST have had bad news, she thought. She tried again.

'I do wish you'd come out and have a look at the things in the back garden some time, Father. The runner beans are doing so splendidly! The pods are going to be over a foot long. I'm going to

keep all the best of them for the Harvest Festival, of course. I thought it would look so nice if we decorated the pulpit with festoons of runner beans and a few tomatoes hanging in among them.'

This was a faux pas. The Rector looked up from his plate with an expression of profound distaste.

'My dear Dorothy,' he said sharply, 'IS it necessary to begin worrying me about the Harvest Festival already?'

'I'm sorry, Father!' said Dorothy, disconcerted. 'I didn't mean to worry you. I just thought— '

'Do you suppose', proceeded the Rector, 'it is any pleasure to me to have to preach my sermon among festoons of runner beans? I am not a greengrocer. It quite puts me off my breakfast to think of it. When is the wretched thing due to happen?'

'It's September the sixteenth, Father.'

'That's nearly a month hence. For Heaven's sake let me forget it a little longer! I suppose we must have this ridiculous business once a year to tickle the vanity of every amateur gardener in the parish. But don't let's think of it more than is absolutely necessary.'

The Rector had, as Dorothy ought to have remembered, a perfect abhorrence of Harvest Festivals. He had even lost a valuable parishioner — a Mr Toagis, a surly retired market gardener — through his dislike, as he said, of seeing his church dressed up to imitate a coster's stall. Mr Toagis, anima naturaliter Nonconformistica, had been kept 'Church' solely by the privilege, at Harvest Festival time, of decorating the side altar with a sort of Stonehenge composed of gigantic vegetable marrows. The previous summer he had succeeded in growing a perfect leviathan of a pumpkin, a fiery red thing so enormous that it took two men to lift it. This monstrous object had been placed in the chancel, where it dwarfed the altar and took all the colour out of the east window. In no matter what part of the church you were standing, the pumpkin, as the saying goes, hit you in the eye. Mr Toagis was in raptures. He hung about the church at all hours, unable to tear himself away from his adored pumpkin, and even bringing relays of friends in to admire it. From the expression of his face you would have thought that he was quoting Wordsworth on Westminster Bridge:

Earth has not any thing to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty!

Dorothy even had hopes, after this, of getting him to come to Holy Communion. But when the Rector saw the pumpkin he was seriously angry, and ordered 'that revolting thing' to be removed at once. Mr Toagis had instantly 'gone chapel', and he and his heirs were lost to the Church for ever.

Dorothy decided to make one final attempt at conversation.

'We're getting on with the costumes for Charles I,' she said. (The Church School children were rehearsing a play entitled Charles I in aid of the organ fund.) 'But I do wish we'd chosen something a bit easier. The armour is a dreadful job to make, and I'm afraid the jackboots are going to be worse. I think next time we must really have a Roman or Greek play. Something where they only have to wear togas.'

This elicited only another muted grunt from the Rector. School plays, pageants, bazaars, jumble sales, and concerts in aid of were not quite so bad in his eyes as Harvest Festivals, but he did not pretend to be interested in them. They were necessary evils, he used to say. At this moment Ellen, the maidservant, pushed open the door and came gauchely into the room with one large, scaly hand holding her sacking apron against her belly. She was a tall, round-shouldered girl with mouse-coloured hair, a plaintive voice, and a bad complexion, and she suffered chronically from eczema. Her eyes flitted apprehensively towards the Rector, but she addressed herself to Dorothy, for she was too much afraid of the Rector to speak to him directly.

'Please, Miss— ' she began.

'Yes, Ellen?'

'Please, Miss,' went on Ellen plaintively, 'Mr Porter's in the kitchen, and he says, please could the Rector come round and baptize Mrs Porter's baby? Because they don't think as it's going to live the day out, and it ain't been baptized yet, Miss.'

Dorothy stood up. 'Sit down,' said the Rector promptly, with his mouth full.

‘What do they think is the matter with the baby?’ said Dorothy.

‘Well, Miss, it’s turning quite black. And it’s had diarrhoea something cruel.’

The Rector emptied his mouth with an effort. ‘Must I have these disgusting details while I am eating my breakfast?’ he exclaimed. He turned on Ellen: ‘Send Porter about his business and tell him I’ll be round at his house at twelve o’clock. I really cannot think why it is that the lower classes always seem to choose mealtimes to come pestering one,’ he added, casting another irritated glance at Dorothy as she sat down.

Mr Porter was a labouring man — a bricklayer, to be exact. The Rector’s views on baptism were entirely sound. If it had been urgently necessary he would have walked twenty miles through snow to baptize a dying baby. But he did not like to see Dorothy proposing to leave the breakfast table at the call of a common bricklayer.

There was no further conversation during breakfast. Dorothy’s heart was sinking lower and lower. The demand for money had got to be made, and yet it was perfectly obvious that it was foredoomed to failure. His breakfast finished, the Rector got up from the table and began to fill his pipe from the tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece. Dorothy uttered a short prayer for courage, and then pinched herself. Go on, Dorothy! Out with it! No funking, please! With an effort she mastered her voice and said:

‘Father— ‘

‘What is it?’ said the Rector, pausing with the match in his hand.

‘Father, I’ve something I want to ask you. Something important.’

The expression of the Rector’s face changed. He had divined instantly what she was going to say; and, curiously enough, he now looked less irritable than before. A stony calm had settled upon his face. He looked like a rather exceptionally aloof and unhelpful sphinx.

‘Now, my dear Dorothy, I know very well what you are going to say. I suppose you are going to ask me for money again. Is that it?’

‘Yes, Father. Because— ‘

‘Well, I may as well save you the trouble. I have no money at all — absolutely no money at all until next quarter. You have had your allowance, and I can’t give you a halfpenny more. It’s quite useless

to come worrying me now.'

'But, Father— '

Dorothy's heart sank yet lower. What was worst of all when she came to him for money was the terrible, unhelpful calmness of his attitude. He was never so unmoved as when you were reminding him that he was up to his eyes in debt. Apparently he could not understand that tradesmen occasionally want to be paid, and that no house can be kept going without an adequate supply of money. He allowed Dorothy eighteen pounds a month for all the household expenses, including Ellen's wages, and at the same time he was 'dainty' about his food and instantly detected any falling off in its quality. The result was, of course, that the household was perennially in debt. But the Rector paid not the smallest attention to his debts — indeed, he was hardly even aware of them. When he lost money over an investment, he was deeply agitated; but as for a debt to a mere tradesman — well, it was the kind of thing that he simply could not bother his head about.

A peaceful plume of smoke floated upwards from the Rector's pipe. He was gazing with a meditative eye at the steel engraving of Charles I and had probably forgotten already about Dorothy's demand for money. Seeing him so unconcerned, a pang of desperation went through Dorothy, and her courage came back to her. She said more sharply than before:

'Father, please listen to me! I MUST have some money soon! I simply MUST! We can't go on as we're doing. We owe money to nearly every tradesman in the town. It's got so that some mornings I can hardly bear to go down the street and think of all the bills that are owing. Do you know that we owe Cargill nearly twenty-two pounds?'

'What of it?' said the Rector between puffs of smoke.

'But the bill's been mounting up for over seven months! He's sent it in over and over again. We MUST pay it! It's so unfair to him to keep him waiting for his money like that!'

'Nonsense, my dear child! These people expect to be kept waiting for their money. They like it. It brings them more in the end. Goodness knows how much I owe to Catkin & Palm — I should hardly care to inquire. They are dunning me by every post. But you

don't hear ME complaining, do you?'

'But, Father, I can't look at it as you do, I can't! It's so dreadful to be always in debt! Even if it isn't actually wrong, it's so HATEFUL. It makes me so ashamed! When I go into Cargill's shop to order the joint, he speaks to me so shortly and makes me wait after the other customers, all because our bill's mounting up the whole time. And yet I daren't stop ordering from him. I believe he'd run us in if I did.'

The Rector frowned. 'What! Do you mean to say the fellow has been impertinent to you?'

'I didn't say he'd been impertinent, Father. But you can't blame him if he's angry when his bill's not paid.'

'I most certainly can blame him! It is simply abominable how these people take it upon themselves to behave nowadays — abominable! But there you are, you see. That is the kind of thing that we are exposed to in this delightful century. That is democracy — PROGRESS, as they are pleased to call it. Don't order from the fellow again. Tell him at once that you are taking your account elsewhere. That's the only way to treat these people.'

'But, Father, that doesn't settle anything. Really and truly, don't you think we ought to pay him? Surely we can get hold of the money somehow? Couldn't you sell out some shares, or something?'

'My dear child, don't talk to me about selling out shares! I have just had the most disagreeable news from my broker. He tells me that my Sumatra Tin shares have dropped from seven and fourpence to six and a penny. It means a loss of nearly sixty pounds. I am telling him to sell out at once before they drop any further.'

'Then if you sell out you'll have some ready money, won't you? Don't you think it would be better to get out of debt once and for all?'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said the Rector more calmly, putting his pipe back in his mouth. 'You know nothing whatever about these matters. I shall have to reinvest at once in something more hopeful — it's the only way of getting my money back.'

With one thumb in the belt of his cassock he frowned abstractedly at the steel engraving. His broker had advised United Celanese. Here — in Sumatra Tin, United Celanese, and numberless other remote and dimly imagined companies — was the central cause of the

Rector's money troubles. He was an inveterate gambler. Not, of course, that he thought of it as gambling; it was merely a lifelong search for a 'good investment'. On coming of age he had inherited four thousand pounds, which had gradually dwindled, thanks to his 'investments', to about twelve hundred. What was worse, every year he managed to scrape together, out of his miserable income, another fifty pounds which vanished by the same road. It is a curious fact that the lure of a 'good investment' seems to haunt clergymen more persistently than any other class of man. Perhaps it is the modern equivalent of the demons in female shape who used to haunt the anchorites of the Dark Ages.

'I shall buy five hundred United Celanese,' said the Rector finally.

Dorothy began to give up hope. Her father was now thinking of his 'investments' (she new nothing whatever about these 'investments', except that they went wrong with phenomenal regularity), and in another moment the question of the shop-debts would have slipped entirely out of his mind. She made a final effort.

'Father, let's get this settled, please. Do you think you'll be able to let me have some extra money fairly soon? Not this moment, perhaps — but in the next month or two?'

'No, my dear, I don't. About Christmas time, possibly — it's very unlikely even then. But for the present, certainly not. I haven't a halfpenny I can spare.'

'But, Father, it's so horrible to feel we can't pay our debts! It disgraces us so! Last time Mr Welwyn-Foster was here' (Mr Welwyn- Foster was the Rural Dean) 'Mrs Welwyn-Foster was going all round the town asking everyone the most personal questions about us — asking how we spent our time, and how much money we had, and how many tons of coal we used in a year, and everything. She's always trying to pry into our affairs. Suppose she found out that we were badly in debt!'

'Surely it is our own business? I fail entirely to see what it has to do with Mrs Welwyn-Foster or anyone else.'

'But she'd repeat it all over the place — and she'd exaggerate it too! You know what Mrs Welwyn-Foster is. In every parish she goes to she tries to find out something disgraceful about the clergyman, and then she repeats every word of it to the Bishop. I don't want to

be uncharitable about her, but really she— ‘

Realizing that she DID want to be uncharitable, Dorothy was silent.

‘She is a detestable woman,’ said the Rector evenly. ‘What of it? Who ever heard of a Rural Dean’s wife who wasn’t detestable?’

‘But, Father, I don’t seem to be able to get you to see how serious things are! We’ve simply nothing to live on for the next month. I don’t even know where the meat’s coming from for today’s dinner.’

‘Luncheon, Dorothy, luncheon!’ said the Rector with a touch of irritation. ‘I do wish you would drop that abominable lower-class habit of calling the midday meal DINNER!’

‘For luncheon, then. Where are we to get the meat from? I daren’t ask Cargill for another joint.’

‘Go to the other butcher — what’s his name? Salter — and take no notice of Cargill. He knows he’ll be paid sooner or later. Good gracious, I don’t know what all this fuss is about! Doesn’t everyone owe money to his tradesmen? I distinctly remember’ — the Rector straightened his shoulders a little, and, putting his pipe back into his mouth, looked into the distance; his voice became reminiscent and perceptibly more agreeable— ‘I distinctly remember that when I was up at Oxford, my father had still not paid some of his own Oxford bills of thirty years earlier. Tom’ (Tom was the Rector’s cousin, the Baronet) ‘owed seven thousand before he came into his money. He told me so himself.’

At that, Dorothy’s last hope vanished. When her father began to talk about his cousin Tom, and about things that had happened ‘when I was up at Oxford’, there was nothing more to be done with him. It meant that he had slipped into an imaginary golden past in which such vulgar things as butchers’ bills simply did not exist. There were long periods together when he seemed actually to forget that he was only a poverty-stricken country Rector — that he was not a young man of family with estates and reversions at his back. The aristocratic, the expensive attitude was the one that in all circumstances came the most naturally to him. And of course while he lived, not uncomfortably, in the world of his imagination, it was Dorothy who had to fight the tradesmen and make a leg of mutton last from Sunday to Wednesday. But she knew the complete

uselessness of arguing with him any longer. It would only end in making him angry. She got up from the table and began to pile the breakfast things on to the tray.

'You're absolutely certain you can't let me have any money, Father?' she said for the last time, at the door; with the tray in her arms.

The Rector, gazing into the middle distance, amid comfortable wreaths of smoke, did not hear her. He was thinking, perhaps, of his golden Oxford days. Dorothy went out of the room distressed almost to the point of tears. The miserable question of the debts was once more shelved, as it had been shelved a thousand times before, with no prospect of final solution.

3

On her elderly bicycle with the basketwork carrier on the handlebars, Dorothy free-wheeled down the hill, doing mental arithmetic with three pounds nineteen and fourpence — her entire stock of money until next quarter-day.

She had been through the list of things that were needed in the kitchen. But indeed, was there anything that was NOT needed in the kitchen? Tea, coffee, soap, matches, candles, sugar, lentils, firewood, soda, lamp oil, boot polish, margarine, baking powder — there seemed to be practically nothing that they were not running short of. And at every moment some fresh item that she had forgotten popped up and dismayed her. The laundry bill, for example, and the fact that the coal was running short, and the question of the fish for Friday. The Rector was 'difficult' about fish. Roughly speaking, he would only eat the more expensive kinds; cod, whiting, sprats, skate, herrings, and kippers he refused.

Meanwhile, she had got to settle about the meat for today's dinner — luncheon. (Dorothy was careful to obey her father and call it LUNCHEON, when she remembered it. On the other hand, you could not in honesty call the evening meal anything but 'supper'; so there was no such meal as 'dinner' at the Rectory.) Better make an omelette for luncheon today, Dorothy decided. She dared not go to Cargill again. Though, of course, if they had an omelette for

luncheon and then scrambled eggs for supper, her father would probably be sarcastic about it. Last time they had eggs twice in one day, he had inquired coldly, 'Have you started a chicken farm, Dorothy?' And perhaps tomorrow she would get two pounds of sausages at the International, and that staved off the meat- question for one day more.

Thirty-nine further days, with only three pounds nineteen and fourpence to provide for them, loomed up in Dorothy's imagination, sending through her a wave of self-pity which she checked almost instantly. Now then, Dorothy! No snivelling, please! It all comes right somehow if you trust in God. Matthew vi, 25. The Lord will provide. Will He? Dorothy removed her right hand from the handle-bars and felt for the glass-headed pin, but the blasphemous thought faded. At this moment she became aware of the gloomy red face of Proggett, who was hailing her respectfully but urgently from the side of the road.

Dorothy stopped and got off her bicycle.

'Beg pardon, Miss,' said Proggett. 'I been wanting to speak to you, Miss — PARTIC'LAR.'

Dorothy sighed inwardly. When Proggett wanted to speak to you PARTIC'LAR, you could be perfectly certain what was coming; it was some piece of alarming news about the condition of the church. Proggett was a pessimistic, conscientious man, and very loyal churchman, after his fashion. Too dim of intellect to have any definite religious beliefs, he showed his piety by an intense solicitude about the state of the church buildings. He had decided long ago that the Church of Christ meant the actual walls, roof, and tower of St Athelstan's, Knype Hill, and he would poke round the church at all hours of the day, gloomily noting a cracked stone here, a worm-eaten beam there — and afterwards, of course, coming to harass Dorothy with demands for repairs which would cost impossible sums of money.

'What is it, Proggett?' said Dorothy.

'Well, Miss, it's they— ' — here a peculiar, imperfect sound, not a word exactly, but the ghost of a word, all but formed itself on Proggett's lips. It seemed to begin with a B. Proggett was one of those men who are for ever on the verge of swearing, but who always

recapture the oath as it is escaping between their teeth. ‘It’s they BELLS, Miss,’ he said, getting rid of the B sound with an effort. ‘They bells up in the church tower. They’re a-splintering through that there belfry floor in a way as it makes you fair shudder to look at ‘em. We’ll have ‘em down atop of us before we know where we are. I was up the belfry ‘smorning, and I tell you I come down faster’n I went up, when I saw how that there floor’s a- busting underneath ‘em.’

Proggett came to complain about the condition of the bells not less than once a fortnight. It was now three years that they had been lying on the floor of the belfry, because the cost of either reswinging or removing them was estimated at twenty-five pounds, which might as well have been twenty-five thousand for all the chance there was of paying for it. They were really almost as dangerous as Proggett made out. It was quite certain that, if not this year or next year, at any rate at some time in the near future, they would fall through the belfry floor into the church porch. And, as Proggett was fond of pointing out, it would probably happen on a Sunday morning just as the congregation were coming into church.

Dorothy sighed again. Those wretched bells were never out of mind for long; there were times when the thought of their falling even got into her dreams. There was always some trouble or other at the church. If it was not the belfry, then it was the roof or the walls; or it was a broken pew which the carpenter wanted ten shillings to mend; or it was seven hymn-books needed at one and sixpence each, or the flue of the stove choked up — and the sweep’s fee was half a crown — or a smashed window-pane or the choir-boys’ cassocks in rags. There was never enough money for anything. The new organ which the rector had insisted on buying five years earlier — the old one, he said, reminded him of a cow with the asthma — was a burden under which the Church Expenses fund had been staggering ever since.

‘I don’t know WHAT we can do,’ said Dorothy finally; ‘I really don’t. We’ve simply no money at all. And even if we do make anything out of the school-children’s play, it’s all got to go to the organ fund. The organ people are really getting quite nasty about their bill. Have you spoken to my father?’

‘Yes, Miss. He don’t make nothing of it. “Belfry’s held up five hundred years,” he says; “we can trust it to hold up a few years longer.”’

This was quite according to precedent. The fact that the church was visibly collapsing over his head made no impression on the Rector; he simply ignored it, as he ignored anything else that he did not wish to be worried about.

‘Well, I don’t know WHAT we can do,’ Dorothy repeated. ‘Of course there’s the jumble sale coming off the week after next. I’m counting on Miss Mayfill to give us something really NICE for the jumble sale. I know she could afford to. She’s got such lots of furniture and things that she never uses. I was in her house the other day, and I saw a most beautiful Lowestoft china tea service which was put away in a cupboard, and she told me it hadn’t been used for over twenty years. Just suppose she gave us that tea service! It would fetch pounds and pounds. We must just pray that the jumble sale will be a success, Proggett. Pray that it’ll bring us five pounds at least. I’m sure we shall get the money somehow if we really and truly pray for it.’

‘Yes, Miss,’ said Proggett respectfully, and shifted his gaze to the far distance.

At this moment a horn hooted and a vast, gleaming blue car came very slowly down the road, making for the High Street. Out of one window Mr Blifil-Gordon, the Proprietor of the sugar-beet refinery, was thrusting a sleek black head which went remarkably ill with his suit of sandy-coloured Harris tweed. As he passed, instead of ignoring Dorothy as usual, he flashed upon her a smile so warm that it was almost amorous. With him were his eldest son Ralph — or, as he and the rest of the family pronounced it, Walph — an epicene youth of twenty, given to the writing of sub-Eliot vers libre poems, and Lord Pockthorne’s two daughters. They were all smiling, even Lord Pockthorne’s daughters. Dorothy was astonished, for it was several years since any of these people had deigned to recognize her in the street.

‘Mr Blifil-Gordon is very friendly this morning,’ she said.

‘Aye, Miss. I’ll be bound he is. It’s the election coming on next week, that’s what ’tis. All honey and butter they are till they’ve made

sure as you'll vote for them; and then they've forgot your very face the day afterwards.'

'Oh, the election!' said Dorothy vaguely. So remote were such things as parliamentary elections from the daily round of parish work that she was virtually unaware of them — hardly, indeed, even knowing the difference between Liberal and Conservative or Socialist and Communist. 'Well, Proggett,' she said, immediately forgetting the election in favour of something more important, 'I'll speak to Father and tell him how serious it is about the bells. I think perhaps the best thing we can do will be to get up a special subscription, just for the bells alone. There's no knowing, we might make five pounds. We might even make ten pounds! Don't you think if I went to Miss Mayfill and asked her to start the subscription with five pounds, she might give it to us?'

'You take my word, Miss, and don't you let Miss Mayfill hear nothing about it. It'd scare the life out of her. If she thought as that tower wasn't safe, we'd never get her inside that church again.'

'Oh dear! I suppose not.'

'No, Miss. We shan't get nothing out of HER; the old— '

A ghostly B floated once more across Proggett's lips. His mind a little more at rest now that he had delivered his fortnightly report upon the bells, he touched his cap and departed, while Dorothy rode on into the High Street, with the twin problems of the shop-debts and the Church Expenses pursuing one another through her mind like the twin refrains of a villanelle.

The still watery sun, now playing hide-and-seek, April-wise, among woolly islets of cloud, sent an oblique beam down the High Street, gilding the house-fronts of the northern side. It was one of those sleepy, old-fashioned streets that look so ideally peaceful on a casual visit and so very different when you live in them and have an enemy or a creditor behind every window. The only definitely offensive buildings were Ye Olde Tea Shoppe (plaster front with sham beams nailed on to it, bottle-glass windows and revolting curly roof like that of a Chinese joss-house), and the new, Doric- pillared post office. After about two hundred yards the High Street forked, forming a tiny market-place, adorned with a pump, now defunct, and a worm-eaten pair of stocks. On either side of the pump stood the

Dog and Bottle, the principal inn of the town, and the Knype Hill Conservative Club. At the end, commanding the street, stood Cargill's dreaded shop.

Dorothy came round the corner to a terrific din of cheering, mingled with the strains of 'Rule Britannia' played on the trombone. The normally sleepy street was black with people, and more people were hurrying from all the sidestreets. Evidently a sort of triumphal procession was taking place. Right across the street, from the roof of the Dog and Bottle to the roof of the Conservative Club, hung a line with innumerable blue streamers, and in the middle a vast banner inscribed 'Blifil-Gordon and the Empire!' Towards this, between the lanes of people, the Blifil- Gordon car was moving at a foot-pace, with Mr Blifil-Gordon smiling richly, first to one side, then to the other. In front of the car marched a detachment of the Buffaloes, headed by an earnest-looking little man playing the trombone, and carrying among them another banner inscribed:

Who'll save Britain from the Reds?
BLIFIL-GORDON
Who'll put the Beer back into your Pot?
BLIFIL-GORDON
Blifil-Gordon for ever!

From the window of the Conservative Club floated an enormous Union Jack, above which six scarlet faces were beaming enthusiastically.

Dorothy wheeled her bicycle slowly down the street, too much agitated by the prospect of passing Cargill's shop (she had got to pass, it, to get to Solepipe's) to take much notice of the procession. The Blifil-Gordon car had halted for a moment outside Ye Olde Tea Shoppe. Forward, the coffee brigade! Half the ladies of the town seemed to be hurrying forth, with lapdogs or shopping baskets on their arms, to cluster about the car like Bacchantes about the car of the vine-god. After all, an election is practically the only time when you get a chance of exchanging smiles with the County. There were eager feminine cries of 'Good luck, Mr Blifil-Gordon! DEAR Mr Blifil-Gordon! We DO hope you'll get in, Mr Blifil-Gordon!' Mr

Blifil-Gordon's largesse of smiles was unceasing, but carefully graded. To the populace he gave a diffused, general smile, not resting on individuals; to the coffee ladies and the six scarlet patriots of the Conservative Club he gave one smile each; to the most favoured of all, young Walph gave an occasional wave of the hand and a squeaky 'Cheewio!'

Dorothy's heart tightened. She had seen that Mr Cargill, like the rest of the shopkeepers, was standing on his doorstep. He was a tall, evil-looking man, in blue-striped apron, with a lean, scraped face as purple as one of his own joints of meat that had lain a little too long in the window. So fascinated were Dorothy's eyes by that ominous figure that she did not look where she was going, and bumped into a very large, stout man who was stepping off the pavement backwards.

The stout man turned round. 'Good Heavens! It's Dorothy!' he exclaimed.

'Why, Mr Warburton! How extraordinary! Do you know, I had a feeling I was going to meet you today.'

'By the pricking of your thumbs, I presume?' said Mr Warburton, beaming all over a large, pink, Micawberish face. 'And how are you? But by Jove!' he added, 'What need is there to ask? You look more bewitching than ever.'

He pinched Dorothy's bare elbow — she had changed, after breakfast, into a sleeveless gingham frock. Dorothy stepped hurriedly backwards to get out of his reach — she hated being pinched or otherwise 'mauled about' — and said rather severely:

'PLEASE don't pinch my elbow. I don't like it.'

'My dear Dorothy, who could resist an elbow like yours? It's the sort of elbow one pinches automatically. A reflex action, if you understand me.'

'When did you get back to Knype Hill?' said Dorothy, who had put her bicycle between Mr Warburton and herself. It's over two months since I've seen you.'

'I got back the day before yesterday. But this is only a flying visit. I'm off again tomorrow. I'm taking the kids to Brittany. The BASTARDS, you know.'

Mr Warburton pronounced the word BASTARDS, at which Dorothy looked away in discomfort, with a touch of naive pride. He

and his 'bastards' (he had three of them) were one of the chief scandals of Knype Hill. He was a man of independent income, calling himself a painter — he produced about half a dozen mediocre landscapes every year — and he had come to Knype Hill two years earlier and bought one of the new villas behind the Rectory. There he lived, or rather stayed periodically, in open concubinage with a woman whom he called his housekeeper. Four months ago this woman — she was a foreigner, a Spaniard it was said — had created a fresh and worse scandal by abruptly deserting him, and his three children were now parked with some long-suffering relative in London. In appearance he was a fine, imposing-looking man, though entirely bald (he was at great pains to conceal this), and he carried himself with such a rakish air as to give the impression that his fairly sizeable belly was merely a kind of annexe to his chest. His age was forty-eight, and he owned to forty-four. People in the town said that he was a 'proper old rascal'; young girls were afraid of him, not without reason.

Mr Warburton had laid his hand pseudo-paternally on Dorothy's shoulder and was shepherding her through the crowd, talking all the while almost without a pause. The Blifil-Gordon car, having rounded the pump, was now wending its way back, still accompanied by its troupe of middle-aged Bacchantes. Mr Warburton, his attention caught, paused to scrutinize it.

'What is the meaning of these disgusting antics?' he asked.

'Oh, they're — what is it they call it? — electioneering. Trying to get us to vote for them, I suppose.'

'Trying to get us to vote for them! Good God!' murmured Mr Warburton, as he eyed the triumphal cortege. He raised the large, silver-headed cane that he always carried, and pointed, rather expressively, first at one figure in the procession and then at another. 'Look at it! Just look at it! Look at those fawning hags, and that half-witted oaf grinning at us like a monkey that sees a bag of nuts. Did you ever see such a disgusting spectacle?'

'Do be careful!' Dorothy murmured. 'Somebody's sure to hear you.'

'Good!' said Mr Warburton, immediately raising his voice. 'And to think that low-born hound actually has the impertinence to think

that he's pleasing us with the sight of his false teeth! And that suit he's wearing is an offence in itself. Is there a Socialist candidate? If so, I shall certainly vote for him.'

Several people on the pavement turned and stared. Dorothy saw little Mr Twiss, the ironmonger, a weazened, leather-coloured old man, peering with veiled malevolence round the corner of the rush baskets that hung in his doorway. He had caught the word Socialist, and was mentally registering Mr Warburton as a Socialist and Dorothy as the friend of Socialists.

'I really MUST be getting on,' said Dorothy hastily, feeling that she had better escape before Mr Warburton said something even more tactless. 'I've got ever such a lot of shopping to do. I'll say good-bye for the present, then.'

'Oh, no, you won't!' said Mr Warburton cheerfully. 'Not a bit of it! I'll come with you.'

As she wheeled her bicycle down the street he marched at her side, still talking, with his large chest well forward and his stick tucked under his arm. He was a difficult man to shake off, and though Dorothy counted him as a friend, she did sometimes wish, he being the town scandal and she the Rector's daughter, that he would not always choose the most public places to talk to her in. At this moment, however, she was rather grateful for his company, which made it appreciably easier to pass Cargill's shop — for Cargill was still on his doorstep and was regarding her with a sidelong, meaning gaze.

'It was a bit of luck my meeting you this morning,' Mr Warburton went on. 'In fact, I was looking for you. Who do you think I've got coming to dinner with me tonight? Bewley — Ronald Bewley. You've heard of him, of course?'

'Ronald Bewley? No, I don't think so. Who is he?'

'Why, dash it! Ronald Bewley, the novelist. Author of Fishpools and Concubines. Surely you've read Fishpools and Concubines?'

'No, I'm afraid I haven't. In fact, I'd never even heard of it.'

'My dear Dorothy! You HAVE been neglecting yourself. You certainly ought to read Fishpools and Concubines. It's hot stuff, I assure you — real high-class pornography. Just the kind of thing you need to take the taste of the Girl Guides out of your mouth.'

‘I do wish you wouldn’t say such things!’ said Dorothy, looking away uncomfortably, and then immediately looking back again because she had all but caught Cargill’s eye. ‘Where does this Mr Bewley live?’ she added. ‘Not here, surely, does he?’

‘No. He’s coming over from Ipswich for dinner, and perhaps to stay the night. That’s why I was looking for you. I thought you might like to meet him. How about your coming to dinner tonight?’

‘I can’t possibly come to dinner,’ said Dorothy. ‘I’ve got Father’s supper to see to, and thousands of other things. I shan’t be free till eight o’clock or after.’

‘Well, come along after dinner, then. I’d like you to know Bewley. He’s an interesting fellow — very au fait with all the Bloomsbury scandal, and all that. You’ll enjoy meeting him. It’ll do you good to escape from the church hen-coop for a few hours.’

Dorothy hesitated. She was tempted. To tell the truth, she enjoyed her occasional visits to Mr Warburton’s house extremely. But of course they were VERY occasional — once in three or four months at the oftenest; it so obviously DIDN’T DO to associate too freely with such a man. And even when she did go to his house she was careful to make sure beforehand that there was going to be at least one other visitor.

Two years earlier, when Mr Warburton had first come to Knype Hill (at that time he was posing as a widower with two children; a little later, however, the housekeeper suddenly gave birth to a third child in the middle of the night), Dorothy had met him at a tea-party and afterwards called on him. Mr Warburton had given her a delightful tea, talked amusingly about books, and then, immediately after tea, sat down beside her on the sofa and begun making love to her, violently, outrageously, even brutally. It was practically an assault. Dorothy was horrified almost out of her wits, though not too horrified to resist. She escaped from him and took refuge on the other side of the sofa, white, shaking, and almost in tears. Mr Warburton, on the other hand, was quite unashamed and even seemed rather amused.

‘Oh, how could you, how could you?’ she sobbed.

‘But it appears that I couldn’t,’ said Mr Warburton.

‘Oh, but how could you be such a brute?’

‘Oh, THAT? Easily, my child, easily. You will understand that when you get to my age.’

In spite of this bad beginning, a sort of friendship had grown up between the two, even to the extent of Dorothy being ‘talked about’ in connexion with Mr Warburton. It did not take much to get you ‘talked about’ in Knype Hill. She only saw him at long intervals and took the greatest care never to be alone with him, but even so he found opportunities of making casual love to her. But it was done in a gentlemanly fashion; the previous disagreeable incident was not repeated. Afterwards, when he was forgiven, Mr Warburton had explained that he ‘always tried it on’ with every presentable woman he met.

‘Don’t you get rather a lot of snubs?’ Dorothy could not help asking him.

‘Oh, certainly. But I get quite a number of successes as well, you know.’

People wondered sometimes how such a girl as Dorothy could consort, even occasionally, with such a man as Mr Warburton; but the hold that he had over her was the hold that the blasphemer and evil- liver always has over the pious. It is a fact — you have only to look about you to verify it — that the pious and the immoral drift naturally together. The best brothel-scenes in literature have been written, without exception, by pious believers or pious unbelievers. And of course Dorothy, born into the twentieth century, made a point of listening to Mr Warburton’s blasphemies as calmly as possible; it is fatal to flatter the wicked by letting them see that you are shocked by them. Besides, she was genuinely fond of him. He teased her and distressed her, and yet she got from him, without being fully aware of it, a species of sympathy and understanding which she could not get elsewhere. For all his vices he was distinctly likeable, and the shoddy brilliance of his conversation — Oscar Wilde seven times watered — which she was too inexperienced to see through, fascinated while it shocked her. Perhaps, too, in this instance, the prospect of meeting the celebrated Mr Bewley had its effect upon her; though certainly Fishponds and Concubines sounded like the kind of book that she either didn’t read or else set herself heavy

penances for reading. In London, no doubt, one would hardly cross the road to see fifty novelists; but these things appeared differently in places like Knype Hill.

'Are you SURE Mr Bewley is coming?' she said.

'Quite sure. And his wife's coming as well, I believe. Full chaperonage. No Tarquin and Lucrece business this evening.'

'All right,' said Dorothy finally; 'thanks very much. I'll come round — about half past eight, I expect.'

'Good. If you can manage to come while it is still daylight, so much the better. Remember that Mrs Semprill is my next-door neighbour. We can count on her to be on the qui vive any time after sundown.'

Mrs Semprill was the town scandalmonger — the most eminent, that is, of the town's many scandalmongers. Having got what he wanted (he was constantly pestering Dorothy to come to his house more often), Mr Warburton said au revoir and left Dorothy to do the remainder of her shopping.

In the semi-gloom of Solepipe's shop, she was just moving away from the counter with her two and a half yards of casement cloth, when she was aware of a low, mournful voice at her ear. It was Mrs Semprill. She was a slender woman of forty, with a lank, sallow, distinguished face, which, with her glossy dark hair and air of settled melancholy, gave her something the appearance of a Van Dyck portrait. Entrenched behind a pile of cretonnes near the window, she had been watching Dorothy's conversation with Mr Warburton. Whenever you were doing something that you did not particularly want Mrs Semprill to see you doing, you could trust her to be somewhere in the neighbourhood. She seemed to have the power of materializing like an Arabian jinneeyeh at any place where she was not wanted. No indiscretion, however small, escaped her vigilance. Mr Warburton used to say that she was like the four beasts of the Apocalypse— 'They are full of eyes, you remember, and they rest not night nor day.'

'Dorothy DEAREST,' murmured Mrs Semprill in the sorrowful, affectionate voice of someone breaking a piece of bad news as gently as possible. 'I've been so WANTING to speak to you. I've something simply DREADFUL to tell you — something that will

really HORRIFY you!'

'What is it?' said Dorothy resignedly, well knowing what was coming — for Mrs Semprill had only one subject of conversation.

They moved out of the shop and began to walk down the street, Dorothy wheeling her bicycle, Mrs Semprill mincing at her side with a delicate birdlike step and bringing her mouth closer and closer to Dorothy's ear as her remarks grew more and more intimate.

'Do you happen to have noticed,' she began, 'that girl who sits at the end of the pew nearest the organ in church? A rather PRETTY girl, with red hair. I've no idea what her name is,' added Mrs Semprill, who knew the surname and all the Christian names of every man, woman, and child in Knype Hill.

'Molly Freeman,' said Dorothy. 'She's the niece of Freeman the greengrocer.'

'Oh, Molly Freeman? Is THAT her name? I'd often wondered. Well— '

The delicate red mouth came closer, the mournful voice sank to a shocked whisper. Mrs Semprill began to pour forth a stream of purulent libel involving Molly Freeman and six young men who worked at the sugar-beet refinery. After a few moments the story became so outrageous that Dorothy, who had turned very pink, hurriedly withdrew her ear from Mrs Semprill's whispering lips. She stopped her bicycle.

'I won't listen to such things!' she said abruptly. 'I KNOW that isn't true about Molly Freeman. It CAN'T be true! She's such a nice quiet girl — she was one of my very best Girl Guides, and she's always been so good about helping with the church bazaars and everything. I'm perfectly certain she wouldn't do such things as you're saying.'

'But, Dorothy DEAREST! When, as I told you, I actually saw with my own eyes . . .'

'I don't care! It's not fair to say such things about people. Even if they were true it wouldn't be right to repeat them. There's quite enough evil in the world without going about looking for it.'

'LOOKING for it!' sighed Mrs Semprill. 'But, my dear Dorothy, as though one ever wanted or NEEDED to look! The trouble is that one can't HELP seeing all the dreadful wickedness that goes on in

this town.'

Mrs Semprill was always genuinely astonished if you accused her of LOOKING for subjects for scandal. Nothing, she would protest, pained her more than the spectacle of human wickedness; but it was constantly forced upon her unwilling eyes, and only a stern sense of duty impelled her to make it public. Dorothy's remarks, so far from silencing her, merely set her talking about the general corruption of Knype Hill, of which Molly Freeman's misbehaviour was only one example. And so from Molly Freeman and her six young men she proceeded to Dr Gaythorne, the town medical officer, who had got two of the nurses at the Cottage Hospital with child, and then to Mrs Corn, the Town Clerk's wife, found lying in a field dead drunk on eau-de-Cologne, and then to the curate at St Wedekind's in Millborough, who had involved himself in a grave scandal with a choirboy; and so it went on, one thing leading to another. For there was hardly a soul in the town or the surrounding country about whom Mrs Semprill could not disclose some festering secret if you listened to her long enough.

It was noticeable that her stories were not only dirty and libellous, but they had nearly always some monstrous tinge of perversion about them. Compared with the ordinary scandalmongers of a country town, she was Freud to Boccaccio. From hearing her talk you would have gathered the impression that Knype Hill with its thousand inhabitants held more of the refinements of evil than Sodom, Gomorrah, and Buenos Aires put together. Indeed, when you reflected upon the lives led by the inhabitants of this latter-day City of the Plain — from the manager of the local bank squandering his clients' money on the children of his second and bigamous marriage, to the barmaid of the Dog and Bottle serving drinks in the taproom dressed only in high-heeled satin slippers, and from old Miss Channon, the music-teacher, with her secret gin bottle and her anonymous letters, to Maggie White, the baker's daughter, who had borne three children to her own brother — when you considered these people, all, young and old, rich and poor, sunken in monstrous and Babylonian vices, you wondered that fire did not come down from Heaven and consume the town forthwith. But if you listened just a little longer, the catalogue of obscenities became first

monstrous and then unbearably dull. For in a town in which EVERYONE is either a bigamist, a pederast, or a drug-taker, the worst scandal loses its sting. In fact, Mrs Semprill was something worse than a slanderer; she was a bore.

As to the extent to which her stories were believed, it varied. At times the word would go round that she was a foul-mouthed old cat and everything she said was a pack of lies; at other times one of her accusations would take effect on some unfortunate person, who would need months or even years to live it down. She had certainly been instrumental in breaking off not less than half a dozen engagements and starting innumerable quarrels between husbands and wives.

All this while Dorothy had been making abortive efforts to shake Mrs Semprill off. She had edged her way gradually across the street until she was wheeling her bicycle along the right-hand kerb; but Mrs Semprill had followed, whispering without cease. It was not until they reached the end of the High Street that Dorothy summoned up enough firmness to escape. She halted and put her right foot on the pedal of her bicycle.

'I really can't stop a moment longer,' she said. 'I've got a thousand things to do, and I'm late already.'

'Oh, but, Dorothy dear! I've something else I simply MUST tell you — something most IMPORTANT!'

'I'm sorry — I'm in such a terrible hurry. Another time, perhaps.'

'It's about that DREADFUL Mr Warburton,' said Mrs Semprill hastily, lest Dorothy should escape without hearing it. 'He's just come back from London, and do you know — I most PARTICULARLY wanted to tell you this — do you know, he actually— '

But here Dorothy saw that she must make off instantly, at no matter what cost. She could imagine nothing more uncomfortable than to have to discuss Mr Warburton with Mrs Semprill. She mounted her bicycle, and with only a very brief 'Sorry — I really CAN'T stop!' began to ride hurriedly away.

'I wanted to tell you — he's taken up with a new woman!' Mrs Semprill cried after her, even forgetting to whisper in her eagerness to pass on this juicy titbit.

But Dorothy rode swiftly round the corner, not looking back, and pretending not to have heard. An unwise thing to do, for it did not pay to cut Mrs Semprill too short. Any unwillingness to listen to her scandals was taken as a sign of depravity, and led to fresh and worse scandals being published about yourself the moment you had left her.

As Dorothy rode homewards she had uncharitable thoughts about Mrs Semprill, for which she duly pinched herself. Also, there was another, rather disturbing idea which had not occurred to her till this moment — that Mrs Semprill would certainly learn of her visit to Mr Warburton's house this evening, and would probably have magnified it into something scandalous by tomorrow. The thought sent a vague premonition of evil through Dorothy's mind as she jumped off her bicycle at the Rectory gate, where Silly Jack, the town idiot, a third-grade moron with a triangular scarlet face like a strawberry, was loitering, vacantly flogging the gatepost with a hazel switch.

4

It was a little after eleven. The day, which, like some overripe but hopeful widow playing at seventeen, had been putting on unseasonable April airs, had now remembered that it was August and settled down to be boiling hot.

Dorothy rode into the hamlet of Fennelwick, a mile out of Knype Hill. She had delivered Mrs Lewin's corn-plaster, and was dropping in to give old Mrs Pither that cutting from the Daily Mail about angelica tea for rheumatism. The sun, burning in the cloudless sky, scorched her back through her gingham frock, and the dusty road quivered in the heat, and the hot, flat meadows, over which even at this time of year numberless larks chirruped tiresomely, were so green that it hurt your eyes to look at them. It was the kind of day that is called 'glorious' by people who don't have to work.

Dorothy leaned her bicycle against the gate of the Pithers' cottage, and took her handkerchief out of her bag and wiped her hands, which were sweating from the handle-bars. In the harsh sunlight her face looked pinched and colourless. She looked her age, and something over, at that hour of the morning. Throughout her day — and in general it was a seventeen-hour day — she had regular, alternating

periods of tiredness and energy; the middle of the morning, when she was doing the first instalment of the day's 'visiting', was one of the tired periods.

'Visiting', because of the distances she had to bicycle from house to house, took up nearly half of Dorothy's day. Every day of her life, except on Sundays, she made from half a dozen to a dozen visits at parishioners' cottages. She penetrated into cramped interiors and sat on lumpy, dust-diffusing chairs gossiping with overworked, blowsy housewives; she spent hurried half-hours giving a hand with the mending and the ironing, and read chapters from the Gospels, and readjusted bandages on 'bad legs', and condoled with sufferers from morning-sickness; she played ride-a-cock-horse with sour-smelling children who grimed the bosom of her dress with their sticky little fingers; she gave advice about ailing aspidistras, and suggested names for babies, and drank 'nice cups of tea' innumerable — for the working women always wanted her to have a 'nice cup of tea', out of the teapot endlessly stewing.

Much of it was profoundly discouraging work. Few, very few, of the women seemed to have even a conception of the Christian life that she was trying to help them to lead. Some of them were shy and suspicious, stood on the defensive, and made excuses when urged to come to Holy Communion; some shammed piety for the sake of the tiny sums they could wheedle out of the church alms box; those who welcomed her coming were for the most part the talkative ones, who wanted an audience for complaints about the 'goings on' of their husbands, or for endless mortuary tales ('And he had to have glass chubes let into his veins,' etc., etc.) about the revolting diseases their relatives had died of. Quite half the women on her list, Dorothy knew, were at heart atheistical in a vague unreasoning way. She came up against it all day long — that vague, blank disbelief so common in illiterate people, against which all argument is powerless. Do what she would, she could never raise the number of regular communicants to more than a dozen or thereabouts. Women would promise to communicate, keep their promise for a month or two, and then fall away. With the younger women it was especially hopeless. They would not even join the local branches of the church leagues that were run for their benefit — Dorothy was honorary secretary of

three such leagues, besides being captain of the Girl Guides. The Band of Hope and the Companionship of Marriage languished almost memberless, and the Mothers' Union only kept going because gossip and unlimited strong tea made the weekly sewing-parties acceptable. Yes, it was discouraging work; so discouraging that at times it would have seemed altogether futile if she had not known the sense of futility for what it is — the subtlest weapon of the Devil.

Dorothy knocked at the Pithers' badly fitting door, from beneath which a melancholy smell of boiled cabbage and dish-water was oozing. From long experience she knew and could taste in advance the individual smell of every cottage on her rounds. Some of their smells were peculiar in the extreme. For instance, there was the salty, feral smell that haunted the cottage of old Mr Tombs, an aged retired bookseller who lay in bed all day in a darkened room, with his long, dusty nose and pebble spectacles protruding from what appeared to be a fur rug of vast size and richness.

But if you put your hand on the fur rug it disintegrated, burst and fled in all directions. It was composed entirely of cats — twenty-four cats, to be exact. Mr Tombs 'found they kept him warm', he used to explain. In nearly all the cottages there was a basic smell of old overcoats and dish-water upon which the other, individual smells were superimposed; the cesspool smell, the cabbage smell, the smell of children, the strong, bacon-like reek of corduroys impregnated with the sweat of a decade.

Mrs Pither opened the door, which invariably stuck to the jamb, and then, when you wrenched it open, shook the whole cottage. She was a large, stooping, grey woman with wispy grey hair, a sacking apron, and shuffling carpet slippers.

'Why, if it isn't Miss Dorothy!' she exclaimed in a dreary, lifeless but not unaffectionate voice.

She took Dorothy between her large, gnarled hands, whose knuckles were as shiny as skinned onions from age and ceaseless washing up, and gave her a wet kiss. Then she drew her into the unclean interior of the cottage.

'Pither's away at work, Miss,' she announced as they got inside. 'Up to Dr Gaythorne's he is, a-digging over the doctor's flower- beds for him.'

Mr Pither was a jobbing gardener. He and his wife, both of them over seventy, were one of the few genuinely pious couples on Dorothy's visiting list. Mrs Pither led a dreary, wormlike life of shuffling to and fro, with a perpetual crick in her neck because the door lintels were too low for her, between the well, the sink, the fireplace, and the tiny plot of kitchen garden. The kitchen was decently tidy, but oppressively hot, evil-smelling and saturated with ancient dust. At the end opposite the fireplace Mrs Pither had made a kind of prie-dieu out of a greasy rag mat laid in front of a tiny, defunct harmonium, on top of which were an oleographed crucifixion, 'Watch and Pray' done in beadwork, and a photograph of Mr and Mrs Pither on their wedding day in 1882.

'Poor Pither!' went on Mrs Pither in her depressing voice, 'him a-digging at his age, with his rheumatism THAT bad! Ain't it cruel hard, Miss? And he's had a kind of a pain between his legs, Miss, as he can't seem to account for — terrible bad he's been with it, these last few mornings. Ain't it bitter hard, Miss, the lives us poor working folks has to lead?'

'It's a shame,' said Dorothy. 'But I hope you've been keeping a little better yourself, Mrs Pither?'

'Ah, Miss, there's nothing don't make ME better. I ain't a case for curing, not in THIS world, I ain't. I shan't never get no better, not in this wicked world down here.'

'Oh, you mustn't say that, Mrs Pither! I hope we shall have you with us for a long time yet.'

'Ah, Miss, you don't know how poorly I've been this last week! I've had the rheumatism a-coming and a-going all down the backs of my poor old legs, till there's some mornings when I don't feel as I can't walk so far as to pull a handful of onions in the garden. Ah, Miss, it's a weary world we lives in, ain't it, Miss? A weary, sinful world.'

'But of course we must never forget, Mrs Pither, that there's a better world coming. This life is only a time of trial — just to strengthen us and teach us to be patient, so that we'll be ready for Heaven when the time comes.'

At this a sudden and remarkable change came over Mrs Pither. It was produced by the word 'Heaven'. Mrs Pither had only two

subjects of conversation; one of them was the joys of Heaven, and the other the miseries of her present state. Dorothy's remark seemed to act upon her like a charm. Her dull grey eye was not capable of brightening, but her voice quickened with an almost joyful enthusiasm.

'Ah, Miss, there you said it! That's a true word, Miss! That's what Pither and me keeps a-saying to ourselves. And that's just the one thing as keeps us a-going — just the thought of Heaven and the long, long rest we'll have there. Whatever we've suffered, we gets it all back in Heaven, don't we, Miss? Every little bit of suffering, you gets it back a hundredfold and a thousandfold. That IS true, ain't it, Miss? There's rest for us all in Heaven — rest and peace and no more rheumatism nor digging nor cooking nor laundering nor nothing. You DO believe that, don't you, Miss Dorothy?'

'Of course,' said Dorothy.

'Ah, Miss, if you knew how it comforts us — just the thoughts of Heaven! Pither he says to me, when he comes home tired of a night and our rheumatism's bad, "Never you mind, my dear," he says, "we ain't far off Heaven now," he says. "Heaven was made for the likes of us," he says; "just for poor working folks like us, that have been sober and godly and kept our Communions regular." That's the best way, ain't it, Miss Dorothy — poor in this life and rich in the next? Not like some of them rich folks as all their motorcars and their beautiful houses won't save from the worm that dieth not and the fire that's not quenched. Such a beautiful text, that is. Do you think you could say a little prayer with me, Miss Dorothy? I been looking forward all the morning to a little prayer.

Mrs Pither was always ready for a 'little prayer' at any hour of the night or day. It was her equivalent to a 'nice cup of tea'. They knelt down on the rag mat and said the Lord's Prayer and the Collect for the week; and then Dorothy, at Mrs Pither's request, read the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Mrs Pither coming in from time to time with 'Amen! That's a true word, ain't it, Miss Dorothy? "And he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." Beautiful! Oh, I do call that just too beautiful! Amen, Miss Dorothy — Amen!'

Dorothy gave Mrs Pither the cutting from the Daily Mail about angelica tea for rheumatism, and then, finding that Mrs Pither had

been too ‘poorly’ to draw the day’s supply of water, she drew three bucketfuls for her from the well. It was a very deep well, with such a low parapet that Mrs Pither’s final doom would almost certainly be to fall into it and get drowned, and it had not even a winch — you had to haul the bucket up hand over hand. And then they sat down for a few minutes, and Mrs Pither talked some more about Heaven. It was extraordinary how constantly Heaven reigned in her thoughts; and more extraordinary yet was the actuality, the vividness with which she could see it. The golden streets and the gates of orient pearl were as real to her as though they had been actually before her eyes. And her vision extended to the most concrete, the most earthly details. The softness of the beds up there! The deliciousness of the food! The lovely silk clothes that you would put on clean every morning! The surcease from everlasting to everlasting from work of any description! In almost every moment of her life the vision of Heaven supported and consoled her, and her abject complaints about the lives of ‘poor working folks’ were curiously tempered by a satisfaction in the thought that, after all, it is ‘poor working folks’ who are the principal inhabitants of Heaven. It was a sort of bargain that she had struck, setting her lifetime of dreary labour against an eternity of bliss. Her faith was almost TOO great, if that is possible. For it was a curious fact, but the certitude with which Mrs Pither looked forward to Heaven — as to some kind of glorified home for incurables — affected Dorothy with strange uneasiness.

Dorothy prepared to depart, while Mrs Pither thanked her, rather too effusively, for her visit, winding up, as usual, with fresh complaints about her rheumatism.

‘I’ll be sure and take the angelica tea,’ she concluded, ‘and thank you kindly for telling me of it, Miss. Not as I don’t expect as it’ll do me much good. Ah, Miss, if you knew how cruel bad my rheumatism’s been this last week! All down the backs of my legs, it is, like a regular shooting red-hot poker, and I don’t seem to be able to get at them to rub them properly. Would it be asking too much of you, Miss, to give me a bit of a rub-down before you go? I got a bottle of Elliman’s under the sink.’

Unseen by Mrs Pither, Dorothy gave herself a severe pinch. She had been expecting this, and — she had done it so many times before

— she really did NOT enjoy rubbing Mrs Pither down. She exhorted herself angrily. Come on, Dorothy! No sniffishness, please! John xiii, 14. 'Of course I will, Mrs Pither!' she said instantly.

They went up the narrow, rickety staircase, in which you had to bend almost double at one place to avoid the overhanging ceiling. The bedroom was lighted by a tiny square of window that was jammed in its socket by the creeper outside, and had not been opened in twenty years. There was an enormous double bed that almost filled the room, with sheets perennially damp and a flock mattress as full of hills and valleys as a contour map of Switzerland. With many groans the old woman crept on to the bed and laid herself face down. The room reeked of urine and paregoric. Dorothy took the bottle of Elliman's embrocation and carefully anointed Mrs Pither's large, grey-veined, flaccid legs.

Outside, in the swimming heat, she mounted her bicycle and began to ride swiftly homewards. The sun burned in her face, but the air now seemed sweet and fresh. She was happy, happy! She was always extravagantly happy when her morning's 'visiting' was over; and, curiously enough, she was not aware of the reason for this. In Borlase the dairy-farmer's meadow the red cows were grazing, knee-deep in shining seas of grass. The scent of cows, like a distillation of vanilla and fresh hay, floated into Dorothy's nostrils. Though she had still a morning's work in front of her she could not resist the temptation to loiter for a moment, steadying her bicycle with one hand against the gate of Borlase's meadow, while a cow, with moist shell-pink nose, scratched its chin upon the gatepost and dreamily regarded her.

Dorothy caught sight of a wild rose, flowerless of course, growing beyond the hedge, and climbed over the gate with the intention of discovering whether it were not sweetbriar. She knelt down among the tall weeds beneath the hedge. It was very hot down there, close to the ground. The humming of many unseen insects sounded in her ears, and the hot summery fume from the tangled swathes of vegetation flowed up and enveloped her. Near by, tall stalks of fennel were growing, with trailing fronds of foliage like the tails of sea-green horses. Dorothy pulled a frond of the fennel against her face and breathed in the strong sweet scent. Its richness overwhelmed her,

almost dizzied her for a moment. She drank it in, filling her lungs with it. Lovely, lovely scent — scent of summer days, scent of childhood joys, scent of spice-drenched islands in the warm foam of Oriental seas!

Her heart swelled with sudden joy. It was that mystical joy in the beauty of the earth and the very nature of things that she recognized, perhaps mistakenly, as the love of God. As she knelt there in the heat, the sweet odour and the drowsy hum of insects, it seemed to her that she could momentarily hear the mighty anthem of praise that the earth and all created things send up everlastingly to their maker. All vegetation, leaves, flowers, grass, shining, vibrating, crying out in their joy. Larks also chanting, choirs of larks invisible, dripping music from the sky. All the riches of summer, the warmth of the earth, the song of birds, the fume of cows, the droning of countless bees, mingling and ascending like the smoke of ever-burning altars. Therefore with Angels and Archangels! She began to pray, and for a moment she prayed ardently, blissfully, forgetting herself in the joy of her worship. Then, less than a minute later, she discovered that she was kissing the frond of the fennel that was still against her face.

She checked herself instantly, and drew back. What was she doing? Was it God that she was worshipping, or was it only the earth? The joy ebbed out of her heart, to be succeeded by the cold, uncomfortable feeling that she had been betrayed into a half-pagan ecstasy. She admonished herself. None of THAT, Dorothy! No Nature-worship, please! Her father had warned her against Nature-worship. She had heard him preach more than one sermon against it; it was, he said, mere pantheism, and, what seemed to offend him even more, a disgusting modern fad. Dorothy took a thorn of the wild rose, and pricked her arm three times, to remind herself of the Three Persons of the Trinity, before climbing over the gate and remounting her bicycle.

A black, very dusty shovel hat was approaching round the corner of the hedge. It was Father McGuire, the Roman Catholic priest, also bicycling his rounds. He was a very large, rotund man, so large that he dwarfed the bicycle beneath him and seemed to be balanced on top of it like a golf-ball on a tee. His face was rosy, humorous, and a little sly.

Dorothy looked suddenly unhappy. She turned pink, and her hand moved instinctively to the neighbourhood of the gold cross beneath her dress. Father McGuire was riding towards her with an untroubled, faintly amused air. She made an endeavour to smile, and murmured unhappily, 'Good morning.' But he rode on without a sign; his eyes swept easily over her face and then beyond her into vacancy, with an admirable pretence of not having noticed her existence. It was the Cut Direct. Dorothy — by nature, alas! unequal to delivering the Cut Direct — got on to her bicycle and rode away, struggling with the uncharitable thoughts which a meeting with Father McGuire never failed to arouse in her.

Five or six years earlier, when Father McGuire was holding a funeral in St Athelstan's churchyard (there was no Roman Catholic cemetery at Knype Hill), there had been some dispute with the Rector about the propriety of Father McGuire robing in the church, or not robing in the church, and the two priests had wrangled disgracefully over the open grave. Since then they had not been on speaking terms. It was better so, the Rector said.

As to the other ministers of religion in Knype Hill — Mr Ward the Congregationalist minister, Mr Foley the Wesleyan pastor, and the braying bald-headed elder who conducted the orgies at Ebenezer Chapel — the Rector called them a pack of vulgar Dissenters and had forbidden Dorothy on pain of his displeasure to have anything to do with them.

5

It was twelve o'clock. In the large, dilapidated conservatory, whose roof-panes, from the action of time and dirt, were dim, green, and iridescent like old Roman glass, they were having a hurried and noisy rehearsal of Charles I.

Dorothy was not actually taking part in the rehearsal, but was busy making costumes. She made the costumes, or most of them, for all the plays the schoolchildren acted. The production and stage management were in the hands of Victor Stone — Victor, Dorothy called him — the Church schoolmaster. He was a small-boned, excitable, black-haired youth of twenty-seven, dressed in dark sub-

clerical clothes, and at this moment he was gesturing fiercely with a roll of manuscript at six dense-looking children. On a long bench against the wall four more children were alternately practising ‘noises off’ by clashing fire-irons together, and squabbling over a grimy little bag of Spearmint Bouncers, forty a penny.

It was horribly hot in the conservatory, and there was a powerful smell of glue and the sour sweat of children. Dorothy was kneeling on the floor, with her mouth full of pins and a pair of shears in her hand, rapidly slicing sheets of brown paper into long narrow strips. The glue-pot was bubbling on an oil-stove beside her; behind her, on the rickety, ink-stained work-table, were a tangle of half-finished costumes, more sheets of brown paper, her sewing- machine, bundles of tow, shards of dry glue, wooden swords, and open pots of paint. With half her mind Dorothy was meditating upon the two pairs of seventeenth-century jackboots that had got to be made for Charles I and Oliver Cromwell, and with the other half listening to the angry shouts of Victor, who was working himself up into a rage, as he invariably did at rehearsals. He was a natural actor, and withal thoroughly bored by the drudgery of rehearsing half-witted children. He strode up and down, haranguing the children in a vehement slangy style, and every now and then breaking off to lunge at one or other of them with a wooden sword that he had grabbed from the table.

‘Put a bit of life into it, can’t you?’ he cried, prodding an ox-faced boy of eleven in the belly. ‘Don’t drone! Say it as if it meant something! You look like a corpse that’s been buried and dug up again. What’s the good of gurgling it down in your inside like that? Stand up and shout at him. Take off that second murderer expression!’

‘Come here, Percy!’ cried Dorothy through her pins. ‘Quick!’

She was making the armour — the worst job of the lot, except those wretched jackboots — out of glue and brown paper. From long practice Dorothy could make very nearly anything out of glue and brown paper; she could even make a passably good periwig, with a brown paper skull-cap and dyed tow for the hair. Taking the year through, the amount of time she spent in struggling with glue, brown paper, butter muslin, and all the other paraphernalia of amateur

theatricals was enormous. So chronic was the need of money for all the church funds that hardly a month ever passed when there was not a school play or a pageant or an exhibition of tableaux vivants on hand — not to mention the bazaars and jumble sales.

As Percy — Percy Jowett, the blacksmith's son, a small curly-headed boy — got down from the bench and stood wriggling unhappily before her, Dorothy seized a sheet of brown paper, measured it against him, snipped out the neckhole and armholes, draped it round his middle and rapidly pinned it into the shape of a rough breastplate. There was a confused din of voices.

VICTOR: Come on, now, come on! Enter Oliver Cromwell — that's you! NO, not like that! Do you think Oliver Cromwell would come slinking on like a dog that's just had a hiding? Stand up. Stick your chest out. Scowl. That's better. Now go on, CROMWELL: 'Halt! I hold a pistol in my hand!' Go on.

A GIRL: Please, Miss, Mother said as I was to tell you, Miss —

DOROTHY: Keep still, Percy! For goodness' SAKE keep still!

CROMWELL: 'Alt! I 'old a pistol in my 'and!

A SMALL GIRL ON THE BENCH: Mister! I've dropped my sweetie! [Snivelling] I've dropped by swee-e-e-etie!

VICTOR: No, no, NO, Tommie! No, no, NO!

THE GIRL: Please, Miss, Mother said as I was to tell you as she couldn't make my knickers like she promised, Miss, because —

DOROTHY: You'll make me swallow a pin if you do that again.

CROMWELL: Halt! I Hold a pistol —

THE SMALL GIRL [in tears]: My swee-e-e-e-eetie!

Dorothy seized the glue-brush, and with feverish speed pasted strips of brown paper all over Percy's thorax, up and down, backwards and forwards, one on top of another, pausing only when the paper stuck to her fingers. In five minutes she had made a cuirass of glue and brown paper stout enough, when it was dry, to have defied a real sword-blade. Percy, 'locked up in complete steel' and with the sharp paper edge cutting his chin, looked down at himself with the miserable resigned expression of a dog having its bath. Dorothy took the shears, slit the breastplate up one side, set it on end to dry and started immediately on another child. A fearful clatter broke out as the 'noises off' began practising the sound of pistol-

shots and horses galloping. Dorothy's fingers were getting stickier and stickier, but from time to time she washed some of the glue off them in a bucket of hot water that was kept in readiness. In twenty minutes she had partially completed three breastplates. Later on they would have to be finished off, painted over with aluminium paint and laced up the sides; and after that there was the job of making the thigh- pieces, and, worst of all, the helmets to go with them. Victor, gesticulating with his sword and shouting to overcome the din of galloping horses, was personating in turn Oliver Cromwell, Charles I, Roundheads, Cavaliers, peasants, and Court ladies. The children were now growing restive and beginning to yawn, whine, and exchange furtive kicks and pinches. The breastplates finished for the moment, Dorothy swept some of the litter off the table, pulled her sewing-machine into position and set to work on a Cavalier's green velvet doublet — it was butter muslin Twinked green, but it looked all right at a distance.

There was another ten minutes of feverish work. Dorothy broke her thread, all but said 'Damn!' checked herself and hurriedly re-threaded the needle. She was working against time. The play was now a fortnight distant, and there was such a multitude of things yet to be made — helmets, doublets, swords, jackboots (those miserable jackboots had been haunting her like a nightmare for days past), scabbards, ruffles, wigs, spurs, scenery — that her heart sank when she thought of them. The children's parents never helped with the costumes for the school plays; more exactly, they always promised to help and then backed out afterwards. Dorothy's head was aching diabolically, partly from the heat of the conservatory, partly from the strain of simultaneously sewing and trying to visualize patterns for brown paper jackboots. For the moment she had even forgotten the bill for twenty-one pounds seven and ninepence at Cargill's. She could think of nothing save that fearful mountain of unmade clothes that lay ahead of her. It was so throughout the day. One thing loomed up after another — whether it was the costumes for the school play or the collapsing floor of the belfry, or the shop-debts or the bindweed in the peas — and each in its turn so urgent and so harassing that it blotted all the others out of existence.

Victor threw down his wooden sword, took out his watch and

looked at it.

'That'll do!' he said in the abrupt, ruthless tone from which he never departed when he was dealing with children. 'We'll go on on Friday. Clear out, the lot of you! I'm sick of the sight of you.'

He watched the children out, and then, having forgotten their existence as soon as they were out of his sight, produced a page of music from his pocket and began to fidget up and down, cocking his eye at two forlorn plants in the corner which trailed their dead brown tendrils over the edges of their pots. Dorothy was still bending over her machine, stitching up the seams of the green velvet doublet.

Victor was a restless, intelligent little creature, and only happy when he was quarrelling with somebody or something. His pale, fine-featured face wore an expression that appeared to be discontent and was really boyish eagerness. People meeting him for the first time usually said that he was wasting his talents in his obscure job as a village schoolmaster; but the truth was that Victor had no very marketable talents except a slight gift for music and a much more pronounced gift for dealing with children. Ineffectual in other ways, he was excellent with children; he had the proper, ruthless attitude towards them. But of course, like everyone else, he despised his own especial talent. His interests were almost purely ecclesiastical. He was what people call a CHURCHY young man. It had always been his ambition to enter the Church, and he would actually have done so if he had possessed the kind of brain that is capable of learning Greek and Hebrew. Debarred from the priesthood, he had drifted quite naturally into his position as a Church schoolmaster and organist. It kept him, so to speak, within the Church precincts. Needless to say, he was an Anglo-Catholic of the most truculent Church Times breed — more clerical than the clerics, knowledgeable about Church history, expert on vestments, and ready at any moment with a furious tirade against Modernists, Protestants, scientists, Bolshevists, and atheists.

'I was thinking,' said Dorothy as she stopped her machine and snipped off the thread, 'we might make those helmets out of old bowler hats, if we can get hold of enough of them. Cut the brims off, put on paper brims of the right shape and silver them over.'

'Oh Lord, why worry your head about such things?' said Victor,

who had lost interest in the play the moment the rehearsal was over.

'It's those wretched jackboots that are worrying me the most,' said Dorothy, taking the doublet on to her knee and looking at it.

'Oh, bother the jackboots! Let's stop thinking about the play for a moment. Look here,' said Victor, unrolling his page of music, 'I want you to speak to your father for me. I wish you'd ask him whether we can't have a procession some time next month.'

'Another procession? What for?'

'Oh, I don't know. You can always find an excuse for a procession. There's the Nativity of the B.V.M. coming off on the eighth — that's good enough for a procession, I should think. We'll do it in style. I've got hold of a splendid rousing hymn that they can all bellow, and perhaps we could borrow their blue banner with the Virgin Mary on it from St Wedekind's in Millborough. If he'll say the word I'll start practising the choir at once.'

'You know he'll only say no,' said Dorothy, threading a needle to sew buttons on the doublet. 'He doesn't really approve of processions. It's much better not to ask him and make him angry.'

'Oh, but dash it all!' protested Victor. 'It's simply months since we've had a procession. I never saw such dead-alive services as we have here. You'd think we were a Baptist chapel or something, from the way we go on.'

Victor chafed ceaselessly against the dull correctness of the Rector's services. His ideal was what he called 'the real Catholic worship' — meaning unlimited incense, gilded images, and more Roman vestments. In his capacity of organist he was for ever pressing for more processions, more voluptuous music, more elaborate chanting in the liturgy, so that it was a continuous pull devil, pull baker between him and the Rector. And on this point Dorothy sided with her father. Having been brought up in the peculiar, frigid via media of Anglicanism, she was by nature averse to and half-afraid of anything 'ritualistic'.

'But dash it all!' went on Victor, 'a procession is such fun! Down the aisle, out through the west door and back through the south door, with the choir carrying candles behind and the Boy Scouts in front with the banner. It would look fine.' He sang a stave in a thin but tuneful tenor:

‘Hail thee, Festival Day, blest day that art hallowed for ever!’

‘If I had MY way,’ he added, ‘I’d have a couple of boys swinging jolly good censers of incense at the same time.’

‘Yes, but you know how much Father dislikes that kind of thing. Especially when it’s anything to do with the Virgin Mary. He says it’s all Roman Fever and leads to people crossing themselves and genuflecting at the wrong times and goodness knows what. You remember what happened at Advent.’

The previous year, on his own responsibility, Victor had chosen as one of the hymns for Advent, Number 642, with the refrain ‘Hail Mary, hail Mary, hail Mary full of grace!’ This piece of popishness had annoyed the Rector extremely. At the close of the first verse he had pointedly laid down his hymn book, turned round in his stall and stood regarding the congregation with an air so stony that some of the choirboys faltered and almost broke down. Afterwards he had said that to hear the rustics bawling ‘‘Ail Mary! ‘Ail Mary!’ made him think he was in the four-ale bar of the Dog and Bottle.

‘But dash it!’ said Victor in his aggrieved way, ‘your father always puts his foot down when I try and get a bit of life into the service. He won’t allow us incense, or decent music, or proper vestments, or anything. And what’s the result? We can’t get enough people to fill the church a quarter full, even on Easter Sunday. You look round the church on Sunday morning, and it’s nothing but the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides and a few old women.’

‘I know. It’s dreadful,’ admitted Dorothy, sewing on her button. ‘It doesn’t seem to make any difference what we do — we simply CAN’T get the people to come to church. Still,’ she added, ‘they do come to us to be married and buried. And I don’t think the congregation’s actually gone down this year. There were nearly two hundred people at Easter Communion.’

‘Two hundred! It ought to be two thousand. That’s the population of this town. The fact is that three quarters of the people in this place never go near a church in their lives. The Church has absolutely lost its hold over them. They don’t know that it exists. And why? That’s what I’m getting at. Why?’

‘I suppose it’s all this Science and Free Thought and all that,’ said Dorothy rather sententiously, quoting her father.

This remark deflected Victor from what he had been about to say. He had been on the very point of saying that St Athelstan's congregation had dwindled because of the dullness of the services; but the hated words of Science and Free Thought set him off in another and even more familiar channel.

'Of course it's this so-called Free Thought!' he exclaimed, immediately beginning to fidget up and down again. 'It's these swine of atheists like Bertrand Russell and Julian Huxley and all that crowd. And what's ruined the Church is that instead of jolly well answering them and showing them up for the fools and liars they are, we just sit tight and let them spread their beastly atheist propaganda wherever they choose. It's all the fault of the bishops, of course.' (Like every Anglo-Catholic, Victor had an abysmal contempt for bishops.) 'They're all Modernists and time- servers. By Jove!' he added more cheerfully, halting, 'did you see my letter in the Church Times last week?'

'No, I'm afraid I didn't,' said Dorothy, holding another button in position with her thumb. 'What was it about?'

'Oh, Modernist bishops and all that. I got in a good swipe at old Barnes.'

It was very rarely that a week passed when Victor did not write a letter to the Church Times. He was in the thick of every controversy and in the forefront of every assault upon Modernists and atheists. He had twice been in combat with Dr Major, had written letters of withering irony about Dean Inge and the Bishop of Birmingham, and had not hesitated to attack even the fiendish Russell himself — but Russell, of course, had not dared to reply. Dorothy, to tell the truth, very seldom read the Church Times, and the Rector grew angry if he so much as saw a copy of it in the house. The weekly paper they took in the Rectory was the High Churchman's Gazette — a fine old High Tory anachronism with a small and select circulation.

'That swine Russell!' said Victor reminiscently, with his hands deep in his pockets. 'How he does make my blood boil!'

'Isn't that the man who's such a clever mathematician, or something?' said Dorothy, biting off her thread.

'Oh, I dare say he's clever enough in his own line, of course,' admitted Victor grudgingly. 'But what's that got to do with it? Just

because a man's clever at figures it doesn't mean to say that — well, anyway! Let's come back to what I was saying. Why is it that we can't get people to come to church in this place? It's because our services are so dreary and godless, that's what it is. People want worship that IS worship — they want the real Catholic worship of the real Catholic Church we belong to. And they don't get if from us. All they get is the old Protestant mumbo-jumbo, and Protestantism's as dead as a doornail, and everyone knows it.'

'That's not true!' said Dorothy rather sharply as she pressed the third button into place. 'You know we're not Protestants. Father's always saying that the Church of England is the Catholic Church — he's preached I don't know how many sermons about the Apostolic Succession. That's why Lord Pockthorne and the others won't come to church here. Only he won't join in the Anglo- Catholic movement because he thinks they're too fond of ritualism for its own sake. And so do I.'

'Oh, I don't say your father isn't absolutely sound on doctrine — absolutely sound. But if he thinks we're the Catholic Church, why doesn't he hold the service in a proper Catholic way? It's a shame we can't have incense OCCASIONALLY. And his ideas about vestments — if you don't mind my saying it — are simply awful. On Easter Sunday he was wearing a Gothic cope with a modern Italian lace alb. Dash it, it's like wearing a top hat with brown boots.'

'Well, I don't think vestments are so important as you do,' said Dorothy. 'I think it's the spirit of the priest that matters, not the clothes he wears.'

'That's the kind of thing a Primitive Methodist would say!' exclaimed Victor disgustedly. 'Of course vestments are important! Where's the sense of worshipping at all if we can't make a proper job of it? Now, if you want to see what real Catholic worship CAN be like, look at St Wedekind's in Millborough! By Jove, they do things in style there! Images of the Virgin, reservation of the Sacrament — everything. They've had the Kensitites on to them three times, and they simply defy the Bishop.'

'Oh, I hate the way they go on at St Wedekind's!' said Dorothy. 'They're absolutely spiky. You can hardly see what's happening at the altar, there are such clouds of incense. I think people like that

ought to turn Roman Catholic and have done with it.'

'My dear Dorothy, you ought to have been a Nonconformist. You really ought. A Plymouth Brother — or a Plymouth Sister or whatever it's called. I think your favourite hymn must be Number 567, "O my God I fear Thee, Thou art very High!"'

'Yours is Number 231, "I nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march nearer Rome!"' retorted Dorothy, winding the thread round the last button.

The argument continued for several minutes while Dorothy adorned a Cavalier's beaver hat (it was an old black felt school hat of her own) with plume and ribbons. She and Victor were never long together without being involved in an argument upon the question of 'ritualism'. In Dorothy's opinion Victor was a kind to 'go over to Rome' if not prevented, and she was very likely right. But Victor was not yet aware of his probable destiny. At present the fevers of the Anglo-Catholic movement, with its ceaseless exciting warfare on three fronts at once — Protestants to right of you, Modernists to the left of you, and, unfortunately, Roman Catholics to rear of you and always ready for a sly kick in the pants — filled his mental horizon. Scoring off Dr Major in the Church Times meant more to him than any of the serious business of life. But for all his churchiness he had not an atom of real piety in his constitution. It was essentially as a game that religious controversy appealed to him — the most absorbing game ever invented, because it goes on for ever and because just a little cheating is allowed.

'Thank goodness, that's done!' said Dorothy, twiddling the Cavalier's beaver hat round on her hand and then putting it down. 'Oh dear, what piles of things there are still to do, though! I wish I could get those wretched jackboots off my mind. What's the time, Victor?'

'It's nearly five to one.'

'Oh, good gracious! I must run. I've got three omelettes to make. I daren't trust them to Ellen. And, oh, Victor! Have you got anything you can give us for the jumble sale? If you had an old pair of trousers you could give us, that would be best of all, because we can always sell trousers.'

'Trousers? No. But I tell you what I have got, though. I've got a

copy of The Pilgrim's Progress and another of Foxe's Book of Martyrs that I've been wanting to get rid of for years. Beastly Protestant trash! An old Dissenting aunt of mine gave them to me. — Doesn't it make you sick, all this cadging for pennies? Now, if we only held our services in a proper Catholic way, so that we could get up a proper congregation, don't you see, we shouldn't need— '

'That'll be splendid,' said Dorothy. 'We always have a stall for books — we charge a penny for each book, and nearly all of them get sold. We simply MUST make that jumble sale a success, Victor! I'm counting on Miss Mayfill to give us something really NICE. What I'm specially hoping is that she might give us that beautiful old Lowestoft china tea service of hers, and we could sell it for five pounds at least. I've been making special prayers all the morning that she'll give it to us.'

'Oh?' said Victor, less enthusiastically than usual. Like Proggett earlier in the morning, he was embarrassed by the word 'prayer'. He was ready to talk all day long about a point of ritual; but the mention of private devotions struck him as slightly indecent. 'Don't forget to ask your father about the procession,' he said, getting back to a more congenial topic.

'All right, I'll ask him. But you know how it'll be. He'll only get annoyed and say it's Roman Fever.'

'Oh, damn Roman Fever!' said Victor, who, unlike Dorothy, did not set himself penances for swearing.

Dorothy hurried to the kitchen, discovered that there were only five eggs to make the omelettes for three people, and decided to make one large omelette and swell it out a bit with the cold boiled potatoes left over from yesterday. With a short prayer for the success of the omelette (for omelettes are so dreadfully apt to get broken when you take them out of the pan), she whipped up the eggs, while Victor made off down the drive, half wistfully and half sulkily humming 'Hail thee, Festival Day', and passing on his way a disgusted-looking manservant carrying the two handleless chamber-pots which were Miss Mayfill's contribution to the jumble sale.

It was a little after ten o'clock. Various things had happened — nothing, however, of any particular importance; only the usual round of parish jobs that filled up Dorothy's afternoon and evening. Now, as she had arranged earlier in the day, she was at Mr Warburton's house, and was trying to hold her own in one of those meandering arguments in which he delighted to entangle her.

They were talking — but indeed, Mr Warburton never failed to manoeuvre the conversation towards this subject — about the question of religious belief.

'My dear Dorothy,' he was saying argumentatively, as he walked up and down with one hand in his coat pocket and the other manipulating a Brazilian cigar. 'My dear Dorothy, you don't seriously mean to tell me that at your age — twenty-seven, I believe — and with your intelligence, you will retain your religious beliefs more or less in toto?'

'Of course I do. You know I do.'

'Oh, come, now! The whole bag of tricks? All that nonsense that you learned at your mother's knee — surely you're not going to pretend to me that you still believe in it? But of course you don't! You can't! You're afraid to own up, that's all it is. No need to worry about that here, you know. The Rural Dean's wife isn't listening, and *I* won't give the show away.'

'I don't know what you mean by "all that NONSENSE",' began Dorothy, sitting up straighter in her chair, a little offended.

'Well, let's take an instance. Something particularly hard to swallow — Hell, for instance. Do you believe in Hell? When I say BELIEVE, mind you, I'm not asking whether you believe it in some milk and water metaphorical way like these Modernist bishops young Victor Stone gets so excited about. I mean do you believe in it literally? Do you believe in Hell as you believe in Australia?'

'Yes, of course I do,' said Dorothy, and she endeavoured to explain to him that the existence of Hell is much more real and permanent than the existence of Australia.

'Hm,' said Mr Warburton, unimpressed. 'Very sound in its way, of course. But what always makes me so suspicious of you religious people is that you're so deucedly cold-blooded about your beliefs. It shows a very poor imagination, to say the least of it. Here am I an

infidel and blasphemer and neck deep in at least six out of the Seven Deadly, and obviously doomed to eternal torment. There's no knowing that in an hour's time I mayn't be roasting in the hottest part of Hell. And yet you can sit there talking to me as calmly as though I'd nothing the matter with me. Now, if I'd merely got cancer or leprosy or some other bodily ailment, you'd be quite distressed about it — at least, I like to flatter myself that you would. Whereas, when I'm going to sizzle on the grid throughout eternity, you seem positively unconcerned about it.'

'I never said YOU were going to Hell,' said Dorothy somewhat uncomfortably, and wishing that the conversation would take a different turn. For the truth was, though she was not going to tell him so, that the point Mr Warburton had raised was one with which she herself had had certain difficulties. She did indeed believe in Hell, but she had never been able to persuade herself that anyone actually WENT there. She believed that Hell existed, but that it was empty. Uncertain of the orthodoxy of this belief, she preferred to keep it to herself. 'It's never certain that ANYONE is going to Hell,' she said more firmly, feeling that here at least she was on sure ground.

'What!' said Mr Warburton, halting in mock surprise. 'Surely you don't mean to say that there's hope for me yet?'

'Of course there is. It's only those horrid Predestination people who pretend that you go to Hell whether you repent or not. You don't think the Church of England are Calvinists, do you?'

'I suppose there's always the chance of getting off on a plea of Invincible Ignorance,' said Mr Warburton reflectively; and then, more confidently: 'Do you know, Dorothy, I've a sort of feeling that even now, after knowing me two years, you've still half an idea you can make a convert of me. A lost sheep — brand plucked from the burning, and all that. I believe you still hope against hope that one of these days my eyes will be opened and you'll meet me at Holy Communion at seven o'clock on some damned cold winter morning. Don't you?'

'Well— ' said Dorothy, again uncomfortably. She did, in fact, entertain some such hope about Mr Warburton, though he was not exactly a promising case for conversion. It was not in her nature to see a fellow being in a state of unbelief without making some effort

to reclaim him. What hours she had spent, at different times, earnestly debating with vague village atheists who could not produce a single intelligible reason for their unbelief! 'Yes,' she admitted finally, not particularly wanting to make the admission, but not wanting to prevaricate.

Mr Warburton laughed delightedly.

'You've a hopeful nature,' he said. 'But you aren't afraid, by any chance, that I might convert YOU? "The dog it was that died", you may remember.'

At this Dorothy merely smiled. 'Don't let him see he's shocking you' — that was always her maxim when she was talking to Mr Warburton. They had been arguing in this manner, without coming to any kind of conclusion, for the past hour, and might have gone on for the rest of the night if Dorothy had been willing to stay; for Mr Warburton delighted in teasing her about her religious beliefs. He had that fatal cleverness that so often goes with unbelief, and in their arguments, though Dorothy was always RIGHT, she was not always victorious. They were sitting, or rather Dorothy was sitting and Mr Warburton was standing, in a large agreeable room, giving on a moonlit lawn, that Mr Warburton called his 'studio' — not that there was any sign of work ever having been done in it. To Dorothy's great disappointment, the celebrated Mr Bewley had not turned up. (As a matter of fact, neither Mr Bewley, nor his wife, nor his novel entitled Fishpools and Concubines, actually existed. Mr Warburton had invented all three of them on the spur of the moment, as a pretext for inviting Dorothy to his house, well knowing that she would never come unchaperoned.) Dorothy had felt rather uneasy on finding that Mr Warburton was alone. It had occurred to her, indeed she had felt perfectly certain, that it would be wiser to go home at once; but she had stayed, chiefly because she was horribly tired and the leather armchair into which Mr Warburton had thrust her the moment she entered the house was too comfortable to leave. Now, however, her conscience was pricking her. It DIDN'T DO to stay too late at his house — people would talk if they heard of it. Besides, there was a multitude of jobs that she ought to be doing and that she had neglected in order to come here. She was so little used to idleness that even an hour spent in mere talking seemed to her vaguely sinful.

She made an effort, and straightened herself in the too-comfortable chair. ‘I think, if you don’t mind, it’s really time I was getting home,’ she said.

‘Talking of Invincible Ignorance,’ went on Mr Warburton, taking no notice of Dorothy’s remark, ‘I forget whether I ever told you that once when I was standing outside the World’s End pub in Chelsea, waiting for a taxi, a damned ugly little Salvation Army lassie came up to me and said — without any kind of introduction, you know— “What will you say at the Judgement Seat?” I said, “I am reserving my defence.” Rather neat, I think, don’t you?’

Dorothy did not answer. Her conscience had given her another and harder jab — she had remembered those wretched, unmade jackboots, and the fact that at least one of them had got to be made tonight. She was, however, unbearably tired. She had had an exhausting afternoon, starting off with ten miles or so bicycling to and fro in the sun, delivering the parish magazine, and continuing with the Mothers’ Union tea in the hot little wooden-walled room behind the parish hall. The Mothers met every Wednesday afternoon to have tea and do some charitable sewing while Dorothy read aloud to them. (At present she was reading Gene Stratton Porter’s A Girl of the Limberlost.) It was nearly always upon Dorothy that jobs of that kind devolved, because the phalanx of devoted women (the church fowls, they are called) who do the dirty work of most parishes had dwindled at Knype Hill to four or five at most. The only helper on whom Dorothy could count at all regularly was Miss Foote, a tall, rabbit-faced, dithering virgin of thirty-five, who meant well but made a mess of everything and was in a perpetual state of flurry. Mr Warburton used to say that she reminded him of a comet— ‘a ridiculous blunt-nosed creature rushing round on an eccentric orbit and always a little behind time’. You could trust Miss Foote with the church decorations, but not with the Mothers or the Sunday School, because, though a regular churchgoer, her orthodoxy was suspect. She had confided to Dorothy that she could worship God best under the blue dome of the sky. After tea Dorothy had dashed up to the church to put fresh flowers on the altar, and then she had typed out her father’s sermon — her typewriter was a rickety pre-Boer War ‘invisible’, on which you couldn’t average eight hundred words an

hour — and after supper she had weeded the pea rows until the light failed and her back seemed to be breaking. With one thing and another, she was even more tired than usual.

'I really MUST be getting home,' she repeated more firmly. 'I'm sure it's getting fearfully late.'

'Home?' said Mr Warburton. 'Nonsense! The evening's hardly begun.'

He was walking up and down the room again, with his hands in his coat pockets, having thrown away his cigar. The spectre of the unmade jackboots stalked back into Dorothy's mind. She would, she suddenly decided, make two jackboots tonight instead of only one, as a penance for the hour she had wasted. She was just beginning to make a mental sketch of the way she would cut out the pieces of brown paper for the insteps, when she noticed that Mr Warburton had halted behind her chair.

'What time is it, do you know?' she said.

'I dare say it might be half past ten. But people like you and me don't talk of such vulgar subjects as the time.'

'If it's half past ten, then I really must be going,' said Dorothy. I've got a whole lot of work to do before I go to bed.'

'Work! At this time of night? Impossible!'

'Yes, I have. I've got to make a pair of jackboots.'

'You've got to make a pair of WHAT?' said Mr Warburton.

'Of jackboots. For the play the schoolchildren are acting. We make them out of glue and brown paper.'

'Glue and brown paper! Good God!' murmured Mr Warburton. He went on, chiefly to cover the fact that he was drawing nearer to Dorothy's chair: 'What a life you lead! Messing about with glue and brown paper in the middle of the night! I must say, there are times when I feel just a little glad that I'm not a clergyman's daughter.'

'I think— ' began Dorothy.

But at the same moment Mr Warburton, invisible behind her chair, had lowered his hands and taken her gently by the shoulders. Dorothy immediately wriggled herself in an effort to get free of him; but Mr Warburton pressed her back into her place.

'Keep still,' he said peaceably.

'Let me go!' exclaimed Dorothy.

Mr Warburton ran his right hand caressingly down her upper arm. There was something very revealing, very characteristic in the way he did it; it was the lingering, appraising touch of a man to whom a woman's body is valuable precisely in the same way as though it were something to eat.

'You really have extraordinary nice arms,' he said. 'How on earth have you managed to remain unmarried all these years?'

'Let me go at once!' repeated Dorothy, beginning to struggle again.

'But I don't particularly want to let you go,' objected Mr Warburton.

'PLEASE don't stroke my arm like that! I don't like it!'

'What a curious child you are! Why don't you like it?'

'I tell you I don't like it!'

'Now don't go and turn round,' said Mr Warburton mildly. 'You don't seem to realize how tactful it was on my part to approach you from behind your back. If you turn round you'll see that I'm old enough to be your father, and hideously bald into the bargain. But if you'll only keep still and not look at me you can imagine I'm Ivor Novello.'

Dorothy caught sight of the hand that was caressing her — a large, pink, very masculine hand, with thick fingers and a fleece of gold hairs upon the back. She turned very pale; the expression of her face altered from mere annoyance to aversion and dread. She made a violent effort, wrenched herself free, and stood up, facing him.

'I DO wish you wouldn't do that!' she said, half in anger and half in distress.

'What is the matter with you?' said Mr Warburton.

He had stood upright, in his normal pose, entirely unconcerned, and he looked at her with a touch of curiosity. Her face had changed. It was not only that she had turned pale; there was a withdrawn, half-frightened look in her eyes — almost as though, for the moment, she were looking at him with the eyes of a stranger. He perceived that he had wounded her in some way which he did not understand, and which perhaps she did not want him to understand.

'What is the matter with you?' he repeated.

'WHY must you do that every time you meet me?'

‘“Every time I meet you” is an exaggeration,’ said Mr Warburton. ‘It’s really very seldom that I get the opportunity. But if you really and truly don’t like it— ‘

‘Of course I don’t like it! You know I don’t like it!’

‘Well, well! Then let’s say no more about it,’ said Mr Warburton generously. ‘Sit down, and we’ll change the subject.’

He was totally devoid of shame. It was perhaps his most outstanding characteristic. Having attempted to seduce her, and failed, he was quite willing to go on with the conversation as though nothing whatever had happened.

‘I’m going home at once,’ said Dorothy. ‘I can’t stay here any longer.’

‘Oh nonsense! Sit down and forget about it. We’ll talk of moral theology, or cathedral architecture, or the Girl Guides’ cooking classes, or anything you choose. Think how bored I shall be all alone if you go home at this hour.’

But Dorothy persisted, and there was an argument. Even if it had not been his intention to make love to her — and whatever he might promise he would certainly begin again in a few minutes if she did not go — Mr Warburton would have pressed her to stay, for, like all thoroughly idle people, he had a horror of going to bed and no conception of the value of time. He would, if you let him, keep you talking till three or four in the morning. Even when Dorothy finally escaped, he walked beside her down the moonlit drive, still talking voluminously and with such perfect good humour that she found it impossible to be angry with him any longer.

‘I’m leaving first thing tomorrow,’ he told her as they reached the gate. ‘I’m going to take the car to town and pick up the kids — the BASTARDS, you know — and we’re leaving for France the next day. I’m not certain where we shall go after that; eastern Europe, perhaps. Prague, Vienna, Bucharest.’

‘How nice,’ said Dorothy.

Mr Warburton, with an adroitness surprising in so large and stout a man, had manoeuvred himself between Dorothy and the gate.

‘I shall be away six months or more,’ he said. ‘And of course I needn’t ask, before so long a parting, whether you want to kiss me good-bye?’

Before she knew what he was doing he had put his arm about her and drawn her against him. She drew back — too late; he kissed her on the cheek — would have kissed her on the mouth if she had not turned her head away in time. She struggled in his arms, violently and for a moment helplessly.

'Oh, let me go!' she cried. 'DO let me go!'

'I believe I pointed out before,' said Mr Warburton, holding her easily against him, 'that I don't want to let you go.'

'But we're standing right in front of Mrs Semprill's window! She'll see us absolutely for certain!'

'Oh, good God! So she will!' said Mr Warburton. 'I was forgetting.'

Impressed by this argument, as he would not have been by any other, he let Dorothy go. She promptly put the gate between Mr Warburton and herself. He, meanwhile, was scrutinizing Mrs Semprill's windows.

'I can't see a light anywhere,' he said finally. 'With any luck the blasted hag hasn't seen us.'

'Good-bye,' said Dorothy briefly. 'This time I really MUST go. Remember me to the children.'

With this she made off as fast as she could go without actually running, to get out of his reach before he should attempt to kiss her again.

Even as she did so a sound checked her for an instant — the unmistakable bang of a window shutting, somewhere in Mrs Semprill's house. Could Mrs Semprill have been watching them after all? But (reflected Dorothy) of COURSE she had been watching them! What else could you expect? You could hardly imagine Mrs Semprill missing such a scene as that. And if she HAD been watching them, undoubtedly the story would be all over the town tomorrow morning, and it would lose nothing in the telling. But this thought, sinister though it was, did no more than flight momentarily through Dorothy's mind as she hurried down the road.

When she was well out of sight of Mr Warburton's house she stopped, took out her handkerchief and scrubbed the place on her cheek where he had kissed her. She scrubbed it vigorously enough to bring the blood into her cheek. It was not until she had quite rubbed

out the imaginary stain which his lips had left there that she walked on again.

What he had done had upset her. Even now her heart was knocking and fluttering uncomfortably. I can't BEAR that kind of thing! she repeated to herself several times over. And unfortunately this was no more than the literal truth; she really could not bear it. To be kissed or fondled by a man — to feel heavy male arms about her and thick male lips bearing down upon her own — was terrifying and repulsive to her. Even in memory or imagination it made her wince. It was her especial secret, the especial, incurable disability that she carried through life.

If only they would leave you ALONE! she thought as she walked onwards a little more slowly. That was how she put it to herself habitually— 'If only they would leave you ALONE!' For it was not that in other ways she disliked men. On the contrary, she liked them better than women. Part of Mr Warburton's hold over her was in the fact that he was a man and had the careless good humour and the intellectual largeness that women so seldom have. But why couldn't they leave you ALONE? Why did they always have to kiss you and maul you about? They were dreadful when they kissed you — dreadful and a little disgusting, like some large, furry beast that rubs itself against you, all too friendly and yet liable to turn dangerous at any moment. And beyond their kissing and mauling there lay always the suggestion of those other, monstrous things ('ALL THAT' was her name for them) of which she could hardly even bear to think.

Of course, she had had her share, and rather more than her share, of casual attention from men. She was just pretty enough, and just plain enough, to be the kind of girl that men habitually pester. For when a man wants a little casual amusement, he usually picks out a girl who is not TOO pretty. Pretty girls (so he reasons) are spoilt and therefore capricious; but plain girls are easy game. And even if you are a clergyman's daughter, even if you live in a town like Knype Hill and spend almost your entire life in parish work, you don't altogether escape pursuit. Dorothy was all too used to it — all too used to the fattish middle-aged men, with their fishily hopeful eyes, who slowed down their cars when you passed them on the road, or who manoeuvred an introduction and then began pinching your

elbow about ten minutes afterwards. Men of all descriptions. Even a clergyman, on one occasion — a bishop's chaplain, he was . . . .

But the trouble was that it was not better, but oh! infinitely worse when they were the right kind of man and the advances they made you were honourable. Her mind slipped backwards five years, to Francis Moon, curate in those days at St Wedekind's in Millborough. Dear Francis! How gladly would she have married him if only it had not been for ALL THAT! Over and over again he had asked her to marry him, and of course she had had to say No; and, equally of course, he had never known why. Impossible to tell him why. And then he had gone away, and only a year later had died so irrelevantly of pneumonia. She whispered a prayer for his soul, momentarily forgetting that her father did not really approve of prayers for the dead, and then, with an effort, pushed the memory aside. Ah, better not to think of it again! It hurt her in her breast to think of it.

She could never marry, she had decided long ago upon that. Even when she was a child she had known it. Nothing would ever overcome her horror of ALL THAT — at the very thought of it something within her seemed to shrink and freeze. And of course, in a sense she did not want to overcome it. For, like all abnormal people, she was not fully aware that she was abnormal.

And yet, though her sexual coldness seemed to her natural and inevitable, she knew well enough how it was that it had begun. She could remember, as clearly as though it were yesterday, certain dreadful scenes between her father and her mother — scenes that she had witnessed when she was no more than nine years old. They had left a deep, secret wound in her mind. And then a little later she had been frightened by some old steel engravings of nymphs pursued by satyrs. To her childish mind there was something inexplicably, horribly sinister in those horned, semi-human creatures that lurked in thickets and behind large trees, ready to come bounding forth in sudden swift pursuit. For a whole year of her childhood she had actually been afraid to walk through woods alone, for fear of satyrs. She had grown out of the fear, of course, but not out of the feeling that was associated with it. The satyr had remained with her as a symbol. Perhaps she would never grow out of it, that special feeling of dread, of hopeless flight from something more than rationally

dreadful — the stamp of hooves in the lonely wood, the lean, furry thighs of the satyr. It was a thing not to be altered, not to be argued away. It is, moreover, a thing too common nowadays, among educated women, to occasion any kind of surprise.

Most of Dorothy's agitation had disappeared by the time she reached the rectory. The thoughts of satyrs and Mr Warburton, of Francis Moon and her foredoomed sterility, which had been going to and fro in her mind, faded out of it and were replaced by the accusing image of a jackboot. She remembered that she had the best part of two hours' work to do before going to bed tonight. The house was in darkness. She went round to the back and slipped in on tiptoe by the scullery door, for fear of waking her father, who was probably asleep already.

As she felt her way through the dark passage to the conservatory, she suddenly decided that she had gone wrong in going to Mr Warburton's house tonight. She would, she resolved, never go there again, even when she was certain that somebody else would be there as well. Moreover, she would do penance tomorrow for having gone there tonight. Having lighted the lamp, before doing anything else she found her 'memo list', which was already written out for tomorrow, and pencilled a capital P against 'breakfast', P stood for penance — no bacon again for breakfast tomorrow. Then she lighted the oilstove under the glue-pot.

The light of the lamp fell yellow upon her sewing-machine and upon the pile of half-finished clothes on the table, reminding her of the yet greater pile of clothes that were not even begun; reminding her, also, that she was dreadfully, overwhelmingly tired. She had forgotten her tiredness at the moment when Mr Warburton laid his hands on her shoulders, but now it had come back upon her with double force. Moreover, there was a somehow exceptional quality about her tiredness tonight. She felt, in an almost literal sense of the words, washed out. As she stood beside the table she had a sudden, very strange feeling as though her mind had been entirely emptied, so that for several seconds she actually forgot what it was that she had come into the conservatory to do.

Then she remembered — the jackboots, of course! Some contemptible little demon whispered in her ear, 'Why not go straight

to bed and leave the jackboots till tomorrow?' She uttered a prayer for strength, and pinched herself. Come on, Dorothy! No slacking please! Luke ix, 62. Then, clearing some of the litter off the table, she got out her scissors, a pencil, and four sheets of brown paper, and sat down to cut out those troublesome insteps for the jackboots while the glue was boiling.

When the grandfather clock in her father's study struck midnight she was still at work. She had shaped both jackboots by this time, and was reinforcing them by pasting narrow strips of paper all over them — a long, messy job. Every bone in her body was aching, and her eyes were sticky with sleep. Indeed, it was only rather dimly that she remembered what she was doing. But she worked on, mechanically pasting strip after strip of paper into place, and pinching herself every two minutes to counteract the hypnotic sound of the oilstove singing beneath the glue-pot.

CHAPTER 2

Out of a black, dreamless sleep, with the sense of being drawn upwards through enormous and gradually lightening abysses, Dorothy awoke to a species of consciousness.

Her eyes were still closed. By degrees, however, their lids became less opaque to the light, and then flickered open of their own accord. She was looking out upon a street — a shabby, lively street of small shops and narrow-faced houses, with streams of men, trams, and cars passing in either direction.

But as yet it could not properly be said that she was LOOKING. For the things she saw were not apprehended as men, trams, and cars, nor as anything in particular; they were not even apprehended as things moving; not even as THINGS. She merely SAW, as an animal sees, without speculation and almost without consciousness. The noises of the street — the confused din of voices, the hooting of horns and the scream of the trams grinding on their gritty rails — flowed through her head provoking purely physical responses. She had no words, nor any conception of the purpose of such things as words, nor any consciousness of time or place, or of her own body or even of her own existence.

Nevertheless, by degrees her perceptions became sharper. The stream of moving things began to penetrate beyond her eyes and sort themselves out into separate images in her brain. She began, still wordlessly, to observe the shapes of things. A long-shaped thing swam past, supported on four other, narrower long-shaped things, and drawing after it a square-shaped thing balanced on two circles. Dorothy watched it pass; and suddenly, as though spontaneously, a word flashed into her mind. The word was ‘horse’. It faded, but returned presently in the more complex form: ‘THAT IS A HORSE.’ Other words followed— ‘house’, ‘street’, ‘tram’, ‘car’, ‘bicycle’ — until in a few minutes she had found a name for almost everything within sight. She discovered the words ‘man’ and ‘woman’, and, speculating upon these words, discovered that she knew the difference between living and inanimate things, and between human beings and horses, and between men and women.

It was only now, after becoming aware of most of the things about her, that she became aware of HERSELF. Hitherto she had been as it were a pair of eyes with a receptive but purely impersonal brain behind them. But now, with a curious little shock, she discovered her separate and unique existence; she could FEEL herself existing; it was as though something within her were exclaiming 'I am I!' Also, in some way she knew that this 'I' had existed and been the same from remote periods in the past, though it was a past of which she had no remembrance.

But it was only for a moment that this discovery occupied her. From the first there was a sense of incompleteness in it, of something vaguely unsatisfactory. And it was this: the 'I am I' which had seemed an answer had itself become a question. It was no longer 'I am I', but 'WHO am I'?

WHO WAS SHE? She turned the question over in her mind, and found that she had not the dimmest notion of who she was; except that, watching the people and horses passing, she grasped that she was a human being and not a horse. And that the question altered itself and took this form: 'Am I a man or a woman?' Again neither feeling nor memory gave any clue to the answer. But at that moment, by accident possibly, her finger-tips brushed against her body. She realized more clearly than before that her body existed, and that it was her own — that it was, in fact, herself. She began to explore it with her hands, and her hands encountered breasts. She was a woman, therefore. Only women had breasts. In some way she knew, without knowing how she knew, that all those women who passed had breasts beneath their clothes, though she could not see them.

She now grasped that in order to identify herself she must examine her own body, beginning with her face; and for some moments she actually attempted to look at her own face, before realizing that this was impossible. She looked down, and saw a shabby black satin dress, rather long, a pair of flesh-coloured artificial silk stockings, laddered and dirty, and a pair of very shabby black satin shoes with high heels. None of them was in the least familiar to her. She examined her hands, and they were both strange and unstrange. They were smallish hands, with hard palms, and very dirty. After a moment she realized that it was their dirtiness that

made them strange to her. The hands themselves seemed natural and appropriate, though she did not recognize them.

After hesitating a few moments longer, she turned to her left and began to walk slowly along the pavement. A fragment of knowledge had come to her, mysteriously, out of the blank past: the existence of mirrors, their purpose, and the fact that there are often mirrors in shop windows. After a moment she came to a cheap little jeweller's shop in which a strip of mirror, set at an angle, reflected the faces of people passing. Dorothy picked her reflection out from among a dozen others, immediately realizing it to be her own. Yet it could not be said that she had recognized it; she had no memory of ever having seen it till this moment. It showed her a woman's youngish face, thin, very blonde, with crow's- feet round the eyes, and faintly smudged with dirt. A vulgar black cloche hat was stuck carelessly on the head, concealing most of the hair. The face was quite unfamiliar to her, and yet not strange. She had not known till this moment what face to expect, but now that she had seen it she realized that it was the face she might have expected. It was appropriate. It corresponded to something within her.

As she turned away from the jeweller's mirror, she caught sight of the words 'Fry's Chocolate' on a shop window opposite, and discovered that she understood the purpose of writing, and also, after a momentary effort, that she was able to read. Her eyes flitted across the street, taking in and deciphering odd scraps of print; the names of shops, advertisements, newspaper posters. She spelled out the letters of two red and white posters outside a tobacconist's shop. One of them read, 'Fresh Rumours about Rector's Daughter', and the other, 'Rector's Daughter. Now believed in Paris'. Then she looked upwards, and saw in white lettering on the corner of a house: 'New Kent Road'. The words arrested her. She grasped that she was standing in the New Kent Road, and — another fragment of her mysterious knowledge — the New Kent Road was somewhere in London. So she was in London.

As she made this discovery a peculiar tremor ran through her. Her mind was now fully awakened; she grasped, as she had not grasped before, the strangeness of her situation, and it bewildered and frightened her. What could it all MEAN? What was she doing here?

How had she got here? What had happened to her?

The answer was not long in coming. She thought — and it seemed to her that she understood perfectly well what the words meant: 'Of course! I've lost my memory!'

At this moment two youths and a girl who were trudging past, the youths with clumsy sacking bundles on their backs, stopped and looked curiously at Dorothy. They hesitated for a moment, then walked on, but halted again by a lamp-post five yards away. Dorothy saw them looking back at her and talking among themselves. One of the youths was about twenty, narrow-chested, black-haired, ruddy-cheeked, good-looking in a nosy cockney way, and dressed in the wreck of a raffishly smart blue suit and a check cap. The other was about twenty-six, squat, nimble, and powerful, with a snub nose, a clear pink skin and huge lips as coarse as sausages, exposing strong yellow teeth. He was frankly ragged, and he had a mat of orange-coloured hair cropped short and growing low on his head, which gave him a startling resemblance to an orang-outang. The girl was a silly-looking, plump creature, dressed in clothes very like Dorothy's own. Dorothy could hear some of what they were saying:

'That tart looks ill,' said the girl.

The orange-headed one, who was singing 'Sonny Boy' in a good baritone voice, stopped singing to answer. 'She ain't ill,' he said. 'She's on the beach all right, though. Same as us.'

'She'd do jest nicely for Nobby, wouldn't she?' said the dark-haired one.

'Oh, YOU!' exclaimed the girl with a shocked-amorous air, pretending to smack the dark one over the head.

The youths had lowered their bundles and leaned them against the lamp-post. All three of them now came rather hesitantly towards Dorothy, the orange-headed one, whose name seemed to be Nobby, leading the way as their ambassador. He moved with a gambolling, apelike gait, and his grin was so frank and wide that it was impossible not to smile back at him. He addressed Dorothy in a friendly way.

'Hullo, kid!'

'Hullo!'

'You on the beach, kid?'

‘On the beach?’

‘Well, on the bum?’

‘On the bum?’

‘Christ! she’s batty,’ murmured the girl, twitching at the black-haired one’s arm as though to pull him away.

‘Well, what I mean to say, kid — have you got any money?’

‘I don’t know.’

At this all three looked at one another in stupefaction. For a moment they probably thought that Dorothy really WAS batty. But simultaneously Dorothy, who had earlier discovered a small pocket in the side of her dress, put her hand into it and felt the outline of a large coin.

‘I believe I’ve got a penny,’ she said.

‘A penny!’ said the dark youth disgustedly, ‘ — lot of good that is to us!’

Dorothy drew it out. It was a half-crown. An astonishing change came over the faces of the three others. Nobby’s mouth split open with delight, he gambolled several steps to and fro like some great jubilant ape, and then, halting, took Dorothy confidentially by the arm.

‘That’s the mulligatawny!’ he said. ‘We’ve struck it lucky — and so’ve you, kid, believe me. You’re going to bless the day you set eyes on us lot. We’re going to make your fortune for you, we are. Now, see here, kid — are you on to go into cahoots with us three?’

‘What?’ said Dorothy.

‘What I mean to say — how about you chumming in with Flo and Charlie and me? Partners, see? Comrades all, shoulder to shoulder. United we stand, divided we fall. We put up the brains, you put up the money. How about it, kid? Are you on, or are you off?’

‘Shut up, Nobby!’ interrupted the girl. ‘She don’t understand a word of what you’re saying. Talk to her proper, can’t you?’

‘That’ll do, Flo,’ said Nobby equably. ‘You keep it shut and leave the talking to me. I got a way with the tarts, I have. Now, you listen to me, kid — what might your name happen to be, kid?’

Dorothy was within an ace of saying ‘I don’t know,’ but she was sufficiently on the alert to stop herself in time. Choosing a feminine name from the half-dozen that sprang immediately into her mind, she

answered, ‘Ellen.’

‘Ellen. That’s the mulligatawny. No surnames when you’re on the bum. Well now, Ellen dear, you listen to me. Us three are going down hopping, see— ‘

‘Hopping?’

‘‘Opping!’ put in the dark youth impatiently, as though disgusted by Dorothy’s ignorance. His voice and manner were rather sullen, and his accent much baser than Nobby’s. ‘Pickin’ ‘ops — dahn in Kent! C’n understand that, can’t yer?’

‘Oh, HOPS! For beer?’

‘That’s the mulligatawny! Coming on fine, she is. Well, kid, ‘z I was saying, here’s us three going down hopping, and got a job promised us and all — Blessington’s farm, Lower Molesworth. Only we’re just a bit in the mulligatawny, see? Because we ain’t got a brown between us, and we got to do it on the toby — thirty-five miles it is — and got to tap for our tommy and skipper at night as well. And that’s a bit of a mulligatawny, with ladies in the party. But now s’pose f’rinstance you was to come along with us, see? We c’d take the twopenny tram far as Bromley, and that’s fifteen miles done, and we won’t need skipper more’n one night on the way. And you can chum in at our bin — four to a bin’s the best picking — and if Blessington’s paying twopence a bushel you’ll turn your ten bob a week easy. What do you say to it, kid? Your two and a tanner won’t do you much good here in Smoke. But you go into partnership with us, and you’ll get your kip for a month and something over — and WE’LL get a lift to Bromley and a bit of scran as well.’

About a quarter of his speech was intelligible to Dorothy. She asked rather at random:

‘What is SCRAN?’

‘Scran? Tommy — food. I can see YOU ain’t been long on the beach, kid.’

‘Oh. . . . Well, you want me to come down hop-picking with you, is that it?’

‘That’s it, Ellen my dear. Are you on, or are you off?’

‘All right,’ said Dorothy promptly. ‘I’ll come.’

She made this decision without any misgiving whatever. It is true that if she had had time to think over her position, she would

probably have acted differently; in all probability she would have gone to a police station and asked for assistance. That would have been the sensible course to take. But Nobby and the others had appeared just at the critical moment, and, helpless as she was, it seemed quite natural to throw in her lot with the first human being who presented himself. Moreover, for some reason which she did not understand, it reassured her to hear that they were making for Kent. Kent, it seemed to her, was the very place to which she wanted to go. The others showed no further curiosity, and asked no uncomfortable questions. Nobby simply said, 'O.K. That's the mulligatawny!' and then gently took Dorothy's half-crown out of her hand and slid it into his pocket — in case she should lose it, he explained. The dark youth — apparently his name was Charlie — said in his surly, disagreeable way:

'Come on, less get movin'! It's 'ar-parse two already. We don't want to miss that there —— tram. Where d'they start from, Nobby?'

'The Elephant,' said Nobby: 'and we got to catch it before four o'clock, because they don't give no free rides after four.'

'Come on, then, don't less waste no more time. Nice job we'll 'ave of it if we got to 'ike it down to Bromley AND look for a place to skipper in the —— dark. C'm on, Flo.'

'Quick march!' said Nobby, swinging his bundle on to his shoulder.

They set out, without more words said, Dorothy, still bewildered but feeling much better than she had felt half an hour ago, walked beside Flo and Charlie, who talked to one another and took no further notice of her. From the very first they seemed to hold themselves a little aloof from Dorothy — willing enough to share her half-crown, but with no friendly feelings towards her. Nobby marched in front, stepping out briskly in spite of his burden, and singing, with spirited imitations of military music, the well-known military song of which the only recorded words seem to be:

'" —— !" was all the band could play;
" —— ! —— !" And the same to you!'

This was the twenty-ninth of August. It was on the night of the twenty-first that Dorothy had fallen asleep in the conservatory; so that there had been an interregnum in her life of not quite eight days.

The thing that had happened to her was commonplace enough — almost every week one reads in the newspapers of a similar case. A man disappears from home, is lost sight of for days or weeks, and presently fetches up at a police station or in a hospital, with no notion of who he is or where he has come from. As a rule it is impossible to tell how he has spent the intervening time; he has been wandering, presumably, in some hypnotic or somnambulistic state in which he has nevertheless been able to pass for normal. In Dorothy's case only one thing is certain, and that is that she had been robbed at some time during her travels; for the clothes she was wearing were not her own, and her gold cross was missing.

At the moment when Nobby accosted her, she was already on the road to recovery; and if she had been properly cared for, her memory might have come back to her within a few days or even hours. A very small thing would have been enough to accomplish it; a chance meeting with a friend, a photograph of her home, a few questions skilfully put. But as it was, the slight mental stimulus that she needed was never given. She was left in the peculiar state in which she had first found herself — a state in which her mind was potentially normal, but not quite strung up to the effort of puzzling out her own identity.

For of course, once she had thrown in her lot with Nobby and the others, all chance of reflection was gone. There was no time to sit down and think the matter over — no time to come to grips with her difficulty and reason her way to its solution. In the strange, dirty sub-world into which she was instantly plunged, even five minutes of consecutive thought would have been impossible. The days passed in ceaseless nightmarish activity. Indeed, it was very like a nightmare; a nightmare not of urgent terrors, but of hunger, squalor, and fatigue, and of alternating heat and cold. Afterwards, when she looked back upon that time, days and nights merged themselves together so that she could never remember with perfect certainty how many of them there had been. She only knew that for some indefinite period she had been perpetually footsore and almost perpetually hungry. Hunger

and the soreness of her feet were her clearest memories of that time; and also the cold of the nights, and a peculiar, blowsy, witless feeling that came of sleeplessness and constant exposure to the air.

After getting to Bromley they had 'drummed up' on a horrible, paper-littered rubbish dump, reeking with the refuse of several slaughter-houses, and then passed a shuddering night, with only sacks for cover, in long wet grass on the edge of a recreation ground. In the morning they had started out, on foot, for the hopfields. Even at this early date Dorothy had discovered that the tale Nobby had told her, about the promise of a job, was totally untrue. He had invented it — he confessed this quite light- heartedly — to induce her to come with them. Their only chance of getting a job was to march down into the hop country and apply at every farm till they found one where pickers were still needed.

They had perhaps thirty-five miles to go, as the crow flies, and yet at the end of three days they had barely reached the fringe of the hopfields. The need of getting food, of course, was what slowed their progress. They could have marched the whole distance in two days or even in a day if they had not been obliged to feed themselves. As it was, they had hardly even time to think of whether they were going in the direction of the hopfields or not; it was food that dictated all their movements. Dorothy's half- crown had melted within a few hours, and after that there was nothing for it except to beg. But there came the difficulty. One person can beg his food easily enough on the road, and even two can manage it, but it is a very different matter when there are four people together. In such circumstances one can only keep alive if one hunts for food as persistently and single-mindedly as a wild beast. Food — that was their sole preoccupation during those three days — just food, and the endless difficulty of getting it.

From morning to night they were begging. They wandered enormous distances, zigzagging right across the country, trailing from village to village and from house to house, 'tapping' at every butcher's and every baker's and every likely looking cottage, and hanging hopefully round picnic parties, and waving — always vainly — at passing cars, and accosting old gentlemen with the right kind of face and pitching hard-up stories. Often they went five miles out of

their way to get a crust of bread or a handful of scraps of bacon. All of them begged, Dorothy with the others; she had no remembered past, no standards of comparison to make her ashamed of it. And yet with all their efforts they would have gone empty- bellied half the time if they had not stolen as well as begged. At dusk and in the early mornings they pillaged the orchards and the fields, stealing apples, damsons, pears, cobnuts, autumn raspberries, and, above all, potatoes; Nobby counted it a sin to pass a potato field without getting at least a pocketful. It was Nobby who did most of the stealing, while the others kept guard. He was a bold thief; it was his peculiar boast that he would steal anything that was not tied down, and he would have landed them all in prison if they had not restrained him sometimes. Once he even laid hands on a goose, but the goose set up a fearful clamour, and Charlie and Dorothy dragged Nobby off just as the owner came out of doors to see what was the matter.

Each of those first days they walked between twenty and twenty-five miles. They trailed across commons and through buried villages with incredible names, and lost themselves in lanes that led nowhere, and sprawled exhausted in dry ditches smelling of fennel and tansies, and sneaked into private woods and ‘drummed up’ in thickets where firewood and water were handy, and cooked strange, squalid meals in the two two-pound snuff-tins that were their only cooking pots. Sometimes, when their luck was in, they had excellent stews of cadged bacon and stolen cauliflowers, sometimes great insipid gorges of potatoes roasted in the ashes, sometimes jam made of stolen autumn raspberries which they boiled in one of the snuff-tins and devoured while it was still scalding hot. Tea was the one thing they never ran short of. Even when there was no food at all there was always tea, stewed, dark brown and reviving. It is a thing that can be begged more easily than most. ‘Please, ma’am, could you spare me a pinch of tea?’ is a plea that seldom fails, even with the case-hardened Kentish housewives.

The days were burning hot, the white roads glared and the passing cars sent stinging dust into their faces. Often families of hop- pickers drove past, cheering, in lorries piled sky-high with furniture, children, dogs, and birdcages. The nights were always cold. There is hardly such a thing as a night in England when it is really warm after

midnight. Two large sacks were all the bedding they had between them. Flo and Charlie had one sack, Dorothy had the other, and Nobby slept on the bare ground. The discomfort was almost as bad as the cold. If you lay on your back, your head, with no pillow, lolled backwards so that your neck seemed to be breaking; if you lay on your side, your hip-bone pressing against the earth caused you torments. Even when, towards the small hours, you managed to fall asleep by fits and starts, the cold penetrated into your deepest dreams. Nobby was the only one who could really stand it. He could sleep as peacefully in a nest of sodden grass as in a bed, and his coarse, simian face, with barely a dozen red-gold hairs glittering on the chin like snippings of copper wire, never lost its warm, pink colour. He was one of those red-haired people who seem to glow with an inner radiance that warms not only themselves but the surrounding air.

All this strange, comfortless life Dorothy took utterly for granted — only dimly aware, if at all, that the other, unremembered life that lay behind her had been in some way different from this. After only a couple of days she had ceased to wonder any longer about her queer predicament. She accepted everything — accepted the dirt and hunger and fatigue, the endless trailing to and fro, the hot, dusty days and the sleepless, shivering nights. She was, in any case, far too tired to think. By the afternoon of the second day they were all desperately, overwhelmingly tired, except Nobby, whom nothing could tire. Even the fact that soon after they set out a nail began to work its way through the sole of his boot hardly seemed to trouble him. There were periods of an hour at a time when Dorothy seemed almost to be sleeping as she walked. She had a burden to carry now, for as the two men were already loaded and Flo steadfastly refused to carry anything, Dorothy had volunteered to carry the sack that held the stolen potatoes. They generally had ten pounds or so of potatoes in reserve. Dorothy slung the sack over her shoulder as Nobby and Charlie did with their bundles, but the string cut into her like a saw and the sack bumped against her hip and chafed it so that finally it began to bleed. Her wretched, flimsy shoes had begun to go to pieces from the very beginning. On the second day the heel of her right shoe came off and left her hobbling; but Nobby, expert in such matters,

advised her to tear the heel off the other shoe and walk flatfooted. The result was a fiery pain down her shins when she walked uphill, and a feeling as though the soles of her feet had been hammered with an iron bar.

But Flo and Charlie were in a much worse case than she. They were not so much exhausted as amazed and scandalized by the distances they were expected to walk. Walking twenty miles in a day was a thing they had never heard of till now. They were cockneys born and bred, and though they had had several months of destitution in London, neither of them had ever been on the road before. Charlie, till fairly recently, had been in good employment, and Flo, too, had had a good home until she had been seduced and turned out of doors to live on the streets. They had fallen in with Nobby in Trafalgar Square and agreed to come hop-picking with him, imagining that it would be a bit of a lark. Of course, having been 'on the beach' a comparatively short time, they looked down on Nobby and Dorothy. They valued Nobby's knowledge of the road and his boldness in thieving, but he was their social inferior — that was their attitude. And as for Dorothy, they scarcely even deigned to look at her after her half-crown came to an end.

Even on the second day their courage was failing. They lagged behind, grumbled incessantly, and demanded more than their fair share of food. By the third day it was almost impossible to keep them on the road at all. They were pining to be back in London, and had long ceased to care whether they ever got to the hopfields or not; all they wanted to do was to sprawl in any comfortable halting place they could find, and, when there was any food left, devour endless snacks. After every halt there was a tedious argument before they could be got to their feet again.

'Come on, blokes!' Nobby would say. 'Pack your peter up, Charlie. Time we was getting off.'

'Oh, —— getting off!' Charlie would answer morosely.

'Well, we can't skipper here, can we? We said we was going to hike as far as Sevenoaks tonight, didn't we?'

'Oh, —— Sevenoaks! Sevenoaks or any other bleeding place — it don't make any bleeding difference to me.'

‘But —— it! We want to get a job tomorrow, don’t we? And we got to get down among the farms ‘fore we can start looking for one.’

‘Oh, —— the farms! I wish I’d never ‘eard of a — — ‘op! I wasn’t brought up to this — — ‘iking and skippering like you was. I’m fed up; that’s what I am —— fed up.’

‘If this is bloody ‘opping,’ Flo would chime in, ‘I’ve ‘ad my bloody bellyful of it already.’

Nobby gave Dorothy his private opinion that Flo and Charlie would probably ‘jack off’ if they got the chance of a lift back to London. But as for Nobby, nothing disheartened him or ruffled his good temper, not even when the nail in his boot was at its worst and his filthy remnant of a sock was dark with blood. By the third day the nail had worn a permanent hole in his foot, and Nobby had to halt once in a mile to hammer it down.

‘‘Scuse me, kid,’ he would say; ‘got to attend to my bloody hoof again. This nail’s a mulligatawny.’

He would search for a round stone, squat in the ditch and carefully hammer the nail down.

‘There!’ he would say optimistically, feeling the place with his thumb. ‘THAT b— ‘s in his grave!’

The epitaph should have been Resurgam, however. The nail invariably worked its way up again within a quarter of an hour.

Nobby had tried to make love to Dorothy, of course, and, when she repulsed him, bore her no grudge. He had that happy temperament that is incapable of taking its own reverses very seriously. He was always debonair, always singing in a lusty baritone voice — his three favourite songs were: ‘Sonny Boy’, ‘’Twas Christmas Day in the Workhouse’ (to the tune of ‘The Church’s One Foundation’), and ‘“ —— !” was all the band could play’, given with lively renderings of military music. He was twenty-six years old and was a widower, and had been successively a seller of newspapers, a petty thief, a Borstal boy, a soldier, a burglar, and a tramp. These facts, however, you had to piece together for yourself, for he was not equal to giving a consecutive account of his life. His conversation was studded with casual picturesque memories — the six months he had served in a line regiment before he was invalided out with a damaged eye, the loathsomeness of the skilly in Holloway, his

childhood in the Deptford gutters, the death of his wife, aged eighteen, in childbirth, when he was twenty, the horrible suppleness of the Borstal canes, the dull boom of the nitro — glycerine, blowing in the safe door at Woodward's boot and shoe factory, where Nobby had cleared a hundred and twenty-five pounds and spent it in three weeks.

On the afternoon of the third day they reached the fringe of the hop country, and began to meet discouraged people, mostly tramps, trailing back to London with the news that there was nothing doing — hops were bad and the price was low, and the gypsies and 'home pickers' had collared all the jobs. At this Flo and Charlie gave up hope altogether, but by an adroit mixture of bullying and persuasion Nobby managed to drive them a few miles farther. In a little village called Wale they fell in with an old Irishwoman — Mrs McElligot was her name — who had just been given a job at a neighbouring hopfield, and they swapped some of their stolen apples for a piece of meat she had 'bummed' earlier in the day. She gave them some useful hints about hop-picking and about what farms to try. They were all sprawling on the village green, tired out, opposite a little general shop with some newspaper posters outside.

'You'd best go down'n have a try at Chalmers's,' Mrs McElligot advised them in her base Dublin accent. 'Dat's a bit above five mile from here. I've heard tell as Chalmers wants a dozen pickers still. I daresay he'd give y'a job if you gets dere early enough.'

'Five miles! Cripes! Ain't there none nearer'n that?' grumbled Charlie.

'Well, dere's Norman's. I got a job at Norman's meself — I'm startin' tomorrow mornin'. But 'twouldn't be no use for you to try at Norman's. He ain't takin' on none but home pickers, an' dey say as he's goin' to let half his hops blow.'

'What's home pickers?' said Nobby.

'Why, dem as has got homes o' deir own. Eider you got to live in de neighbourhood, or else de farmer's got to give y'a hut to sleep in. Dat's de law nowadays. In de ole days when you come down hoppin', you kipped in a stable an' dere was no questions asked. But dem bloody interferin' gets of a Labour Government brought in a law to say as no pickers was to be taken on widout de farmer had proper

accommodation for ‘em. So Norman only takes on folks as has got homes o’ deir own.’

‘Well, you ain’t got a home of your own, have you?’

‘No bloody fear! But Norman t’inks I have. I kidded’m I was stayin’ in a cottage near by. Between you an’ me, I’m skipperin’ in a cow byre. ‘Tain’t so bad except for de stink o’ de muck, but you got to be out be five in de mornin’, else de cowmen ‘ud catch you.’

‘We ain’t got no experience of hopping,’ Nobby said. ‘I wouldn’t know a bloody hop if I saw one. Best to let on you’re an old hand when you go up for a job, eh?’

‘Hell! Hops don’t need no experience. Tear ‘em off an’ fling ‘em into de bin. Dat’s all der is to it, wid hops.’

Dorothy was nearly asleep. She heard the others talking desultorily, first about hop-picking, then about some story in the newspapers of a girl who had disappeared from home. Flo and Charlie had been reading the posters on the shop-front opposite; and this had revived them somewhat, because the posters reminded them of London and its joys. The missing girl, in whose fate they seemed to be rather interested, was spoken of as ‘The Rector’s Daughter’.

‘J’a see that one, Flo?’ said Charlie, reading a poster aloud with intense relish: ‘“Secret Love Life of Rector’s Daughter. Startling Revelations.” Coo! Wish I ‘ad a penny to ‘ave a read of that!’

‘Oh? What’s ‘t all about, then?’

‘What? Didn’t j’a read about it? Papers ‘as bin full of it. Rector’s Daughter this and Rector’s Daughter that — wasn’t ‘alf smutty, some of it, too.’

‘She’s bit of hot stuff, the ole Rector’s Daughter,’ said Nobby reflectively, lying on his back. ‘Wish she was here now! I’d know what to do with her, all right, I would.’

‘’Twas a kid run away from home,’ put in Mrs McElligot. ‘She was carryin’ on wid a man twenty year older’n herself, an’ now she’s disappeared an’ dey’re searchin’ for her high an’ low.’

‘Jacked off in the middle of the night in a motor-car with no clo’es on ‘cep’ ‘er nightdress,’ said Charlie appreciatively. ‘The ‘ole village sore ‘em go.’

‘Dere’s some t’ink as he’s took her abroad an’ sold her to one o’ dem flash cat-houses in Parrus,’ added Mrs McElligot.

‘No clo’es on ‘cep’ ‘er nightdress? Dirty tart she must ‘a been!’

The conversation might have proceeded to further details, but at this moment Dorothy interrupted it. What they were saying had roused a faint curiosity in her. She realized that she did not know the meaning of the word ‘Rector’. She sat up and asked Nobby:

‘What is a Rector?’

‘Rector? Why, a sky-pilot — parson bloke. Bloke that preaches and gives out the hymns and that in church. We passed one of ‘em yesterday — riding a green bicycle and had his collar on back to front. A priest — clergyman. YOU know.’

‘Oh. . . . Yes, I think so.’

‘Priests! Bloody ole getsies dey are too, some o’ dem,’ said Mrs McElligot reminiscently.

Dorothy was left not much the wiser. What Nobby had said did enlighten her a little, but only a very little. The whole train of thought connected with ‘church’ and ‘clergyman’ was strangely vague and blurred in her mind. It was one of the gaps — there was a number of such gaps — in the mysterious knowledge that she had brought with her out of the past.

That was their third night on the road. When it was dark they slipped into a spinney as usual to ‘skipper’, and a little after midnight it began to pelt with rain. They spent a miserable hour stumbling to and fro in the darkness, trying to find a place to shelter, and finally found a hay-stack, where they huddled themselves on the lee side till it was light enough to see. Flo blubbered throughout the night in the most intolerable manner, and by the morning she was in a state of semi-collapse. Her silly fat face, washed clean by rain and tears, looked like a bladder of lard, if one can imagine a bladder of lard contorted with self- pity. Nobby rooted about under the hedge until he had collected an armful of partially dry sticks, and then managed to get a fire going and boil some tea as usual. There was no weather so bad that Nobby could not produce a can of tea. He carried, among other things, some pieces of old motor tyre that would make a flare when the wood was wet, and he even possessed the art, known only to a few cognoscenti among tramps, of getting water to boil over a candle.

Everyone’s limbs had stiffened after the horrible night, and Flo

declared herself unable to walk a step farther. Charlie backed her up. So, as the other two refused to move, Dorothy and Nobby went on to Chalmers's farm, arranging a rendezvous where they should meet when they had tried their luck. They got to Chalmers's, five miles away, found their way through vast orchards to the hop- fields, and were told that the overseer 'would be along presently'. So they waited four hours on the edge of the plantation, with the sun drying their clothes on their backs, watching the hop-pickers at work. It was a scene somehow peaceful and alluring. The hop bines, tall climbing plants like runner beans enormously magnified, grew in green leafy lanes, with the hops dangling from them in pale green bunches like gigantic grapes. When the wind stirred them they shook forth a fresh, bitter scent of sulphur and cool beer. In each lane of bines a family of sunburnt people were shredding the hops into sacking bins, and singing as they worked; and presently a hooter sounded and they knocked off to boil cans of tea over crackling fires of hop bines. Dorothy envied them greatly. How happy they looked, sitting round the fires with their cans of tea and their hunks of bread and bacon, in the smell of hops and wood smoke! She pined for such a job — however, for the present there was nothing doing. At about one o'clock the overseer arrived and told them that he had no jobs for them, so they trailed back to the road, only avenging themselves on Chalmers's farm by stealing a dozen apples as they went.

When they reached their rendezvous, Flo and Charlie had vanished. Of course they searched for them, but, equally of course, they knew very well what had happened. Indeed, it was perfectly obvious. Flo had made eyes at some passing lorry driver, who had given the two of them a lift back to London for the chance of a good cuddle on the way. Worse yet, they had stolen both bundles. Dorothy and Nobby had not a scrap of food left, not a crust of bread nor a potato nor a pinch of tea, no bedding, and not even a snuff-tin in which to cook anything they could cadge or steal — nothing, in fact, except the clothes they stood up in.

The next thirty-six hours were a bad time — a very bad time. How they pined for a job, in their hunger and exhaustion! But the chances of getting one seemed to grow smaller and smaller as they got farther into the hop country. They made interminable marches

from farm to farm, getting the same answer everywhere — no pickers needed — and they were so busy marching to and fro that they had not even time to beg, so that they had nothing to eat except stolen apples and damsons that tormented their stomachs with their acid juice and yet left them ravenously hungry. It did not rain that night, but it was much colder than before. Dorothy did not even attempt to sleep, but spent the night in crouching over the fire and keeping it alight. They were hiding in a beech wood, under a squat, ancient tree that kept the wind away but also wetted them periodically with sprinklings of chilly dew. Nobby, stretched on his back, mouth open, one broad cheek faintly illumined by the feeble rays of the fire, slept as peacefully as a child. All night long a vague wonder, born of sleeplessness and intolerable discomfort, kept stirring in Dorothy's mind. Was this the life to which she had been bred — this life of wandering empty-bellied all day and shivering at night under dripping trees? Had it been like this even in the blank past? Where had she come from? Who was she? No answer came, and they were on the road at dawn. By the evening they had tried at eleven farms in all, and Dorothy's legs were giving out, and she was so dizzy with fatigue that she found difficulty in walking straight.

But late in the evening, quite unexpectedly, their luck turned. They tried at a farm named Cairns's, in the village of Clintock, and were taken on immediately, with no questions asked. The overseer merely looked them up and down, said briefly, 'Right you are — you'll do. Start in the morning; bin number 7, set 19,' and did not even bother to ask their names. Hop-picking, it seemed, needed neither character nor experience.

They found their way to the meadow where the pickers' camp was situated. In a dreamlike state, between exhaustion and the joy of having got a job at last, Dorothy found herself walking through a maze of tin-roofed huts and gypsies' caravans with many-coloured washing hanging from the windows. Hordes of children swarmed in the narrow grass alleys between the huts, and ragged, agreeable-looking people were cooking meals over innumerable faggot fires. At the bottom of the field there were some round tin huts, much inferior to the others, set apart for unmarried people. An old man who was toasting cheese at a fire directed Dorothy to one of the women's huts.

Dorothy pushed open the door of the hut. It was about twelve feet across, with unglazed windows which had been boarded up, and it had no furniture whatever. There seemed to be nothing in it but an enormous pile of straw reaching to the roof — in fact, the hut was almost entirely filled with straw. To Dorothy's eyes, already sticky with sleep, the straw looked paradisically comfortable. She began to push her way into it, and was checked by a sharp yelp from beneath her.

"Ere! What yer doin' of? Get off of it! 'Oo asked YOU to walk about on my belly, stoopid?'

Seemingly there were women down among the straw. Dorothy burrowed forward more circumspectly, tripped over something, sank into the straw and in the same instant began to fall asleep. A rough-looking woman, partially undressed, popped up like a mermaid from the strawy sea.

''Ullo, mate!' she said. 'Jest about all in, ain't you, mate?'

'Yes, I'm tired — very tired.'

'Well, you'll bloody freeze in this straw with no bed-clo'es on you. Ain't you got a blanket?'

'No.'

''Alf a mo, then. I got a poke 'ere.'

She dived down into the straw and re-emerged with a hop-poke seven feet long. Dorothy was asleep already. She allowed herself to be woken up, and inserted herself somehow into the sack, which was so long that she could get into it head and all; and then she was half wriggling, half sinking down, deep down, into a nest of straw warmer and drier than she had conceived possible. The straw tickled her nostrils and got into her hair and pricked her even through the sack, but at that moment no imaginable sleeping place — not Cleopatra's couch of swan's-down nor the floating bed of Haroun al Raschid — could have caressed her more voluptuously.

3

It was remarkable how easily, once you had got a job, you settled down to the routine of hop-picking. After only a week of it you ranked as an expert picker, and felt as though you had been picking

hops all your life.

It was exceedingly easy work. Physically, no doubt, it was exhausting — it kept you on your feet ten or twelve hours a day, and you were dropping with sleep by six in the evening — but it needed no kind of skill. Quite a third of the pickers in the camp were as new to the job as Dorothy herself. Some of them had come down from London with not the dimmest idea of what hops were like, or how you picked them, or why. One man, it was said, on his first morning on the way to the fields, had asked, 'Where are the spades?' He imagined that hops were dug up out of the ground.

Except for Sundays, one day at the hop camp was very like another. At half past five, at a tap on the wall of your hut, you crawled out of your sleeping nest and began searching for your shoes, amid sleepy curses from the women (there were six or seven or possibly even eight of them) who were buried here and there in the straw. In that vast pile of straw any clothes that you were so unwise as to take off always lost themselves immediately. You grabbed an armful of straw and another of dried hop bines, and a faggot from the pile outside, and got the fire going for breakfast. Dorothy always cooked Nobby's breakfast as well as her own, and tapped on the wall of his hut when it was ready, she being better at waking up in the morning than he. It was very cold on those September mornings, the eastern sky was fading slowly from black to cobalt, and the grass was silvery white with dew. Your breakfast was always the same — bacon, tea, and bread fried in the grease of the bacon. While you ate it you cooked another exactly similar meal, to serve for dinner, and then, carrying your dinner-pail, you set out for the fields, a mile-and-a-half walk through the blue, windy dawn, with your nose running so in the cold that you had to stop occasionally and wipe it on your sacking apron.

The hops were divided up into plantations of about an acre, and each set — forty pickers or thereabouts, under a foreman who was often a gypsy — picked one plantation at a time. The bines grew twelve feet high or more, and they were trained up strings and slung over horizontal wires, in rows a yard or two apart; in each row there was a sacking bin like a very deep hammock slung on a heavy wooden frame. As soon as you arrived you swung your bin into

position, slit the strings from the next two bines, and tore them down — huge, tapering strands of foliage, like the plaits of Rapunzel's hair, that came tumbling down on top of you, showering you with dew. You dragged them into place over the bin, and then, starting at the thick end of the bine, began tearing off the heavy bunches of hops. At that hour of the morning you could only pick slowly and awkwardly. Your hands were still stiff and the coldness of the dew numbed them, and the hops were wet and slippery. The great difficulty was to pick the hops without picking the leaves and stalks as well; for the measurer was liable to refuse your hops if they had too many leaves among them.

The stems of the bines were covered with minute thorns which within two or three days had torn the skin of your hands to pieces. In the morning it was a torment to begin picking when your fingers were almost too stiff to bend and bleeding in a dozen places; but the pain wore off when the cuts had reopened and the blood was flowing freely. If the hops were good and you picked well, you could strip a bine in ten minutes, and the best bines yielded half a bushel of hops. But the hops varied greatly from one plantation to another. In some they were as large as walnuts, and hung in great leafless bunches which you could rip off with a single twist; in others they were miserable things no bigger than peas, and grew so thinly that you had to pick them one at a time. Some hops were so bad that you could not pick a bushel of them in an hour.

It was slow work in the early morning, before the hops were dry enough to handle. But presently the sun came out, and the lovely, bitter odour began to stream from the warming hops, and people's early-morning surliness wore off, and the work got into its stride. From eight till midday you were picking, picking, picking, in a sort of passion of work — a passionate eagerness, which grew stronger and stronger as the morning advanced, to get each bine done and shift your bin a little farther along the row. At the beginning of each plantation all the bins started abreast, but by degrees the better pickers forged ahead, and some of them had finished their lane of hops when the others were barely halfway along; whereupon, if you were far behind, they were allowed to turn back and finish your row for you, which was called 'stealing your hops'. Dorothy and Nobby

were always among the last, there being only two of them — there were four people at most of the bins. And Nobby was a clumsy picker, with his great coarse hands; on the whole, the women picked better than the men.

It was always a neck and neck race between the two bins on either side of Dorothy and Nobby, bin number 6 and bin number 8. Bin number 6 was a family of gypsies — a curly-headed, ear-ringed father, an old dried-up leather-coloured mother, and two strapping sons — and bin number 8 was an old East End costerwoman who wore a broad hat and long black cloak and took snuff out of a papiermache box with a steamer painted on the lid. She was always helped by relays of daughters and granddaughters who came down from London for two days at a time. There was quite a troop of children working with the set, following the bins with baskets and gathering up the fallen hops while the adults picked. And the old costerwoman's tiny, pale granddaughter Rose, and a little gypsy girl, dark as an Indian, were perpetually slipping off to steal autumn raspberries and make swings out of hop bines; and the constant singing round the bins was pierced by shrill cries from the costerwoman of, 'Go on, Rose, you lazy little cat! Pick them 'ops up! I'll warm your a — for you!' etc., etc.

Quite half the pickers in the set were gypsies — there were not less than two hundred of them in the camp. Diddykies, the other pickers called them. They were not a bad sort of people, friendly enough, and they flattered you grossly when they wanted to get anything out of you; yet they were sly, with the impenetrable slyness of savages. In their oafish, Oriental faces there was a look as of some wild but sluggish animal — a look of dense stupidity existing side by side with untameable cunning. Their talk consisted of about half a dozen remarks which they repeated over and over again without ever growing tired of them. The two young gypsies at bin number 6 would ask Nobby and Dorothy as many as a dozen times a day the same conundrum:

'What is it the cleverest man in England couldn't do?'

'I don't know. What?'

'Tickle a gnat's a — with a telegraph pole.'

At this, never-failing bellows of laughter. They were all

abysmally ignorant; they informed you with pride that not one of them could read a single word. The old curly-headed father, who had conceived some dim notion that Dorothy was a 'scholard', once seriously asked her whether he could drive his caravan to New York.

At twelve o'clock a hooter down at the farm signalled to the pickers to knock off work for an hour, and it was generally a little before this that the measurer came round to collect the hops. At a warning shout from the foreman of ''Ops ready, number nineteen!' everyone would hasten to pick up the fallen hops, finish off the tendrils that had been left unpicked here and there, and clear the leaves out of the bin. There was an art in that. It did not pay to pick too 'clean', for leaves and hops alike all went to swell the tally. The old hands, such as the gypsies, were adepts at knowing just how 'dirty' it was safe to pick.

The measurer would come round, carrying a wicker basket which held a bushel, and accompanied by the 'bookie,' who entered the pickings of each bin in a ledger. The 'bookies' were young men, clerks and chartered accountants and the like, who took this job as a paying holiday. The measurer would scoop the hops out of the bin a bushel at a time, intoning as he did so, 'One! Two! Three! Four!' and the pickers would enter the number in their tally books. Each bushel they picked earned them twopence, and naturally there were endless quarrels and accusations of unfairness over the measuring. Hops are spongy things — you can crush a bushel of them into a quart pot if you choose; so after each scoop one of the pickers would lean over into the bin and stir the hops up to make them lie looser, and then the measurer would hoist the end of the bin and shake the hops together again. Some mornings he had orders to 'take them heavy', and would shovel them in so that he got a couple of bushels at each scoop, whereat there were angry yells of, 'Look how the b— 's ramming them down! Why don't you bloody well stamp on them?' etc.; and the old hands would say darkly that they had known measurers to be ducked in cowponds on the last day of picking. From the bins the hops were put into pokes which theoretically held a hundredweight; but it took two men to hoist a full poke when the measurer had been 'taking them heavy'. You had an hour for dinner, and you made a fire of hop bines — this was forbidden, but everyone did it — and heated

up your tea and ate your bacon sandwiches. After dinner you were picking again till five or six in the evening, when the measurer came once more to take your hops, after which you were free to go back to the camp.

Looking back, afterwards, upon her interlude of hop-picking, it was always the afternoons that Dorothy remembered. Those long, laborious hours in the strong sunlight, in the sound of forty voices singing, in the smell of hops and wood smoke, had a quality peculiar and unforgettable. As the afternoon wore on you grew almost too tired to stand, and the small green hop lice got into your hair and into your ears and worried you, and your hands, from the sulphurous juice, were as black as a Negro's except where they were bleeding. Yet you were happy, with an unreasonable happiness. The work took hold of you and absorbed you. It was stupid work, mechanical, exhausting, and every day more painful to the hands, and yet you never wearied of it; when the weather was fine and the hops were good you had the feeling that you could go on picking for ever and for ever. It gave you a physical joy, a warm satisfied feeling inside you, to stand there hour after hour, tearing off the heavy clusters and watching the pale green pile grow higher and higher in your bin, every bushel another twopence in your pocket. The sun burned down upon you, baking you brown, and the bitter, never-palling scent, like a wind from oceans of cool beer, flowed into your nostrils and refreshed you. When the sun was shining everybody sang as they worked; the plantations rang with singing. For some reason all the songs were sad that autumn — songs about rejected love and fidelity unrewarded, like gutter versions of Carmen and Manon Lescaut. There was:

THERE they GO — IN their joy —
'APPY girl — LUCKY boy —
But 'ere am *I-I-I* —
Broken— 'A-A-Arted!

And there was:

But I'm dan — cing with tears — in my eyes —

‘Cos the girl — in my arms — isn’t you-o-ou!

And:

The bells — are ringing — for Sally —
But no-o-ot — for Sally — and me!

The little gypsy girl used to sing over and over again:

We’re so misable, all so misable,
Down on Misable Farm!

And though everyone told her that the name of it was Misery Farm, she persisted in calling it Misable Farm. The old costerwoman and her granddaughter Rose had a hop-picking song which went:

‘Our lousy ‘ops!
Our lousy ‘ops!
When the measurer ‘e comes round,
Pick ‘em up, pick ‘em up off the ground!
When ‘e comes to measure,
‘E never knows where to stop;
Ay, ay, get in the bin
And take the bloody lot!’

‘There they go in their joy’, and ‘The bells are ringing for Sally’, were the especial favourites. The pickers never grew tired of singing them; they must have sung both of them several hundred times over before the season came to an end. As much a part of the atmosphere of the hopfields as the bitter scent and the blowsy sunlight were the tunes of those two songs, ringing through the leafy lanes of the bines.

When you got back to the camp, at half past six or thereabouts, you squatted down by the stream that ran past the huts, and washed your face, probably for the first time that day. It took you twenty minutes or so to get the coal-black filth off your hands. Water and even soap made no impression on it; only two things would remove it — one of them was mud, and the other, curiously enough, was hop juice. Then you cooked your supper, which was usually bread and tea

and bacon again, unless Nobby had been along to the village and bought two pennyworth of pieces from the butcher. It was always Nobby who did the shopping. He was the sort of man who knows how to get four pennyworth of meat from the butcher for twopence, and, besides, he was expert in tiny economies. For instance, he always bought a cottage loaf in preference to any of the other shapes, because, as he used to point out, a cottage loaf seems like two loaves when you tear it in half.

Even before you had eaten your supper you were dropping with sleep, but the huge fires that people used to build between the huts were too agreeable to leave. The farm allowed two faggots a day for each hut, but the pickers plundered as many more as they wanted, and also great lumps of elm root which kept smouldering till morning. On some nights the fires were so enormous that twenty people could sit round them in comfort, and there was singing far into the night, and telling of stories and roasting of stolen apples. Youths and girls slipped off to the dark lanes together, and a few bold spirits like Nobby set out with sacks and robbed the neighbouring orchards, and the children played hide-and-seek in the dusk and harried the nightjars which haunted the camp and which, in their cockney ignorance, they imagined to be pheasants. On Saturday nights fifty or sixty of the pickers used to get drunk in the pub and then march down the village street roaring bawdy songs, to the scandal of the inhabitants, who looked on the hopping season as decent provincials in Roman Gaul might have looked on the yearly incursion of the Goths.

When finally you managed to drag yourself away to your nest in the straw, it was none too warm or comfortable. After that first blissful night, Dorothy discovered that straw is wretched stuff to sleep in. It is not only prickly, but, unlike hay, it lets in the draught from every possible direction. However, you had the chance to steal an almost unlimited number of hop-pokes from the fields, and by making herself a sort of cocoon of four hop-pokes, one on top of the other, she managed to keep warm enough to sleep at any rate five hours a night.

As to what you earned by hop-picking, it was just enough to keep body and soul together, and no more.

The rate of pay at Cairns's was twopence a bushel, and given good hops a practised picker can average three bushels an hour. In theory, therefore, it would have been possible to earn thirty shillings by a sixty-hour week. Actually, no one in the camp came anywhere near this figure. The best pickers of all earned thirteen or fourteen shillings a week, and the worst hardly as much as six shillings. Nobby and Dorothy, pooling their hops and dividing the proceeds, made round about ten shillings a week each.

There were various reasons for this. To begin with, there was the badness of the hops in some of the fields. Again, there were the delays which wasted an hour or two of every day. When one plantation was finished you had to carry your bin to the next, which might be a mile distant; and then perhaps it would turn out that there was some mistake, and the set, struggling under their bins (they weighed a hundredweight), would have to waste another half-hour in traipsing elsewhere. Worst of all, there was the rain. It was a bad September that year, raining one day in three. Sometimes for a whole morning or afternoon you shivered miserably in the shelter of the unstripped bines, with a dripping hop-poke round your shoulders, waiting for the rain to stop. It was impossible to pick when it was raining. The hops were too slippery to handle, and if you did pick them it was worse than useless, for when sodden with water they shrank all to nothing in the bin. Sometimes you were in the fields all day to earn a shilling or less.

This did not matter to the majority of the pickers, for quite half of them were gypsies and accustomed to starvation wages, and most of the others were respectable East Enders, costermongers and small shopkeepers and the like, who came hop-picking for a holiday and were satisfied if they earned enough for their fare both ways and a bit of fun on Saturday nights. The farmers knew this and traded on it. Indeed, were it not that hop-picking is regarded as a holiday, the industry would collapse forthwith, for the price of hops is now so low that no farmer could afford to pay his pickers a living wage.

Twice a week you could 'sub' up to the amount of half your earnings. If you left before the picking was finished (an inconvenient

thing for the farmers) they had the right to pay you off at the rate of a penny a bushel instead of twopence — that is, to pocket half of what they owed you. It was also common knowledge that towards the end of the season, when all the pickers had a fair sum owing to them and would not want to sacrifice it by throwing up their jobs, the farmer would reduce the rate of payment from twopence a bushel to a penny halfpenny. Strikes were practically impossible. The pickers had no union, and the foremen of the sets, instead of being paid twopence a bushel like the others, were paid a weekly wage which stopped automatically if there was a strike; so naturally they would raise Heaven and earth to prevent one. Altogether, the farmers had the pickers in a cleft stick; but it was not the farmers who were to blame — the low price of hops was the root of the trouble. Also as Dorothy observed later, very few of the pickers had more than a dim idea of the amount they earned. The system of piecework disguised the low rate of payment.

For the first few days, before they could 'sub', Dorothy and Nobby very nearly starved, and would have starved altogether if the other pickers had not fed them. But everyone was extraordinarily kind. There was a party of people who shared one of the larger huts a little farther up the row, a flower-seller named Jim Burrows and a man named Jim Turle who was vermin man at a large London restaurant, who had married sisters and were close friends, and these people had taken a liking to Dorothy. They saw to it that she and Nobby should not starve. Every evening during the first few days May Turle, aged fifteen, would arrive with a saucepan full of stew, which was presented with studied casualness, lest there should be any hint of charity about it. The formula was always the same:

'Please, Ellen, mother says as she was just going to throw this stew away, and then she thought as p'raps you might like it. She ain't got no use for it, she says, and so you'd be doing her a kindness if you was to take it.'

It was extraordinary what a lot of things the Turles and the Burrowses were 'just going to throw away' during those first few days. On one occasion they even gave Nobby and Dorothy half a pig's head ready stewed; and besides food they gave them several cooking pots and a tin plate which could be used as a frying-pan.

Best of all, they asked no uncomfortable questions. They knew well enough that there was some mystery in Dorothy's life— 'You could see,' they said, 'as Ellen had COME DOWN IN THE WORLD' — but they made it a point of honour not to embarrass her by asking questions about it. It was not until she had been more than a fortnight at the camp that Dorothy was even obliged to put herself to the trouble of inventing a surname.

As soon as Dorothy and Nobby could 'sub', their money troubles were at an end. They lived with surprising ease at the rate of one and sixpence a day for the two of them. Fourpence of this went on tobacco for Nobby, and fourpence-halfpenny on a loaf of bread; and they spent about sevenpence a day on tea, sugar, milk (you could get milk at the farm at a halfpenny a half-pint), and margarine and 'pieces' of bacon. But, of course, you never got through the day without squandering another penny or two. You were everlastingly hungry, everlastingly doing sums in farthings to see whether you could afford a kipper or a doughnut or a pennyworth of potato chips, and, wretched as the pickers' earnings were, half the population of Kent seemed to be in conspiracy to tickle their money out of their pockets. The local shopkeepers, with four hundred hop-pickers quartered upon them, made more during the hop season than all the rest of the year put together, which did not prevent them from looking down on the pickers as cockney dirt. In the afternoon the farm hands would come round the bins selling apples and pears at seven a penny, and London hawkers would come with baskets of doughnuts or water ices or 'halfpenny lollies'. At night the camp was thronged by hawkers who drove down from London with vans of horrifyingly cheap groceries, fish and chips, jellied eels, shrimps, shop-soiled cakes, and gaunt, glassy-eyed rabbits which had lain two years on the ice and were being sold off at ninepence a time.

For the most part it was a filthy diet upon which the hop-pickers lived — inevitably so, for even if you had the money to buy proper food, there was no time to cook it except on Sundays. Probably it was only the abundance of stolen apples that prevented the camp from being ravaged by scurvy. There was constant, systematic thieving of apples; practically everyone in the camp either stole them or shared them. There were even parties of young men (employed, so

it was said, by London fruit-costers) who bicycled down from London every week-end for the purpose of raiding the orchards. As for Nobby, he had reduced fruit-stealing to a science. Within a week he had collected a gang of youths who looked up to him as a hero because he was a real burglar and had been in jail four times, and every night they would set out at dusk with sacks and come back with as much as two hundredweight of fruit. There were vast orchards near the hopfields, and the apples, especially the beautiful little Golden Russets, were lying in piles under the trees, rotting, because the farmers could not sell them. It was a sin not to rake them, Nobby said. On two occasions he and his gang even stole a chicken. How they managed to do it without waking the neighbourhood was a mystery; but it appeared that Nobby knew some dodge of slipping a sack over a chicken's head, so that it 'ceas'd upon the midnight with no pain' — or at any rate, with no noise.

In this manner a week and then a fortnight went by, and Dorothy was no nearer to solving the problem of her own identity. Indeed, she was further from it than ever, for except at odd moments the subject had almost vanished from her mind. More and more she had come to take her curious situation for granted, to abandon all thoughts of either yesterday or tomorrow. That was the natural effect of life in the hopfields; it narrowed the range of your consciousness to the passing minute. You could not struggle with nebulous mental problems when you were everlastingly sleepy and everlastingly occupied — for when you were not at work in the fields you were either cooking, or fetching things from the village, or coaxing a fire out of wet sticks, or trudging to and fro with cans of water. (There was only one water tap in the camp, and that was two hundred yards from Dorothy's hut, and the unspeakable earth latrine was at the same distance.) It was a life that wore you out, used up every ounce of your energy, and kept you profoundly, unquestionably happy. In the literal sense of the word, it stupefied you. The long days in the fields, the coarse food and insufficient sleep, the smell of hops and wood smoke, lulled you into an almost beastlike heaviness. Your wits seemed to thicken, just as your skin did, in the rain and sunshine and perpetual fresh air.

On Sundays, of course, there was no work in the fields; but Sunday morning was a busy time, for it was then that people cooked their principal meal of the week, and did their laundering and mending. All over the camp, while the jangle of bells from the village church came down the wind, mingling with the thin strains of 'O God our Help' from the ill-attended open-air service held by St Somebody's Mission to Hop-pickers, huge faggot fires were blazing, and water boiling in buckets and tin cans and saucepans and anything else that people could lay their hands on, and ragged washing fluttering from the roofs of all the huts. On the first Sunday Dorothy borrowed a basin from the Turles and washed first her hair, then her underclothes and Nobby's shirt. Her underclothes were in a shocking state. How long she had worn them she did not know, but certainly not less than ten days, and they had been slept in all that while. Her stockings had hardly any feet left to them, and as for her shoes, they only held together because of the mud that caked them.

After she had set the washing to dry she cooked the dinner, and they dined opulently off half a stewed chicken (stolen), boiled potatoes (stolen), stewed apples (stolen), and tea out of real tea- cups with handles on them, borrowed from Mrs Burrows. And after dinner, the whole afternoon, Dorothy sat against the sunny side of the hut, with a dry hop-poke across her knees to hold her dress down, alternately dozing and reawakening. Two-thirds of the people in the camp were doing exactly the same thing; just dozing in the sun, and waking to gaze at nothing, like cows. It was all you felt equal to, after a week of heavy work.

About three o'clock, as she sat there on the verge of sleep, Nobby sauntered by, bare to the waist — his shirt was drying — with a copy of a Sunday newspaper that he had succeeded in borrowing. It was Pippin's Weekly, the dirtiest of the five dirty Sunday newspapers. He dropped it in Dorothy's lap as he passed.

'Have a read of that, kid,' he said generously.

Dorothy took Pippin's Weekly and laid it across her knees, feeling herself far too sleepy to read. A huge headline stared her in the face: 'PASSION DRAMA IN COUNTRY RECTORY.' And then there were some more headlines, and something in leaded type, and an inset photograph of a girl's face. For the space of five seconds or

thereabouts Dorothy was actually gazing at a blackish, smudgy, but quite recognizable portrait of herself.

There was a column or so of print beneath the photograph. As a matter of fact, most of the newspapers had dropped the 'Rector's Daughter' mystery by this time, for it was more than a fortnight old and stale news. But Pippin's Weekly cared little whether its news was new so long as it was spicy, and that week's crop of rapes and murders had been a poor one. They were giving the 'Rector's Daughter' one final boost — giving her, in fact, the place of honour at the top left-hand corner of the front page.

Dorothy gazed inertly at the photograph. A girl's face, looking out at her from beds of black unappetizing print — it conveyed absolutely nothing to her mind. She re-read mechanically the words, 'PASSION DRAMA IN COUNTRY RECTORY', without either understanding them or feeling the slightest interest in them. She was, she discovered, totally unequal to the effort of reading; even the effort of looking at the photographs was too much for her. Heavy sleep was weighing down her head. Her eyes, in the act of closing, flitted across the page to a photograph that was either of Lord Snowden or of the man who wouldn't wear a truss, and then, in the same instant, she fell asleep, with Pippin's Weekly across her knees.

It was not uncomfortable against the corrugated iron wall of the hut, and she hardly stirred till six o'clock, when Nobby woke her up to tell her that he had got tea ready; whereat Dorothy put Pippin's Weekly thriftily away (it would come in for lighting the fire), without looking at it again. So for the moment the chance of solving her problem passed by. And the problem might have remained unsolved even for months longer, had not a disagreeable accident, a week later, frightened her out of the contented and unreflecting state in which she was living.

5

The following Sunday night two policemen suddenly descended upon the camp and arrested Nobby and two others for theft.

It happened all in a moment, and Nobby could not have escaped even if he had been warned beforehand, for the countryside was

pullulating with special constables. There are vast numbers of special constables in Kent. They are sworn in every autumn — a sort of militia to deal with the marauding tribes of hop-pickers. The farmers had been growing tired of the orchard-robbing, and had decided to make an example, in terrorem.

Of course there was a tremendous uproar in the camp. Dorothy came out of her hut to discover what was the matter, and saw a firelit ring of people towards which everyone was running. She ran after them, and a horrid chill went through her, because it seemed to her that she knew already what it was that had happened. She managed to wriggle her way to the front of the crowd, and saw the very thing that she had been fearing.

There stood Nobby, in the grip of an enormous policeman, and another policeman was holding two frightened youths by the arms. One of them, a wretched child hardly sixteen years old, was crying bitterly. Mr Cairns, a stiff-built man with grey whiskers, and two farm hands, were keeping guard over the stolen property that had been dug out of the straw of Nobby's hut. Exhibit A, a pile of apples; Exhibit B, some blood-stained chicken feathers. Nobby caught sight of Dorothy among the crowd, grinned at her with a flash of large teeth, and winked. There was a confused din of shouting:

'Look at the pore little b — crying! Let 'im go! Bloody shame, pore little kid like that! Serve the young bastard right, getting us all into trouble! Let 'im go! Always got to put the blame on us bloody hop-pickers! Can't lose a bloody apple without it's us that's took it. Let 'im go! Shut up, can't you? S'pose they was YOUR bloody apples? Wouldn't YOU bloodiwell— ' etc., etc., etc. And then: 'Stand back mate! 'Ere comes the kid's mother.'

A huge Toby jug of a woman, with monstrous breasts and her hair coming down her back, forced her way through the ring of people and began roaring first at the policeman and Mr Cairns, then at Nobby, who had led her son astray. Finally the farm hands managed to drag her away. Through the woman's yells Dorothy could hear Mr Cairns gruffly interrogating Nobby:

'Now then, young man, just you own up and tell us who you shared them apples with! We're going to put a stop to this thieving game, once and for all. You own up, and I dessay we'll take it into

consideration.'

Nobby answered, as blithely as ever, 'Consideration, your a — !'

'Don't you get giving me any of your lip, young man! Or else you'll catch it all the hotter when you go up before the magistrate.'

'Catch it hotter, your a — !'

Nobby grinned. His own wit filled him with delight. He caught Dorothy's eye and winked at her once again before being led away. And that was the last she ever saw of him.

There was further shouting, and when the prisoners were removed a few dozen men followed them, booing at the policemen and Mr Cairns, but nobody dared to interfere. Dorothy meanwhile had crept away; she did not even stop to find out whether there would be an opportunity of saying goodbye to Nobby — she was too frightened, too anxious to escape. Her knees were trembling uncontrollably. When she got back to the hut, the other women were sitting up, talking excitedly about Nobby's arrest. She burrowed deep into the straw and hid herself, to be out of the sound of their voices. They continued talking half the night, and of course, because Dorothy had supposedly been Nobby's 'tart', they kept condoling with her and plying her with questions. She did not answer them — pretended to be asleep. But there would be, she knew well enough, no sleep for her that night.

The whole thing had frightened and upset her — but it had frightened her more than was reasonable or understandable. For she was in no kind of danger. The farm hands did not know that she had shared the stolen apples — for that matter, nearly everyone in the camp had shared them — and Nobby would never betray her. It was not even that she was greatly concerned for Nobby, who was frankly not troubled by the prospect of a month in jail. It was something that was happening inside her — some change that was taking place in the atmosphere of her mind.

It seemed to her that she was no longer the same person that she had been an hour ago. Within her and without, everything was changed. It was as though a bubble in her brain had burst, setting free thoughts, feelings, fears of which she had forgotten the existence. All the dreamlike apathy of the past three weeks was shattered. For it was precisely as in a dream that she had been living — it is the

especial condition of a dream that one accepts everything, questions nothing. Dirt, rags, vagabondage, begging, stealing — all had seemed natural to her. Even the loss of her memory had seemed natural; at least, she had hardly given it a thought till this moment. The question 'WHO AM I?' had faded out of her mind till sometimes she had forgotten it for hours together. It was only now that it returned with any real urgency.

For nearly the whole of a miserable night that question went to and fro in her brain. But it was not so much the question itself that troubled her as the knowledge that it was about to be answered. Her memory was coming back to her, that was certain, and some ugly shock was coming with it. She actually feared the moment when she should discover her own identity. Something that she did not want to face was waiting just below the surface of her consciousness.

At half past five she got up and groped for her shoes as usual. She went outside, got the fire going, and stuck the can of water among the hot embers to boil. Just as she did so a memory, seeming irrelevant, flashed across her mind. It was of that halt on the village green at Wale, a fortnight ago — the time when they had met the old Irishwoman, Mrs McElligot. Very vividly she remembered the scene. Herself lying exhausted on the grass, with her arm over her face; and Nobby and Mrs McElligot talking across her supine body; and Charlie, with succulent relish, reading out the poster, 'Secret Love Life of Rector's Daughter'; and herself, mystified but not deeply interested, sitting up and asking, 'What is a Rector?'

At that a deadly chill, like a hand of ice, fastened about her heart. She got up and hurried, almost ran back to the hut, then burrowed down to the place where her sacks lay and felt in the straw beneath them. In that vast mound of straw all your loose possessions got lost and gradually worked their way to the bottom. But after searching for some minutes, and getting herself well cursed by several women who were still half asleep, Dorothy found what she was looking for. It was the copy of Pippin's Weekly which Nobby had given her a week ago. She took it outside, knelt down, and spread it out in the light of the fire.

It was on the front page — a photograph, and three big headlines. Yes! There it was!

PASSION DRAMA IN COUNTRY RECTORY
PARSON'S DAUGHTER AND ELDERLY SEDUCER
WHITE-HAIRED FATHER PROSTRATE WITH GRIEF
(Pippin's Weekly Special)

'I would sooner have seen her in her grave!' was the heartbroken cry of the Rev. Charles Hare, Rector of Knype Hill, Suffolk, on learning of his twenty-eight-year-old daughter's elopement with an elderly bachelor named Warburton, described as an artist.

Miss Hare, who left the town on the night of the twenty-first of August, is still missing, and all attempts to trace her have failed. [In leaded type] Rumour, as yet unconfirmed, states that she was recently seen with a male companion in a hotel of evil repute in Vienna.

Readers of Pippin's Weekly will recall that the elopement took place in dramatic circumstances. A little before midnight on the twenty-first of August, Mrs Evelina Semprill, a widowed lady who inhabits the house next door to Mr Warburton's, happened by chance to look out of her bedroom window and saw Mr Warburton standing at his front gate in conversation with a young woman. As it was a clear moonlight night, Mrs Semprill was able to distinguish this young woman as Miss Hare, the Rector's daughter. The pair remained at the gate for several minutes, and before going indoors they exchanged embraces which Mrs Semprill describes as being of a passionate nature. About half an hour later they reappeared in Mr Warburton's car, which was backed out of the front gate, and drove off in the direction of the Ipswich road. Miss Hare was dressed in scanty attire, and appeared to be under the influence of alcohol.

It is now learned that for some time past Miss Hare had been in the habit of making clandestine visits to Mr Warburton's house. Mrs Semprill, who could only with great difficulty be persuaded to speak upon so painful a subject, has further revealed —

Dorothy crumpled Pippin's Weekly violently between her hands and thrust it into the fire, upsetting the can of water. There was a cloud of ashes and sulphurous smoke, and almost in the same instant Dorothy pulled the paper out of the fire unburnt. No use funking it — better to learn the worst. She read on, with a horrible fascination. It was not a nice kind of story to read about yourself. For it was

strange, but she had no longer any shadow of doubt that this girl of whom she was reading was herself. She examined the photograph. It was a blurred, nebulous thing, but quite unmistakable. Besides, she had no need of the photograph to remind her. She could remember everything — every circumstance of her life, up to that evening when she had come home tired out from Mr Warburton's house, and, presumably, fallen asleep in the conservatory. It was all so clear in her mind that it was almost incredible that she had ever forgotten it.

She ate no breakfast that day, and did not think to prepare anything for the midday meal; but when the time came, from force of habit, she set out for the hopfields with the other pickers. With difficulty, being alone, she dragged the heavy bin into position, pulled the next bine down and began picking. But after a few minutes she found that it was quite impossible; even the mechanical labour of picking was beyond her. That horrible, lying story in Pippin's Weekly had so unstrung her that it was impossible even for an instant to focus her mind upon anything else. Its lickerish phrases were going over and over in her head. 'Embraces of a passionate nature'— 'in scanty attire'— 'under the influence of alcohol' — as each one came back into her memory it brought with it such a pang that she wanted to cry out as though in physical pain.

After a while she stopped even pretending to pick, let the bine fall across her bin, and sat down against one of the posts that supported the wires. The other pickers observed her plight, and were sympathetic. Ellen was a bit cut up, they said. What else could you expect, after her bloke had been knocked off? (Everyone in the camp, of course, had taken it for granted that Nobby was Dorothy's lover.) They advised her to go down to the farm and report sick. And towards twelve o'clock, when the measurer was due, everyone in the set came across with a hatful of hops and dropped it into her bin.

When the measurer arrived he found Dorothy still sitting on the ground. Beneath her dirt and sunburn she was very pale; her face looked haggard, and much older than before. Her bin was twenty yards behind the rest of the set, and there were less than three bushels of hops in it.

'What's the game?' he demanded. 'You ill?'

'No.'

‘Well, why ain’t you bin pickin’, then? What you think this is — toff’s picnic? You don’t come up ‘ere to sit about on the ground, you know.’

‘You cheese it and don’t get nagging of ‘er!’ shouted the old cockney costerwoman suddenly. ‘Can’t the pore girl ‘ave a bit of rest and peace if she wants it? Ain’t ‘er bloke in the clink thanks to you and your bloody nosing pals of coppers? She’s got enough to worry ‘er ‘thout being —— about by every bloody copper’s nark in Kent!’

‘That’ll be enough from you, Ma!’ said the measurer gruffly, but he looked more sympathetic on hearing that it was Dorothy’s lover who had been arrested on the previous night. When the costerwoman had got her kettle boiling she called Dorothy to her bin and gave her a cup of strong tea and a hunk of bread and cheese; and after the dinner interval another picker who had no partner was sent up to share Dorothy’s bin. He was a small, weazened old tramp named Deafie. Dorothy felt somewhat better after the tea. Encouraged by Deafie’s example — for he was an excellent picker — she managed to do her fair share of work during the afternoon.

She had thought things over, and was less distracted than before. The phrases in Pippin’s Weekly still made her wince with shame, but she was equal now to facing the situation. She understood well enough what had happened to her, and what had led to Mrs Semprill’s libel. Mrs Semprill had seen them together at the gate and had seen Mr Warburton kissing her; and after that, when they were both missing from Knype Hill, it was only too natural — natural for Mrs Semprill, that is — to infer that they had eloped together. As for the picturesque details, she had invented them later. Or HAD she invented them? That was the one thing you could never be certain of with Mrs Semprill — whether she told her lies consciously and deliberately AS lies, or whether, in her strange and disgusting mind, she somehow succeeded in believing them.

Well, anyway, the harm was done — no use worrying about it any longer. Meanwhile, there was the question of getting back to Knype Hill. She would have to send for some clothes, and she would need two pounds for her train fare home. Home! The word sent a pang through her heart. Home, after weeks of dirt and hunger! How she longed for it, now that she remembered it!

But — !

A chilly little doubt raised its head. There was one aspect of the matter that she had not thought of till this moment. COULD she, after all, go home? Dared she?

Could she face Knype Hill after everything that had happened? That was the question. When you have figured on the front page of Pippin's Weekly— 'in scanty attire'— 'under the influence of alcohol' — ah, don't let's think of it again! But when you have been plastered all over with horrible, dishonouring libels, can you go back to a town of two thousand inhabitants where everybody knows everybody else's private history and talks about it all day long?

She did not know — could not decide. At one moment it seemed to her that the story of her elopement was so palpably absurd that no one could possibly have believed it. Mr Warburton, for instance, could contradict it — most certainly would contradict it, for every possible reason. But the next moment she remembered that Mr Warburton had gone abroad, and unless this affair had got into the continental newspapers, he might not even have heard of it; and then she quailed again. She knew what it means to have to live down a scandal in a small country town. The glances and furtive nudges when you passed! The prying eyes following you down the street from behind curtained windows! The knots of youths on the corners round Blifil-Gordon's factory, lewdly discussing you!

'George! Say, George! J'a see that bit of stuff over there? With fair 'air?'

'What, the skinny one? Yes. 'Oo's she?'

'Rector's daughter, she is. Miss 'Are. But, say! What you think she done two years ago? Done a bunk with a bloke old enough to bin 'er father. Regular properly went on the razzle with 'im in Paris! Never think it to look at 'er, would you?'

'GO on!'

'She did! Straight, she did. It was in the papers and all. Only 'e give 'er the chuck three weeks afterwards, and she come back 'ome again as bold as brass. Nerve, eh?'

Yes, it would take some living down. For years, for a decade it might be, they would be talking about her like that. And the worst of it was that the story in Pippin's Weekly was probably a mere

bowdlerized vestige of what Mrs Semprill had been saying in the town. Naturally, Pippin's Weekly had not wanted to commit itself too far. But was there anything that would ever restrain Mrs Semprill? Only the limits of her imagination — and they were almost as wide as the sky.

One thing, however, reassured Dorothy, and that was the thought that her father, at any rate, would do his best to shield her. Of course, there would be others as well. It was not as though she were friendless. The church congregation, at least, knew her and trusted her, and the Mothers' Union and the Girl Guides and the women on her visiting list would never believe such stories about her. But it was her father who mattered most. Almost any situation is bearable if you have a home to go back to and a family who will stand by you. With courage, and her father's support, she might face things out. By the evening she had decided that it would be perfectly all right to go back to Knype Hill, though no doubt it would be disagreeable at first, and when work was over for the day she 'subbed' a shilling, and went down to the general shop in the village and bought a penny packet of notepaper. Back in the camp, sitting on the grass by the fire — no tables or chairs in the camp, of course — she began to write with a stump of pencil:

Dearest Father, — I can't tell you how glad I am, after everything that has happened, to be able to write to you again. And I do hope you have not been too anxious about me or too worried by those horrible stories in the newspapers. I don't know what you must have thought when I suddenly disappeared like that and you didn't hear from me for nearly a month. But you see— '

How strange the pencil felt in her torn and stiffened fingers! She could only write a large, sprawling hand like that of a child. But she wrote a long letter, explaining everything, and asking him to send her some clothes and two pounds for her fare home. Also, she asked him to write to her under an assumed name she gave him — Ellen Millborough, after Millborough in Suffolk. It seemed a queer thing to have to do, to use a false name; dishonest — criminal, almost. But she dared not risk its being known in the village, and perhaps in the camp as well, that she was Dorothy Hare, the notorious 'Rector's Daughter'.

6

Once her mind was made up, Dorothy was pining to escape from the hop camp. On the following day she could hardly bring herself to go on with the stupid work of picking, and the discomforts and bad food were intolerable now that she had memories to compare them with. She would have taken to flight immediately if only she had had enough money to get her home. The instant her father's letter with the two pounds arrived, she would say good-bye to the Turles and take the train for home, and breathe a sigh of relief to get there, in spite of the ugly scandals that had got to be faced.

On the third day after writing she went down the village post office and asked for her letter. The postmistress, a woman with the face of a dachshund and a bitter contempt for all hop-pickers, told her frostily that no letter had come. Dorothy was disappointed. A pity — it must have been held up in the post. However, it didn't matter; tomorrow would be soon enough — only another day to wait.

The next evening she went again, quite certain that it would have arrived this time. Still no letter. This time a misgiving assailed her; and on the fifth evening, when there was yet again no letter, the misgiving changed into a horrible panic. She bought another packet of notepaper and wrote an enormous letter, using up the whole four sheets, explaining over and over again what had happened and imploring her father not to leave her in such suspense. Having posted it, she made up her mind that she would let a whole week go by before calling at the post office again.

This was Saturday. By Wednesday her resolve had broken down. When the hooter sounded for the midday interval she left her bin and hurried down to the post office — it was a mile and a half away, and it meant missing her dinner. Having got there she went shame-facedly up to the counter, almost afraid to speak. The dog-faced postmistress was sitting in her brass-barred cage at the end of the counter, ticking figures in a long shaped account book. She gave Dorothy a brief nosy glance and went on with her work, taking no notice of her.

Something painful was happening in Dorothy's diaphragm. She was finding it difficult to breathe, 'Are there any letters for me?' she

managed to say at last.

'Name?' said the postmistress, ticking away.

'Ellen Millborough.'

The postmistress turned her long dachshund nose over her shoulder for an instant and glanced at the M partition of the Poste Restante letter-box.

'No,' she said, turning back to her account book.

In some manner Dorothy got herself outside and began to walk back towards the hopfields, then halted. A deadly feeling of emptiness at the pit of her stomach, caused partly by hunger, made her too weak to walk.

Her father's silence could mean only one thing. He believed Mrs Semprill's story — believed that she, Dorothy, had run away from home in disgraceful circumstances and then told lies to excuse herself. He was too angry and too disgusted to write to her. All he wanted was to get rid of her, drop all communication with her; get her out of sight and out of mind, as a mere scandal to be covered up and forgotten.

She could not go home after this. She dared not. Now that she had seen what her father's attitude was, it had opened her eyes to the rashness of the thing she had been contemplating. Of COURSE she could not go home! To slink back in disgrace, to bring shame on her father's house by coming there — ah, impossible, utterly impossible! How could she even have thought of it?

What then? There was nothing for it but to go right away — right away to some place that was big enough to hide in. London, perhaps. Somewhere where nobody knew her and the mere sight of her face or mention of her name would not drag into the light a string of dirty memories.

As she stood there the sound of bells floated towards her, from the village church round the bend of the road, where the ringers were amusing themselves by ringing 'Abide with Me', as one picks out a tune with one finger on the piano. But presently 'Abide with Me' gave way to the familiar Sunday-morning jangle. 'Oh do leave my wife alone! She is so drunk she can't get home!' — the same peal that the bells of St Athelstan's had been used to ring three years ago before they were unswung. The sound planted a spear of

homesickness in Dorothy's heart, bringing back to her with momentary vividness a medley of remembered things — the smell of the glue-pot in the conservatory when she was making costumes for the school play, and the chatter of starlings outside her bedroom window, interrupting her prayers before Holy Communion, and Mrs Pither's doleful voice chronicling the pains in the backs of her legs, and the worries of the collapsing belfry and the shop-debts and the bindweed in the peas — all the multitudinous, urgent details of a life that had alternated between work and prayer.

Prayer! For a very short time, a minute perhaps, the thought arrested her. Prayer — in those days it had been the very source and centre of her life. In trouble or in happiness, it was to prayer that she had turned. And she realized — the first time that it had crossed her mind — that she had not uttered a prayer since leaving home, not even since her memory had come back to her. Moreover, she was aware that she had no longer the smallest impulse to pray. Mechanically, she began a whispered prayer, and stopped almost instantly; the words were empty and futile. Prayer, which had been the mainstay of her life, had no meaning for her any longer. She recorded this fact as she walked slowly up the road, and she recorded it briefly, almost casually, as though it had been something seen in passing — a flower in the ditch or a bird crossing the road — something noticed and then dismissed. She had not even the time to reflect upon what it might mean. It was shouldered out of her mind by more momentous things.

It was of the future that she had got to be thinking now. She was already fairly clear in her mind as to what she must do. When the hop-picking was at an end she must go up to London, write to her father for money and her clothes — for however angry he might be, she could not believe that he intended to leave her utterly in the lurch — and then start looking for a job. It was the measure of her ignorance that those dreaded words 'looking for a job' sounded hardly at all dreadful in her ears. She knew herself strong and willing — knew that there were plenty of jobs that she was capable of doing. She could be a nursery governess, for instance — no, better, a housemaid or a parlourmaid. There were not many things in a house that she could not do better than most servants; besides, the more

menial her job, the easier it would be to keep her past history secret.

At any rate, her father's house was closed to her, that was certain. From now on she had got to fend for herself. On this decision, with only a very dim idea of what it meant, she quickened her pace and got back to the fields in time for the afternoon shift.

The hop-picking season had not much longer to run. In a week or thereabouts Cairns's would be closing down, and the cockneys would take the hoppers' train to London, and the gypsies would catch their horses, pack their caravans, and march northward to Lincolnshire, to scramble for jobs in the potato fields. As for the cockneys, they had had their bellyful of hop-picking by this time. They were pining to be back in dear old London, with Woolworths and the fried-fish shop round the corner, and no more sleeping in straw and frying bacon in tin lids with your eyes weeping from wood smoke. Hopping was a holiday, but the kind of holiday that you were glad to see the last of. You came down cheering, but you went home cheering louder still and swearing that you would never go hopping again — until next August, when you had forgotten the cold nights and the bad pay and the damage to your hands, and remembered only the blowsy afternoons in the sun and the boozing of stone pots of beer round the red camp fires at night.

The mornings were growing bleak and Novemberish; grey skies, the first leaves falling, and finches and starlings already flocking for the winter. Dorothy had written yet again to her father, asking for money and some clothes; he had left her letter unanswered, nor had anybody else written to her. Indeed, there was no one except her father who knew her present address; but somehow she had hoped that Mr Warburton might write. Her courage almost failed her now, especially at nights in the wretched straw, when she lay awake thinking of the vague and menacing future. She picked her hops with a sort of desperation, a sort of frenzy of energy, more aware each day that every handful of hops meant another fraction of a farthing between herself and starvation. Deafie, her bin-mate, like herself, was picking against time, for it was the last money he would earn till next year's hopping season came round. The figure they aimed at was five shillings a day — thirty bushels — between the two of them, but there was no day when they quite attained it.

Deafie was a queer old man and a poor companion after Nobby, but not a bad sort. He was a ship's steward by profession, but a tramp of many years' standing, as deaf as a post and therefore something of a Mr F.'s aunt in conversation. He was also an exhibitionist, but quite harmless. For hours together he used to sing a little song that went 'With my willy willy — WITH my willy willy', and though he could not hear what he was singing it seemed to cause him some kind of pleasure. He had the hairiest ears Dorothy had ever seen. There were tufts like miniature Dundreary whiskers growing out of each of his ears. Every year Deafie came hop-picking at Cairns's farm, saved up a pound, and then spent a paradisiac week in a lodging-house in Newington Butts before going back to the road. This was the only week in the year when he slept in what could be called, except by courtesy, a bed.

The picking came to an end on 28 September. There were several fields still unpicked, but they were poor hops and at the last moment Mr Cairns decided to 'let them blow'. Set number 19 finished their last field at two in the afternoon, and the little gypsy foreman swarmed up the poles and retrieved the derelict bunches, and the measurer carted the last hops away. As he disappeared there was a sudden shout of 'Put 'em in the bins!' and Dorothy saw six men bearing down upon her with a fiendish expression on their faces, and all the women in the set scattering and running. Before she could collect her wits to escape the men had seized her, laid her at full length in a bin and swung her violently from side to side. Then she was dragged out and kissed by a young gypsy smelling of onions. She struggled at first, but she saw the same thing being done to the other women in the set, so she submitted. It appeared that putting the women in the bins was an invariable custom on the last day of picking. There were great doings in the camp that night, and not much sleep for anybody. Long after midnight Dorothy found herself moving with a ring of people about a mighty fire, one hand clasped by a rosy butcher-boy and the other by a very drunk old woman in a Scotch bonnet out of a cracker, to the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne'.

In the morning they went up to the farm to draw their money, and Dorothy drew one pound and fourpence, and earned another fivepence by adding up their tally books for people who could not

read or write. The cockney pickers paid you a penny for this job; the gypsies paid you only in flattery. Then Dorothy set out for West Ackworth station, four miles away, together with the Turles, Mr Turle carrying the tin trunk, Mrs Turle carrying the baby, the other children carrying various odds and ends, and Dorothy wheeling the perambulator which held the Turles' entire stock of crockery, and which had two circular wheels and two elliptical.

They got to the station about midday, the hoppers' train was due to start at one, and it arrived at two and started at a quarter past three. After a journey of incredible slowness, zigzagging all over Kent to pick up a dozen hop-pickers here and half a dozen there, going back on its tracks over and over again and backing into sidings to let other trains pass — taking, in fact, six hours to do thirty-five miles — it landed them in London a little after nine at night.

7

Dorothy slept that night with the Turles. They had grown so fond of her that they would have given her shelter for a week or a fortnight if she had been willing to impose on their hospitality. Their two rooms (they lived in a tenement house not far from Tower Bridge Road) were a tight fit for seven people including children, but they made her a bed of sorts on the floor out of two rag mats, an old cushion and an overcoat.

In the morning she said good-bye to the Turles and thanked them for all their kindness towards her, and then went straight to Bermondsey public baths and washed off the accumulated dirt of five weeks. After that she set out to look for a lodging, having in her possession sixteen and eightpence in cash, and the clothes she stood up in. She had darned and cleaned her clothes as best she could, and being black they did not show the dirt quite as badly as they might have done. From the knees down she was now passably respectable. On the last day of picking a 'home picker' in the next set, named Mrs Killfrew, had presented her with a good pair of shoes that had been her daughter's, and a pair of woollen stockings.

It was not until the evening that Dorothy managed to find herself a room. For something like ten hours she was wandering up and down,

from Bermondsey into Southwark, from Southwark into Lambeth, through labyrinthine streets where snotty-nosed children played at hop-scotch on pavements horrible with banana skins and decaying cabbage leaves. At every house she tried it was the same story — the landlady refused point-blank to take her in. One after another a succession of hostile women, standing in their doorways as defensively as though she had been a motor bandit or a government inspector, looked her up and down, said briefly, 'We don't TAKE single girls,' and shut the door in her face. She did not know it, of course, but the very look of her was enough to rouse any respectable landlady's suspicions. Her stained and ragged clothes they might possibly have put up with; but the fact that she had no luggage damned her from the start. A single girl with no luggage is invariably a bad lot — this is the first and greatest of the apophthegms of the London landlady.

At about seven o'clock, too tired to stand on her feet any longer, she ventured into a filthy, flyblown little cafe near the Old Vic theatre and asked for a cup of tea. The proprietress, getting into conversation with her and learning that she wanted a room, advised her to 'try at Mary's, in Wellings Court, jest orff the Cut'. 'Mary', it appeared, was not particular and would let a room to anybody who could pay. Her proper name was Mrs Sawyer, but the boys all called her Mary.

Dorothy found Wellings Court with some difficulty. You went along Lambeth Cut till you got to a Jew clothes-shop called Knockout Trousers Ltd, then you turned up a narrow alley, and then turned to your left again up another alley so narrow that its grimy plaster walls almost brushed you as you went. In the plaster, persevering boys had cut the word —— innumerable times and too deeply to be erased. At the far end of the alley you found yourself in a small court where four tall narrow houses with iron staircases stood facing one another.

Dorothy made inquiries and found 'Mary' in a subterranean den beneath one of the houses. She was a drabby old creature with remarkably thin hair and face so emaciated that it looked like a rouged and powdered skull. Her voice was cracked, shrewish, and nevertheless ineffably dreary. She asked Dorothy no questions, and

indeed scarcely even looked at her, but simply demanded ten shillings and then said in her ugly voice:

'Twenty-nine. Third floor. Go up be the back stairs.'

Apparently the back stairs were those inside the house. Dorothy went up the dark, spiral staircase, between sweating walls, in a smell of old overcoats, dishwater and slops. As she reached the second floor there was a loud squeal of laughter, and two rowdy- looking girls came out of one of the rooms and stared at her for a moment. They looked young, their faces being quite hidden under rouge and pink powder, and their lips painted scarlet as geranium petals. But amid the pink powder their china-blue eyes were tired and old; and that was somehow horrible, because it reminded you of a girl's mask with an old woman's face behind it. The taller of the two greeted Dorothy.

''Ullo, dearie!'

'Hullo!'

'You new 'ere? Which room you kipping in?'

'Number twenty-nine.'

'God, ain't that a bloody dungeon to put you in! You going out tonight?'

'No, I don't think so,' said Dorothy, privately a little astonished at the question. 'I'm too tired.'

'Thought you wasn't, when I saw you 'adn't dolled up. But, say! dearie, you ain't on the beach, are you? Not spoiling the ship for a 'aporth of tar? Because f'rinstance if you want the lend of a lipstick, you only got to say the word. We're all chums 'ere, you know.'

'Oh. . . . No, thank you,' said Dorothy, taken aback.

'Oh, well! Time Doris and me was moving. Got a 'portant business engagement in Leicester Square.' Here she nudged the other girl with her hip, and both of them sniggered in a silly mirthless manner. 'But, say!' added the taller girl confidentially, 'ain't it a bloody treat to 'ave a good night's kip all alone once in a way? Wish *I* could. All on your Jack Jones with no bloody great man's feet shoving you about. 'S all right when you can afford it, eh?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy, feeling that this answer was expected of her, and with only a very vague notion of what the other was talking about.

‘Well, ta ta, dearie! Sleep tight. And jes’ look out for the smash and grab raiders ‘bout ‘ar-parse one!’

When the two girls had skipped downstairs with another of their meaningless squeals of laughter, Dorothy found her way to room number 29 and opened the door. A cold, evil smell met her. The room measured about eight feet each way, and was very dark. The furniture was simple. In the middle of the room, a narrow iron bedstead with a ragged coverlet and greyish sheets; against the wall, a packing case with a tin basin and an empty whisky bottle intended for water; tacked over the bed, a photograph of Bebe Daniels torn out of Film Fun.

The sheets were not only dirty, but damp. Dorothy got into the bed, but she had only undressed to her chemise, or what was left of her chemise, her underclothes by this time being almost entirely in ruins; she could not bring herself to lay her bare body between those nauseous sheets. And once in bed, though she was aching from head to foot with fatigue, she could not sleep. She was unnerved and full of forebodings. The atmosphere of this vile place brought home to her more vividly than before the fact that she was helpless and friendless and had only six shillings between herself and the streets. Moreover, as the night wore on the house grew noisier and noisier. The walls were so thin that you could hear everything that was happening. There were bursts of shrill idiotic laughter, hoarse male voices singing, a gramophone drawling out limericks, noisy kisses, strange deathlike groans, and once or twice the violent rattling of an iron bed. Towards midnight the noises began to form themselves into a rhythm in Dorothy’s brain, and she fell lightly and unrestfully asleep. She was woken about a minute later, as it seemed, by her door being flung open, and two dimly seen female shapes rushed in, tore every scrap of clothing from her bed except the sheets, and rushed out again. There was a chronic shortage of blankets at ‘Mary’s’, and the only way of getting enough of them was to rob somebody else’s bed. Hence the term ‘smash and grab raiders’.

In the morning, half an hour before opening time, Dorothy went to the nearest public library to look at the advertisements in the newspapers. Already a score of vaguely mangy-looking people were prowling up and down, and the number swelled by ones and twos till

there were no less than sixty. Presently the doors of the library opened, and in they all surged, racing for a board at the other end of the reading-room where the 'Situations Vacant' columns from various newspapers had been cut out and pinned up. And in the wake of the job-hunters came poor old bundles of rags, men and women both, who had spent the night in the streets and came to the library to sleep. They came shambling in behind the others, flopped down with grunts of relief at the nearest table, and pulled the nearest periodical towards them; it might be the Free Church Messenger, it might be the Vegetarian Sentinel — it didn't matter what it was, but you couldn't stay in the library unless you pretended to be reading. They opened their papers, and in the same instant fell asleep, with their chins on their breasts. And the attendant walked round prodding them in turn like a stoker poking a succession of fires, and they grunted and woke up as he prodded them, and then fell asleep again the instant he had passed.

Meanwhile a battle was raging round the advertisement board, everybody struggling to get to the front. Two young men in blue overalls came running up behind the others, and one of them put his head down and fought his way through the crowd as though it had been a football scrum. In a moment he was at the board. He turned to his companion: ''Ere we are, Joe — I got it! "Mechanics wanted — Locke's Garage, Camden Town." C'm on out of it!' He fought his way out again, and both of them scooted for the door. They were going to Camden Town as fast as their legs would carry them. And at this moment, in every public library in London, mechanics out of work were reading that identical notice and starting on the race for the job, which in all probability had already been given to someone who could afford to buy a paper for himself and had seen the notice at six in the morning.

Dorothy managed to get to the board at last, and made a note of some of the addresses where 'cook generals' were wanted. There were plenty to choose from — indeed, half the ladies in London seemed to be crying out for strong capable general servants. With a list of twenty addresses in her pocket, and having had a breakfast of bread and margarine and tea which cost her threepence, Dorothy set out to look for a job, not unhopefully.

She was too ignorant as yet to know that her chances of finding work unaided were practically nil; but the next four days gradually enlightened her. During those four days she applied for eighteen jobs, and sent written applications for four others. She trudged enormous distances all through the southern suburbs: Clapham, Brixton, Dulwich, Penge, Sydenham, Beckenham, Norwood — even as far as Croydon on one occasion. She was haled into neat suburban drawing-rooms and interviewed by women of every conceivable type — large, chubby, bullying women, thin, acid, catty women, alert frigid women in gold pince-nez, vague rambling women who looked as though they practised vegetarianism or attended spiritualist seances. And one and all, fat or thin, chilly or motherly, they reacted to her in precisely the same way. They simply looked her over, heard her speak, stared inquisitively, asked her a dozen embarrassing and impertinent questions, and then turned her down.

Any experienced person could have told her how it would be. In her circumstances it was not to be expected that anyone would take the risk of employing her. Her ragged clothes and her lack of references were against her, and her educated accent, which she did not know how to disguise, wrecked whatever chances she might have had. The tramps and cockney hop-pickers had not noticed her accent, but the suburban housewives noticed it quickly enough, and it scared them in just the same way as the fact that she had no luggage had scared the landladies. The moment they had heard her speak, and spotted her for a gentlewoman, the game was up. She grew quite used to the startled, mystified look that came over their faces as soon as she opened her mouth — the prying, feminine glance from her face to her damaged hands, and from those to the darns in her skirt. Some of the women asked her outright what a girl of her class was doing seeking work as a servant. They sniffed, no doubt, that she had ‘been in trouble’ — that is, had an illegitimate baby — and after probing her with their questions they got rid of her as quickly as possible.

As soon as she had an address to give Dorothy had written to her father, and when on the third day no answer came, she wrote again, despairingly this time — it was her fifth letter, and four had gone unanswered — telling him that she must starve if he did not send her

money at once. There was just time for her to get an answer before her week at 'Mary's' was up and she was thrown out for not paying her rent.

Meanwhile, she continued the useless search for work, while her money dwindled at the rate of a shilling a day — a sum just sufficient to keep her alive while leaving her chronically hungry. She had almost given up the hope that her father would do anything to help her. And strangely enough her first panic had died down, as she grew hungrier and the chances of getting a job grew remoter, into a species of miserable apathy. She suffered, but she was not greatly afraid. The sub-world into which she was descending seemed less terrible now that it was nearer.

The autumn weather, though fine, was growing colder. Each day the sun, fighting his losing battle against the winter, struggled a little later through the mist to dye the house-fronts with pale aquarelle colours. Dorothy was in the streets all day, or in the public library, only going back to 'Mary's' to sleep, and then taking the precaution of dragging her bed across the door. She had grasped by this time that 'Mary's' was — not actually a brothel, for there is hardly such a thing in London, but a well-known refuge of prostitutes. It was for that reason that you paid ten shillings a week for a kennel not worth five. Old 'Mary' (she was not the proprietress of the house, merely the manageress) had been a prostitute herself in her day, and looked it. Living in such a place damned you even in the eyes of Lambeth Cut. Women sniffed when you passed them, men took an offensive interest in you. The Jew on the corner, the owner of Knockout Trousers Ltd, was the worst of all. He was a solid young man of about thirty, with bulging red cheeks and curly black hair like astrakhan. For twelve hours a day he stood on the pavement roaring with brazen lungs that you couldn't get a cheaper pair of trousers in London, and obstructing the passers-by. You had only to halt for a fraction of a second, and he seized you by the arm and bundled you inside the shop by main force. Once he got you there his manner became positively threatening. If you said anything disparaging about his trousers he offered to fight, and weak-minded people bought pairs of trousers in sheer physical terror. But busy though he was, he kept a sharp eye open for the 'birds', as he called them; and

Dorothy appeared to fascinate him beyond all other 'birds'. He had grasped that she was not a prostitute, but living at 'Mary's', she must — so he reasoned — be on the very verge of becoming one. The thought made his mouth water. When he saw her coming down the alley he would post himself at the corner, with his massive chest well displayed and one black lecherous eye turned inquiringly upon her ('Are you ready to begin yet?' his eye seemed to be saying), and, as she passed, give her a discreet pinch on the backside.

On the last morning of her week at 'Mary's', Dorothy went downstairs and looked, with only a faint flicker of hope, at the slate in the hallway where the names of people for whom there were letters were chalked up. There was no letter for 'Ellen Millborough'. That settled it; there was nothing left to do except to walk out into the street. It did not occur to her to do as every other woman in the house would have done — that is, pitch a hard-up tale and try to cadge another night's lodging rent free. She simply walked out of the house, and had not even the nerve to tell 'Mary' that she was going.

She had no plan, absolutely no plan whatever. Except for half an hour at noon when she went out to spend threepence out of her last fourpence on bread and margarine and tea, she passed the entire day in the public library, reading weekly papers. In the morning she read the Barber's Record, and in the afternoon Cage Birds. They were the only papers she could get hold of, for there were always so many idlers in the library that you had to scramble to get hold of a paper at all. She read them from cover to cover, even the advertisements. She pored for hours together over such technicalities as How to strop French Razors, Why the Electric Hairbrush is Unhygienic, Do Budgies thrive on Rapeseed? It was the only occupation that she felt equal to. She was in a strange lethargic state in which it was easier to interest herself in How to strop French Razors than in her own desperate plight. All fear had left her. Of the future she was utterly unable to think; even so far ahead as tonight she could barely see. There was a night in the streets ahead of her, that was all she knew, and even about that she only vaguely cared. Meanwhile there were Cage Birds and the Barber's Record; and they were, strangely, absorbingly interesting.

At nine o'clock the attendant came round with a long hooked pole

and turned out the gaslights, the library was closed. Dorothy turned to the left, up the Waterloo Road, towards the river. On the iron footbridge she halted for a moment. The night wind was blowing. Deep banks of mist, like dunes, were rising from the river, and, as the wind caught them, swirling north-eastward across the town. A swirl of mist enveloped Dorothy, penetrating her thin clothes and making her shudder with a sudden foretaste of the night's cold. She walked on and arrived, by the process of gravitation that draws all roofless people to the same spot, at Trafalgar Square.

CHAPTER 3

[SCENE: Trafalgar Square. Dimly visible through the mist, a dozen people, Dorothy among them, are grouped about one of the benches near the north parapet.]

CHARLIE [singing]: ‘Ail Mary, ‘ail Mary, ‘a-il Ma-ary — [Big Ben strikes ten.]

SNOUTER [mimicking the noise]: Ding dong, ding dong! Shut your —— noise, can’t you? Seven more hours of it on this —— square before we get the chance of a setdown and a bit of sleep! Cripes!

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: Non sum qualis eram boni sub regno Edwardi! In the days of my innocence, before the Devil carried me up into a high place and dropped me into the Sunday newspapers — that is to say when I was Rector of Little Fawley-cum-Dewsbury . . . .

DEAFIE [singing]: With my willy willy, WITH my willy willy —

MRS WAYNE: Ah, dearie, as soon as I set eyes on you I knew as you was a lady born and bred. You and me’ve known what it is to come down in the world, haven’t we, dearie? It ain’t the same for us as what it is for some of these others here.

CHARLIE [singing]: ‘Ail Mary, ‘ail Mary, ‘a-il Ma-ary, full of grace!

MRS BENDIGO: Calls himself a bloody husband, does he? Four pound a week in Covent Garden and ‘is wife doing a starry in the bloody Square! Husband!

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: Happy days, happy days! My ivied church under the sheltering hillside — my red-tiled Rectory slumbering among Elizabethan yews! My library, my vinery, my cook, house- parlourmaid and groom-gardener! My cash in the bank, my name in Crockford! My black suit of irreproachable cut, my collar back to front, my watered silk cassock in the church precincts . . . .

MRS WAYNE: Of course the one thing I DO thank God for, dearie, is that my poor dear mother never lived to see this day. Because if she ever HAD of lived to see the day when her eldest

daughter — as was brought up, mind you, with no expense spared and milk straight from the cow . . . .

MRS BENDIGO: HUSBAND!

GINGER: Come on, less 'ave a drum of tea while we got the chance. Last we'll get tonight — coffee shop shuts at 'ar-parse ten.

THE KIKE: Oh Jesus! This bloody cold's gonna kill me! I ain't got nothing on under my trousers. Oh Je-e-e-EEZE!

CHARLIE [singing]: 'Ail Mary, 'ail Mary —

SNOUTER: Fourpence! Fourpence for six —— hours on the bum! And that there nosing sod with the wooden leg queering our pitch at every boozer between Aldgate and the Mile End Road. With 'is —— wooden leg and 'is war medals as 'e bought in Lambeth Cut! Bastard!

DEAFIE [singing]: With my willy willy, WITH my willy willy —

MRS BENDIGO: Well, I told the bastard what I thought of 'im, anyway. 'Call yourself a man?' I says. 'I've seen things like you kep' in a bottle at the 'orspital,' I says . . . .

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: Happy days, happy days! Roast beef and bobbing villagers, and the peace of God that passeth all understanding! Sunday mornings in my oaken stall, cool flower scent and frou-frou of surplices mingling in the sweet corpse-laden air! Summer evenings when the late sun slanted through my study window — I pensive, boozed with tea, in fragrant wreaths of Cavendish, thumbing drowsily some half-calf volume — Poetical Works of William Shenstone, Esq., Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, J. Lempriere, D.D., professor of immoral theology . . .

GINGER: Come on, 'oo's for that drum of riddleme-ree? We got the milk and we got the tea. Question is, 'oo's got any bleeding sugar?

DOROTHY: This cold, this cold! It seems to go right through you! Surely it won't be like this all night?

MRS BENDIGO: Oh, cheese it! I 'ate these snivelling tarts.

CHARLIE: Ain't it going to be a proper perisher, too? Look at the perishing river mist creeping up that there column. Freeze the fish-hooks off of ole Nelson before morning.

MRS WAYNE: Of course, at the time that I'm speaking of we

still had our little tobacco and sweetstuff business on the corner, you'll understand . . . .

THE KIKE: Oh Je-e-e-EEZE! Lend's that overcoat of yours, Ginger. I'm bloody freezing!

SNOUTER: —— double-crossing bastard! P'raps I won't bash 'is navel in when I get a 'old of 'im!

CHARLIE: Fortunes o' war, boy, fortunes o' war. Perishing Square tonight — rumpsteak and kip on feathers tomorrow. What else d'you expect on perishing Thursday?

MRS BENDIGO: Shove up, Daddy, shove up! Think I want your lousy old 'ed on my shoulder — me a married woman?

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: For preaching, chanting, and intoning I was unrivalled. My Lift up your Hearts' was renowned throughout the diocese. All styles I could do you, High Church, Low Church, Broad Church and No Church. Throaty Anglo-Cat Warblings, straight from the shoulder muscular Anglican, or the adenoidal Low Church whine in which still lurk the Houyhnhnm-notes of neighing chapel elders . . . .

DEAFIE [singing]: WITH my willy willy —

GINGER: Take your 'ands off that bleeding overcoat, Kikie. You don't get no clo'es of mine while you got the chats on you.

CHARLIE [singing]:

As pants the 'art for cooling streams,
When 'eated in the chase —

MRS MCELLIGOT [in her sleep]: Was 'at you, Michael dear?

MRS BENDIGO: It's my belief as the sneaking bastard 'ad another wife living when 'e married me.

MR TALLBOYS [from the roof of his mouth, stage curate-wise, reminiscently]: If any of you know cause of just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony . . .

THE KIKE: A pal! A bloody pal! And won't lend his bloody overcoat!

MRS WAYNE: Well, now as you've mentioned it, I must admit as I never WAS one to refuse a nice cup of tea. I know that when our

poor dear mother was alive, pot after pot we used to . . .

NOSY WATSON [to himself, angrily]: Sod! . . . Gee'd into it and then a stretch all round. . . . Never even done the bloody job. . . . Sod!

DEAFIE [singing]: WITH my willy willy —

MRS MCELLIGOT [half asleep]: DEAR Michael. . . . He was real loving, Michael was. Tender an' true. . . . Never looked at another man since dat evenin' when I met'm outside Kronk's slaughter-house an' he gimme de two pound o' sausage as he'd bummed off de International Stores for his own supper . . . .

MRS BENDIGO: Well, I suppose we'll get that bloody tea this time tomorrow.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting, reminiscently]: By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Zion! . . .

DOROTHY: Oh, this cold, this cold!

SNOUTER: Well, I don't do no more —— starries this side of Christmas. I'll 'ave my kip tomorrow if I 'ave to cut it out of their bowels.

NOSY WATSON: Detective, is he? Smith of the Flying Squad! Flying Judas more likely! All they can bloody do — copping the old offenders what no beak won't give a fair chance.

GINGER: Well, I'm off for the fiddlede-dee. 'Oo's got a couple of clods for the water?

MRS MCELLIGOT [waking]: Oh dear, oh dear! If my back ain't fair broke! Oh holy Jesus, if dis bench don't catch you across de kidneys! An' dere was me dreamin' I was warm in kip wid a nice cup a' tea an' two o' buttered toast waitin' by me bedside. Well, dere goes me last wink o' sleep till I gets into Lambeth public lib'ry tomorrow.

DADDY [his head emerging from within his overcoat like a tortoise's from within its shell]: Wassat you said, boy? Paying money for water! How long've you bin on the road, you ignorant young scut? Money for bloody water? Bum it, boy, bum it! Don't buy what you can bum and don't bum what you can steal. That's my word — fifty year on the road, man and boy. [Retires within his coat.]

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: O all ye works of the Lord —

DEAFIE [singing]: WITH my willy willy —

CHARLIE: 'Oo was it copped you, Nosy?

THE KIKE: Oh Je-e-e-EEZE!

MRS BENDIGO: Shove up, shove up! Seems to me some folks think they've took a mortgage on this bloody seat.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: O all ye works of the Lord, curse ye the Lord, curse Him and vilify Him for ever!

MRS MCELLIGOT: What I always says is, it's always us poor bloody Catholics dat's down in de bloody dumps.

NOSY WATSON: Smithy. Flying Squad — flying sod! Give us the plans of the house and everything, and then had a van full of coppers waiting and nipped the lot of us. I wrote it up in the Black Maria:

'Detective Smith knows how to gee;
Tell him he's a —— from me.'

SNOUTER: 'Ere, what about our —— tea? Go on, Kikie, you're a young 'un; shut that —— noise and take the drums. Don't you pay nothing. Worm it out of the old tart. Snivel. Do the doleful.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: O all ye children of men, curse ye the Lord, curse Him and vilify Him for ever!

CHARLIE: What, is Smithy crooked too?

MRS BENDIGO: I tell you what, girls, I tell you what gets ME down, and that's to think of my bloody husband snoring under four blankets and me freezing in this bloody Square. That's what *I* can't stomach. The unnatural sod!

GINGER [singing]: THERE they go — IN their joy — Don't take that there drum with the cold sausage in it, Kikie.

NOSY WATSON: Crooked? CROOKED? Why, a corkscrew 'ud look like a bloody bradawl beside of him! There isn't one of them double —— sons of whores in the Flying Squad but 'ud sell his grandmother to the knackers for two pound ten and then sit on her gravestone eating potato crisps. The geeing, narking toe rag!

CHARLIE: Perishing tough. 'Ow many convictions you got?

GINGER [singing]:

THERE they go — IN their joy —
‘APpy girl — LUcky boy —

NOSY WATSON: Fourteen. You don’t stand no chance with that lot against you.

MRS WAYNE: What, don’t he keep you, then?

MRS BENDIGO: No, I’m married to this one, sod ‘im!

CHARLIE: I got perishing nine myself.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: O Ananias, Azarias and Misael, curse ye the Lord, curse Him and vilify Him for ever!

GINGER [singing]:

THERE they go — IN their joy —
‘APpy girl — LUcky boy —
But ‘ere am *I-I-I* —
Broken— ‘A-A-AARted!

God, I ain’t ‘ad a dig in the grave for three days. ‘Ow long since you washed your face, Snouter?

MRS MCELLIGOT: Oh dear, oh dear! If dat boy don’t come soon wid de tea me insides’ll dry up like a bloody kippered herring.

CHARLIE: YOU can’t sing, none of you. Ought to ‘ear Snouter and me ‘long towards Christmas time when we pipe up ‘Good King Wenceslas’ outside the boozers. ‘Ymns, too. Blokes in the bar weep their perishing eyes out to ‘ear us. ‘Member when we tapped twice at the same ‘ouse by mistake, Snouter? Old tart fair tore the innards out of us.

MR TALLBOYS [marching up and down behind an imaginary drum and singing]:

All things vile and damnable,
All creatures great and small —

[Big Ben strikes half past ten.]

SNOUTER [mimicking the clock]: Ding dong, ding dong! Six and a —— half hours of it! Cripes!

GINGER: Kikie and me knocked off four of them safety-razor

blades in Woolworth's 's afternoon. I'll 'ave a dig in the bleeding fountains tomorrow if I can bum a bit of soap.

DEAFIE: When I was a stooard in the P. & O., we used to meet them black Indians two days out at sea, in them there great canoes as they call catamarans, catching sea-turtles the size of dinner tables.

MRS WAYNE: Did yoo used to be a clergyman, then, sir?

MR TALLBOYS [halting]: After the order of Melchizedec. There is no question of 'used to be', Madam. Once a priest always a priest. Hoc est corpus hocus-pocus. Even though unfrocked — un-Crocked, we call it — and dog-collar publicly torn off by the bishop of the diocese.

GINGER [singing]: THERE they go — IN their joy — Thank Christ! 'Ere comes Kikie. Now for the consultation-free!

MRS BENDIGO: Not before it's bloody needed.

CHARLIE: 'Ow come they give you the sack, mate? Usual story? Choirgirls in the family way?

MRS MCELLIGOT: You've took your time, ain't you, young man? But come on, let's have a sup of it before me tongue falls out o' me bloody mouth.

MRS BENDIGO: Shove up, Daddy! You're sitting on my packet of bloody sugar.

MR TALLBOYS: Girls is a euphemism. Only the usual flannel-bloomered hunters of the unmarried clergy. Church hens — altar-dressers and brass-polishers — spinsters growing bony and desperate. There is a demon that enters into them at thirty-five.

THE KIKE: The old bitch wouldn't give me the hot water. Had to tap a toff in the street and pay a penny for it.

SNOUTER: —— likely story! Bin swigging it on the way more likely.

DADDY [emerging from his overcoat]: Drum o' tea, eh? I could sup a drum o' tea. [Belches slightly.]

CHARLIE: When their bubs get like perishing razor stops? *I* know.

NOSY WATSON: Tea — bloody catlap. Better'n that cocoa in the stir, though. Lend's your cup, matie.

GINGER: Jest wait'll I knock a 'ole in this tin of milk. Shy us a money or your life, someone.

MRS BENDIGO: Easy with that bloody sugar! 'Oo paid for it, I sh'd like to know?

MR TALLBOYS: When their bubs get like razor stops. I thank thee for that humour. Pippin's Weekly made quite a feature of the case. 'Missing Canon's Sub Rosa Romance. Intimate Revelations.' And also an Open Letter in John Bull: 'To a Skunk in Shepherd's Clothing'. A pity — I was marked out for preferment. [To Dorothy] Gaiters in the family, if you understand me. You would not think, would you, that the time has been when this unworthy backside dented the plush cushions of a cathedral stall?

CHARLIE: 'Ere comes Florry. Thought she'd be along soon as we got the tea going. Got a nose like a perishing vulture for tea, that girl 'as.

SNOUTER: Ay, always on the tap. [Singing]

Tap, tap, tappety tap,
I'm a perfec' devil at that —

MRS MCELLIGOT: De poor kid, she ain't got no sense. Why don't she go up to Piccadilly Circus where she'd get her five bob reg'lar? She won't do herself no good bummin' round de Square wid a set of miserable ole Tobies.

DOROTHY: Is that milk all right?

GINGER: All right? [Applies his mouth to one of the holes in the tin and blows. A sticky greyish stream dribbles from the other.]

CHARLIE: What luck, Florry? 'Ow 'bout that perishing toff as I see you get off with just now?

DOROTHY: It's got 'Not fit for babies' on it.

MRS BENDIGO: Well, you ain't a bloody baby, are you? You can drop your Buckingham Palace manners, 'ere, dearie.

FLORRY: Stood me a coffee and a fag — mingy bastard! That tea you got there, Ginger? You always WAS my favourite, Ginger dear.

MRS WAYNE: There's jest thirteen of us.

MR TALLBOYS: As we are not going to have any dinner you need not disturb yourself.

GINGER: What-o, ladies and gents! Tea is served. Cups forward, please!

THE KIKE: Oh Jeez! You ain't filled my bloody cup half full!

MRS MCELLIGOT: Well, here's luck to us all, an' a better bloody kip tomorrow. I'd ha' took shelter in one o' dem dere churches meself, only de b — s won't let you in if so be as dey t'ink you got de chats on you. [Drinks.]

MRS WAYNE: Well, I can't say as this is exactly the way as I've been ACCUSTOMED to drinking a cup of tea — but still — [Drinks.]

CHARLIE: Perishing good cup of tea. [Drinks.]

DEAFIE: And there was flocks of them there green parakeets in the coco-nut palms, too. [Drinks.]

MR TALLBOYS:

What potions have I drunk of siren tears,
Distilled from limbecs foul as Hell within!

[Drinks.]

SNOUTER: Last we'll get till five in the —— morning. [Drinks.]

[Florry produces a broken shop-made cigarette from her stocking, and cadges a match. The men, except Daddy, Deafie, and Mr Tallboys, roll cigarettes from picked-up fag-ends. The red ends glow through the misty twilight, like a crooked constellation, as the smokers sprawl on the bench, the ground, or the slope of the parapet.]

MRS WAYNE: Well, there now! A nice cup of tea do seem to warm you up, don't it, now? Not but what I don't feel it a bit different, as you might say, not having no nice clean table-cloth like I've been accustomed to, and the beautiful china tea service as our mother used to have; and always, of course, the very best tea as money could buy — real Pekoe Points at two and nine a pound . . . .

GINGER [singing]:

THERE they go — IN their joy —
'APPY girl — LUCKY boy —

MR TALLBOYS [singing, to the tune of 'Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles']: Keep the aspidistra flying —

CHARLIE: ‘Ow long you two kids been in Smoke?

SNOUTER: I’m going to give them boozers such a doing tomorrow as they won’t know if theyr’e on their ‘eads or their — — ‘eels. I’ll ‘ave my ‘alf dollar if I ‘ave to ‘old them upside down and —— shake ‘em.

GINGER: Three days. We come down from York — skippering ‘alf the way. God, wasn’t it jest about bleeding nine carat gold, too!

FLORRY: Got any more tea there, Ginger dear? Well, so long, folks. See you all at Wilkins’s tomorrow morning.

MRS BENDIGO: Thieving little tart! Swallers ‘er tea and then jacks off without so much as a thank you. Can’t waste a bloody moment.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Cold? Ay, I b’lieve you. Skipperin’ in de long grass wid no blanket an’ de bloody dew fit to drown you, an’ den can’t get your bloody fire going’ in de mornin’, an’ got to tap de milkman ‘fore you can make yourself a drum o’ tea. I’ve had some’v it when me and Michael was on de toby.

MRS BENDIGO: Even go with blackies and Chinamen she will, the dirty little cow.

DOROTHY: How much does she get each time?

SNOUTER: Tanner.

DOROTHY: SIXPENCE?

CHARLIE: Bet your life. Do it for a perishing fag along towards morning.

MRS MCELLIGOT: I never took less’n a shilling, never.

GINGER: Kikie and me skippered in a boneyard one night. Woke up in the morning and found I was lying on a bleeding gravestone.

THE KIKE: She ain’t half got the crabs on her, too.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Michael an’ me skippered in a pigsty once. We was just a-creepin’ in, when, ‘Holy Mary!’ says Michael, ‘dere’s a pig in here!’ ‘Pig be —— !’ I says, ‘he’ll keep us warm anyway.’ So in we goes, an’ dere was an old sow lay on her side snorin’ like a traction engine. I creeps up agen her an’ puts me arms round her, an’ begod she kept me warm all night. I’ve skippered worse.

DEAFIE [singing]: WITH my willy willy —

CHARLIE: Don’t ole Deafie keep it up? Sets up a kind of a ‘umming inside of ‘im, ‘e says.

DADDY: When I was a boy we didn't live on this 'ere bread and marg and tea and suchlike trash. Good solid tommy we 'ad in them days. Beef stoo. Black pudden. Bacon dumpling. Pig's 'ead. Fed like a fighting-cock on a tanner a day. And now fifty year I've 'ad of it on the toby. Spud-grabbing, pea-picking, lambing, turnip-topping — everythink. And sleeping in wet straw and not once in a year you don't fill your guts right full. Well — ! [Retires within his coat.]

MRS MCELLIGOT: But he was real bold, Michael was. He'd go in anywhere. Many's de time we've broke into an empty house an kipped in de best bed. 'Other people got homes,' he'd say. 'Why shouln't we have'm too!'

GINGER [singing]: But I'm dan — cing with tears — in my eyes —

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: Absumet haeres Caecuba dignior! To think that there were twenty-one bottles of Clos St Jacques 1911 in my cellar still, that night when the baby was born and I left for London on the milk train! . . .

MRS WAYNE: And as for the WREATHS we 'as sent us when our mother died — well, you wouldn't believe! 'Uge, they was . . . .

MRS BENDIGO: If I 'ad my time over again I'd marry for bloody money.

GINGER [singing]:

But I'm dan — cing with tears — in my eyes —
'Cos the girl — in my arms — isn't you-o-ou!

NOSY WATSON: Some of you lot think you got a bloody lot to howl about, don't you? What about a poor sod like me? You wasn't narked into the stir when you was eighteen year old, was you?

THE KIKE: Oh Je-e-eEEZE!

CHARLIE: Ginger, you can't sing no more'n a perishing tomcat with the guts-ache. Just you listen to me. I'll give y'a treat. [Singing]: Jesu, lover OF my soul —

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: Et ego in Crockford. . . . With Bishops and Archbishops and with all the Company of Heaven . . . .

NOSY WATSON: D'you know how I got in the stir the first time? Narked by my own sister — yes, my own bloody sister! My

sister's a cow if ever there was one. She got married to a religious maniac — he's so bloody religious that she's got fifteen kids now — well, it was him put her up to narking me. But I got back on 'em, *I* can tell you. First thing, I done when I come out of the stir, I buys a hammer and goes round to my sister's house, and smashed her piano to bloody matchwood. 'There!' I says, 'that's what you get for narking ME! You nosing mare!' I says.

DOROTHY: This cold, this cold! I don't know whether my feet are there or not.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Bloody tea don't warm you for long, do it? I'm fair froze myself.

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: My curate days, my curate days! My fancywork bazaars and morris-dancers in aid of on the village green, my lectures to the Mothers' Union-missionary work in Western China with fourteen magic lantern slides! My Boys' Cricket Club, teetotallers only, my Confirmation classes — purity lecture once monthly in the Parish Hall — my Boy Scout orgies! The Wolf Cubs will deliver the Grand Howl. Household Hints for the Parish Magazine, 'Discarded fountain-pen fillers can be used as enemas for canaries . . . .'

CHARLIE [singing]: Jesu, lover OF my soul —

GINGER: 'Ere comes the bleeding flattie! Get up off the ground, all of you. [Daddy emerges from his overcoat.]

THE POLICEMAN [shaking the sleepers on the next bench]: Now then, wake up, wake up! Rouse up, you! Got to go home if you want to sleep. This isn't a common lodging house. Get up, there! [etc., etc.]

MRS BENDIGO: It's that nosy young sod as wants promotion. Wouldn't let you bloody breathe if 'e 'ad 'is way.

CHARLIE [singing]:

Jesu, lover of my soul,
Let me TO Thy bosom fly —

THE POLICEMAN: Now then, YOU! What you think THIS is? Baptist prayer meeting? [To the Kike] Up you get, and look sharp about it!

CHARLIE: I can't 'elp it, sergeant. It's my toonful nature. It comes out of me natural-like.

THE POLICEMAN [shaking Mrs Bendigo]: Wake up, mother, wake up!

MRS BENDIGO: Mother? MOTHER, is it? Well, if I am a mother, thank God I ain't got a bloody son like you! And I'll tell you another little secret, constable. Next time I want a man's fat 'ands feeling round the back of my neck, I won't ask YOU to do it. I'll 'ave someone with a bit more sex-appeal.

THE POLICEMAN: Now then, now then! No call to get abusive, you know. We got our orders to carry out. [Exit majestically.]

SNOUTER [sotto voce]: —— off, you —— son of a —— !

CHARLIE [singing]:

While the gathering waters roll,
While the tempest still is 'igh!

Sung bass in the choir my last two years in Dartmoor, I did.

MRS BENDIGO: I'll bloody mother 'im! [Shouting after the policeman] 'I! Why don't you get after them bloody cat burglars 'stead of coming nosing round a respectable married woman?

GINGER: Kip down, blokes. 'E's jacked. [Daddy retires within his coat.]

NOSY WATSON: Wassit like in Dartmoor now? D'they give you jam now?

MRS WAYNE: Of course, you can see as they couldn't reely allow people to sleep in the streets — I mean, it wouldn't be quite nice — and then you've got to remember as it'd be encouraging of all the people as haven't got homes of their own — the kind of riff-raff, if you take my meaning . . . .

MR TALLBOYS [to himself]: Happy days, happy days! Outings with the Girl Guides in Epping Forest — hired brake and sleek roan horses, and I on the box in my grey flannel suit, speckled straw hat, and discreet layman's necktie. Buns and ginger pop under the green elms. Twenty Girl Guides pious yet susceptible frisking in the breast-high bracken, and I a happy curate sporting among them, in loco parentis pinching the girls' backsides . . . .

MRS MCELLIGOT: Well, you may talk about kippin' down, but begod dere won't be much sleep for my poor ole bloody bones tonight. I can't skipper it now de way me and Michael used to.

CHARLIE: Not jam. Gets cheese, though, twice a week.

THE KIKE: Oh Jeez! I can't stand it no longer. I going down to the M.A.B.

[Dorothy stands up, and then, her knees having stiffened with the cold, almost falls.]

GINGER: Only send you to the bleeding Labour Home. What you say we all go up to Covent Garden tomorrow morning? Bum a few pears if we get there early enough.

CHARLIE: I've 'ad my perishing bellyful of Dartmoor, b'lieve me. Forty on us went through 'ell for getting off with the ole women down on the allotments. Ole trots seventy years old they was — spud-grabbers. Didn't we cop it just! Bread and water, chained to the wall — perishing near murdered us.

MRS BENDIGO: No fear! Not while my bloody husband's there. One black eye in a week's enough for me, thank you.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting, reminiscently]: As for our harps, we hanged them up, upon the willow trees of Babylon! . . .

MRS MCELLIGOT: Hold up, kiddie! Stamp your feet an' get de blood back into 'm. I'll take y'a walk up to Paul's in a coupla minutes.

DEAFIE [singing]: WITH my willy willy —

[Big Ben strikes eleven.]

SNOUTER: Six more — hours! Cripes!

[An hour passes. Big Ben stops striking. The mist thins and the cold increases. A grubby-faced moon is seen sneaking among the clouds of the southern sky. A dozen hardened old men remain on the benches, and still contrive to sleep, doubled up and hidden in their greatcoats. Occasionally they groan in their sleep. The others set out in all directions, intending to walk all night and so keep their blood flowing, but nearly all of them have drifted back to the Square by midnight. A new policeman comes on duty. He strolls through the Square at intervals of half an hour, scrutinizing the faces of the sleepers but letting them alone when he has made sure that they are only asleep and not dead. Round each bench revolves a knot of

people who take it in turns to sit down and are driven to their feet by the cold after a few minutes. Ginger and Charlie fill two drums at the fountains and set out in the desperate hope of boiling some tea over the navvies' clinker fire in Chandos Street; but a policeman is warming himself at the fire, and orders them away. The Kike suddenly vanishes, probably to beg a bed at the M.A.B. Towards one o'clock a rumour goes round that a lady is distributing hot coffee, ham sandwiches, and packets of cigarettes under Charing Cross Bridge; there is a rush to the spot, but the rumour turns out to be unfounded. As the Square fills again the ceaseless changing of places upon the benches quickens until it is a game of musical chairs. Sitting down, with one's hands under one's armpits, it is possible to get into a kind of sleep, or doze, for two or three minutes on end. In this state, enormous ages seem to pass. One sinks into a complex, troubling dreams which leave one conscious of one's surroundings and of the bitter cold. The night is growing clearer and colder every minute. There is a chorus of varying sound — groans, curses, bursts of laughter, and singing, and through them all the uncontrollable chattering of teeth.]

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint! . . .

MRS MCELLIGOT: Ellen an' me bin wanderin' round de City dis two hours. Begod it's like a bloody tomb wid dem great lamps glarin' down on you an' not a soul stirren' excep' de flatties strollin' two an' two.

SNOUTER: Five past —— one and I ain't 'ad a bite since dinner! Course it 'ad to 'appen to us on a —— night like this!

MR TALLBOYS: A drinking night I should have called it. But every man to his taste. [Chanting] 'My strength is dried like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my gums!' . . .

CHARLIE: Say, what you think? Nosy and me done a smash jest now. Nosy sees a tobacconist's show-case full of them fancy boxes of Gold Flake, and 'e says, 'By cripes I'm going to 'ave some of them fags if they give me a perishing stretch for it!' 'e says. So 'e wraps 'is scarf round 'is 'and, and we waits till there's a perishing great van passing as'll drown the noise, and then Nosy lets fly — biff! We nipped a dozen packets of fags, and then I bet you didn't see

our a — s for dust. And when we gets round the corner and opens them, there wasn't no perishing fags inside! Perishing dummy boxes. I 'ad to laugh.

DOROTHY: My knees are giving way. I can't stand up much longer.

MRS BENDIGO: Oh, the sod, the sod! To turn a woman out of doors on a night like bloody this! You wait'll I get 'im drunk o' Saturday night and 'e can't 'it back. I'll mash 'im to bloody shin of beef, I will. 'E'll look like two pennorth of pieces after I've swiped 'im with the bloody flat-iron.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Here, make room'n let de kid sit down. Press up agen ole Daddy, dear. Put his arm round you. He's chatty, but he'll keep you warm.

GINGER [double marking time]: Stamp your feet on the ground — only bleeding thing to do. Strike up a song, someone, and less all stamp our bleeding feet in time to it.

DADDY [waking and emerging]: Wassat? [Still half asleep, he lets his head fall back, with mouth open and Adam's apple protruding from his withered throat like the blade of a tomahawk.]

MRS BENDIGO: There's women what if they'd stood what I'VE stood, they'd ave put spirits of salts in 'is cup of bloody tea.

MR TALLBOYS [beating an imaginary drum and singing]: Onward, heathen so-oldiers —

MRS WAYNE: Well, reely now! If any of us'd ever of thought, in the dear old days when we used to sit round our own Silkstone coal fire, with the kettle on the hob and a nice dish of toasted crumpets from the baker's over the way . . . .

[The chattering of her teeth silences her.]

CHARLIE: No perishing church trap now, matie. I'll give y'a bit of smut — something as we can perishing dance to. You listen t'me.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Don't you get talkin' about crumpets, Missis. Me bloody belly's rubbin' agen me backbone already.

[Charlie draws himself up, clears his throat, and in an enormous voice roars out a song entitled 'Rollicking Bill the Sailor'. A laugh that is partly a shudder bursts from the people on the bench. They sing the song through again, with increasing volume of noise, stamping and clapping in time. Those sitting down, packed elbow to

elbow, sway grotesquely from side to side, working their feet as though stamping on the pedals of a harmonium. Even Mrs Wayne joins in after a moment, laughing in spite of herself. They are all laughing, though with chattering teeth. Mr Tallboys marches up and down behind his vast swag belly, pretending to carry a banner or crozier in front of him. The night is now quite clear, and an icy wind comes shuddering at intervals through the Square. The stamping and clapping rise to a kind of frenzy as the people feel the deadly cold penetrate to their bones. Then the policeman is seen wandering into the Square from the eastern end, and the singing ceases abruptly.]

CHARLIE: There! You can't say as a bit of music don't warm you up.

MRS BENDIGO: This bloody wind! And I ain't even got any drawers on, the bastard kicked me out in such a 'urry.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Well, glory be to Jesus, 'twon't be long before dat dere church in de Gray's Inn Road opens up for de winter. Dey gives you a roof over your head of a night, 't any rate.

THE POLICEMAN: Now then, now THEN! D'you think this is the time of night to begin singing like a blooming bear garden? I shall have to send you back to your homes if you can't keep quiet.

SNOUTER [sotto voce]: You —— son of a —— !

GINGER: Yes — they lets you kip on the bleeding stone floor with three newspaper posters 'stead of blankets. Might as well be in the Square and 'ave done with it. God, I wish I was in the bleeding spike.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Still, you gets a cup of Horlicks an' two slices. I bin glad to kip dere often enough.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the Lord! . . .

DOROTHY [starting up]: Oh, this cold, this cold! I don't know whether it's worse when you're sitting down or when you're standing up. Oh, how can you all stand it? Surely you don't have to do this every night of your lives?

MRS WAYNE: You mustn't think, dearie, as there isn't SOME of us wasn't brought up respectable.

CHARLIE [singing]: Cheer up, cully, you'll soon be dead! Brrh! Perishing Jesus! Ain't my fish-hooks blue! [Double marks time and

beats his arms against his sides.]

DOROTHY: Oh, but how can you stand it? How can you go on like this, night after night, year after year? It's not possible that people can live so! It's so absurd that one wouldn't believe it if one didn't know it was true. It's impossible!

SNOUTER: —— possible if you ask me.

MR TALLBOYS [stage curate-wise]: With God, all things are possible.

[Dorothy sinks back on to the bench, her knees still being unsteady.]

CHARLIE: Well, it's jest on 'ar-parse one. Either we got to get moving, or else make a pyramid on that perishing bench. Unless we want to perishing turn up our toes. 'Oo's for a little constitootional up to the Tower of London?

MRS MCELLIGOT: 'Twon't be me dat'll walk another step tonight. Me bloody legs've given out on me.

GINGER: What-o for the pyramid! This is a bit too bleeding nine-day-old for me. Less scrum into that bench — beg pardon, Ma!

DADDY [sleepily]: Wassa game? Can't a man get a bit of kip but what you must come worriting 'in and shaking of 'im?

CHARLIE: That's the stuff! Shove in! Shift yourself, Daddy, and make room for my little sit-me-down. Get one atop of each other. That's right. Never mind the chats. Jam all together like pilchards in a perishing tin.

MRS WAYNE: Here! I didn't ask you to sit on my lap, young man!

GINGER: Sir on mine, then, mother— 'sall the same. What-o! First bit of stuff I've 'ad my arm round since Easter.

[They pile themselves in a monstrous shapeless clot, men and women clinging indiscriminately together, like a bunch of toads at spawning time. There is a writhing movement as the heap settles down, and a sour stench of clothes diffuses itself. Only Mr Tallboys remains marching up and down.]

MR TALLBOYS [declaiming]: O ye nights and days, ye light and darkness, ye lightnings and clouds, curse ye the Lord!

[Deafie, someone having sat on his diaphragm, utters a strange, unreproducible sound.]

MRS BENDIGO: Get off my bad leg, can't you? What you think I am? Bloody drawing-room sofa?

CHARLIE: Don't ole Daddy stink when you get up agen 'im?

GINGER: Bleeding Bank 'oliday for the chats this'll be.

DOROTHY: Oh, God, God!

MR TALLBOYS [halting]: Why call on God, you puling deathbed penitent? Stick to your guns and call on the Devil as I do. Hail to thee, Lucifer, Prince of the Air! [Singing to the tune of 'Holy, holy holy']: Incubi and Succubi, falling down before Thee! . . .

MRS BENDIGO: Oh, shut up, you blarsphemous old sod! 'E's too bloody fat to feel the cold, that's what's wrong with 'im.

CHARLIE: Nice soft be'ind you got, Ma. Keep an eye out for the perishing flattie, Ginger.

MR TALLBOYS: Malecidite, omnia opera! The Black Mass! Why not? Once a priest always a priest. Hand me a chunk of toke and I will work the miracle. Sulphur candles, Lord's Prayer backwards, crucifix upside down. [To Dorothy] If we had a black he-goat you would come in useful.

[The animal heat of the piled bodies had already made itself felt. A drowsiness is descending upon everyone.]

MRS WAYNE: You mustn't think as I'm ACCUSTOMED to sitting on a gentleman's knee, you know . . .

MRS MCELLIGOT [drowsily]: It took my sacraments reg'lar till de bloody priest wouldn't give me absolution along o' my Michael. De ole get, de ole getsie! . . .

MR TALLBOYS [striking an attitude]: Per aquam sacratam quam nunc spargo, signumque crucis quod nunc facio . . . .

GINGER: 'Oo's got a fill of 'ard-up? I've smoked by last bleeding fag-end.

MR TALLBOYS [as at the altar]: Dearly beloved brethren we are gathered together in the sight of God for the solemnization of unholy blasphemy. He has afflicted us with dirt and cold, with hunger and solitude, with the pox and the itch, with the headlouse and the crablouse. Our food is damp crusts and slimy meat-scraps handed out in packets from hotel doorways. Our pleasure is stewed tea and sawdust cakes bolted in reeking cellars, bar-rinsing sand spittle of common ale, the embrace of toothless hags. Our destiny is the

pauper's grave, twenty-feet deep in deal coffins, the kip- house of underground. It is very meet, right and our bounden duty at all times and in all places to curse Him and revile Him. Therefore with Demons and Archdemons [etc., etc., etc.].

MRS MCELLIGOT [drowsily]: By holy Jesus, I'm half asleep right now, only some b— 's lyin' across my legs and crushin' 'em.

MR TALLBOYS: Amen. Evil from us deliver, but temptation into not us lead [etc., etc., etc.].

[As he reaches the first word of the prayer he tears the consecrated bread across. The blood runs out of it. There is a rolling sound, as of thunder, and the landscape changes. Dorothy's feet are very cold. Monstrous winged shapes of Demons and Archdemons are dimly visible, moving to and fro. Something, beak or claw, closes upon Dorothy's shoulder, reminding her that her feet and hands are aching with cold.]

THE POLICEMAN [shaking Dorothy by the shoulder]: Wake up, now, wake up, wake up! Haven't you got an overcoat? You're as white as death. Don't you know better than to let yourself sprawl about in the cold like that?

[Dorothy finds that she is stiff with cold. The sky is now quite clear, with gritty little stars twinkling like electric lamps enormously remote. The pyramid has unrolled itself.]

MRS MCELLIGOT: De poor kid, she ain't used to roughin' it de way us others are.

GINGER [beating his arms]: Brr! Woo! 'Taters in the bleeding mould!

MRS WAYNE: She's a lady born and bred.

THE POLICEMAN: Is that so? — See here, Miss, you best come down to the M.A.B. with me. They'll give you a bed all right. Anyone can see with half an eye as you're a cut above these others here.

MRS BENDIGO: Thank you, constable, THANK you! 'Ear that, girls? 'A cut above us,' 'e says. Nice, ain't it? [To the policeman] Proper bloody Ascot swell yourself, ain't you?

DOROTHY: No, no! Leave me, I'd rather stay here.

THE POLICEMAN: Well, please yourself. You looked real bad just now. I'll be along later and take a look at you. [Moves off

doubtfully.]

CHARLIE: Wait'll the perisher's round the corner and then pile up agen. Only perishing way we'll keep warm.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Come on, kid. Get underneath an' let'm warm you.

SNOUTER: Ten minutes to —— two. Can't last for ever, I s'pose.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart also in the midst of my body is like unto melting wax! . . .

[Once more the people pile themselves on the bench. But the temperature is now not many degrees above freezing-point, and the wind is blowing more cuttingly. The people wriggle their wind-nipped faces into the heap like sucking pigs struggling for their mother's teats. One's interludes of sleep shrink to a few seconds, and one's dreams grow more monstrous, troubling, and undreamlike. There are times when the nine people are talking almost normally, times when they can even laugh at their situation, and times when they press themselves together in a kind of frenzy, with deep groans of pain. Mr Tallboys suddenly becomes exhausted and his monologue degenerates into a stream of nonsense. He drops his vast bulk on top of the others, almost suffocating them. The heap rolls apart. Some remain on the bench, some slide to the ground and collapse against the parapet or against the others' knees. The policeman enters the Square and orders those on the ground to their feet. They get up, and collapse again the moment he is gone. There is no sound from the ten people save of snores that are partly groans. Their heads nod like those of joined porcelain Chinamen as they fall asleep and reawake as rhythmically as the ticking of a clock. Three strikes somewhere. A voice yells like a trumpet from the eastern end of the Square: 'Boys! Up you get! The noospapers is come!']

CHARLIE [starting from his sleep]: The perishing papers! C'm on, Ginger! Run like Hell!

[They run, or shamble, as fast as they can to the corner of the Square, where three youths are distributing surplus posters given away in charity by the morning newspapers. Charlie and Ginger come back with a thick wad of posters. The five largest men now jam

themselves together on the bench, Deafie and the four women sitting across their knees; then, with infinite difficulty (as it has to be done from the inside), they wrap themselves in a monstrous cocoon of paper, several sheets thick, tucking the loose ends into their necks or breasts or between their shoulders and the back of the bench. Finally nothing is uncovered save their heads and the lower part of their legs. For their heads they fashion hoods of paper. The paper constantly comes loose and lets in cold shafts of wind, but it is now possible to sleep for as much as five minutes consecutively. At this time — between three and five in the morning — it is customary with the police not to disturb the Square sleepers. A measure of warmth steals through everyone and extends even to their feet. There is some furtive fondling of the women under cover of the paper. Dorothy is too far gone to care.

By a quarter past four the paper is all crumpled and torn to nothing, and it is far too cold to remain sitting down. The people get up, swear, find their legs somewhat rested, and begin to slouch to and fro in couples, frequently halting from mere lassitude. Every belly is now contorted with hunger. Ginger's tin of condensed milk is torn open and the contents devoured, everyone dipping their fingers into it and licking them. Those who have no money at all leave the Square for the Green Park, where they will be undisturbed till seven. Those who can command even a halfpenny make for Wilkins's cafe not far from the Charing Cross Road. It is known that the cafe will not open till five o'clock; nevertheless, a crowd is waiting outside the door by twenty to five.]

MRS MCELLIGOT: Got your halfpenny, dearie? Dey won't let more'n four of us in on one cup o'tea, de stingy ole gets!

MR TALLBOYS [singing]: The roseate hu-ues of early da-awn —

GINGER: God, that bit of sleep we 'ad under the newspapers done me some good. [Singing] But I'm dan-cing with tears — in my eyes —

CHARLIE: Oh, boys, boys! Look through that perishing window, will you? Look at the 'eat steaming down the window pane! Look at the tea-urns jest on the boil, and them great piles of 'ot toast and 'am sandwiches, and them there sausages sizzling in the pan! Don't it

make your belly turn perishing summersaults to see ‘em?

DOROTHY: I’ve got a penny. I can’t get a cup of tea for that, can I?

SNOUTER: —— lot of sausages we’ll get this morning with fourpence between us. ‘Alf a cup of tea and a —— doughnut more likely. There’s a breakfus’ for you!

MRS MCELLIGOT: You don’t need buy a cup o’ tea all to yourself. I got a halfpenny an’ so’s Daddy, an’ we’ll put’m to your penny an’ have a cup between de t’ree of us. He’s got sores on his lip, but Hell! who cares? Drink near de handle an’ dere’s no harm done.

[A quarter to five strikes.]

MRS BENDIGO: I’d bet a dollar my ole man’s got a bit of ‘addock to ‘is breakfast. I ‘ope it bloody chokes ‘im.

GINGER [singing]: But I’m dan-cing with tears — in my eyes —

MR TALLBOYS [singing]: Early in the morning my song shall rise to Thee!

MRS MCELLIGOT: You gets a bit o’ kip in dis place, dat’s one comfort. Dey lets you sleep wid your head on de table till seven o’clock. It’s a bloody godsend to us Square Tobies.

CHARLIE [slavering like a dog]: Sausages! Perishing sausages! Welsh rabbit! ‘Ot dripping toast! And a rump-steak two inches thick with chips and a pint of Ole Burton! Oh, perishing Jesus!

[He bounds forward, pushes his way through the crowd and rattles the handle of the glass door. The whole crowd of people, about forty strong, surge forward and attempt to storm the door, which is stoutly held within by Mr Wilkins, the proprietor of the cafe. He menaces them through the glass. Some press their breasts and faces against the window as though warming themselves. With a whoop and a rush Florry and four other girls, comparatively fresh from having spent part of the night in bed, debouch from a neighbouring alley, accompanied by a gang of youths in blue suits. They hurl themselves upon the rear of the crowd with such momentum that the door is almost broken. Mr Wilkins pulls it furiously open and shoves the leaders back. A fume of sausages, kippers, coffee, and hot bread streams into the outer cold.]

YOUTHS VOICES FROM THE REAR: Why can’t he —— open

before five? We're starving for our —— tea! Ram the —— door in! [etc., etc.]

MR WILKINS: Get out! Get out, the lot of you! Or by God not one of you comes in this morning!

GIRLS' VOICES FROM THE REAR: Mis-ter Wil-kins! Mis-ter Wil-kins! BE a sport and let us in! I'll give y'a kiss all free for nothing. BE a sport now! [etc., etc.]

MR WILKINS: Get on out of it! We don't open before five, and you know it. [Slams the door.]

MRS MCELLIGOT: Oh, holy Jesus, if dis ain't de longest ten minutes o' de whole bloody night! Well, I'll give me poor ole legs a rest, anyway. [Squats on her heels coal-miner-fashion. Many others do the same.]

GINGER: 'Oo's got a 'alfpenny? I'm ripe to go fifty-fifty on a doughnut.

YOUTHS' VOICES [imitating military music, then singing]:

' —— !' was all the band could play;
' —— ! — — ' And the same to you!

DOROTHY [to Mrs McElligot]: Look at us all! Just look at us! What clothes! What faces!

MRS BENDIGO: You're no Greta Garbo yourself, if you don't mind my mentioning it.

MRS WAYNE: Well, now, the time DO seem to pass slowly when you're waiting for a nice cup of tea, don't it now?

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: For our soul is brought low, even unto the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the ground!

CHARLIE: Kippers! Perishing piles of 'em! I can smell 'em through the perishing glass.

GINGER [singing]:

But I'm dan-cing with tears — in my eyes —
'Cos the girl — in my arms — isn't you-o-ou!

[Much time passes. Five strikes. Intolerable ages seem to pass. Then the door is suddenly wrenched open and the people stampede in

to fight for the corner seats. Almost swooning in the hot air, they fling themselves down and sprawl across the tables, drinking in the heat and the smell of food through all their pores.]

MR WILKINS: Now then, all! You know the rules, I s'pose. No hokey-pokey this morning! Sleep till seven if you like, but if I see any man asleep after that, out he goes on his neck. Get busy with that tea, girls!

A DEAFENING CHORUS Of YELLS: Two teas 'ere! Large tea and a doughnut between us four! Kippers! Mis-ter Wil-kins! 'Ow much them sausages? Two slices! Mis-ter Wil-kins! Got any fag papers? Kipp-ers! [etc., etc.]

MR WILKINS: Shut up, shut up! Stop that hollering or I don't serve any of you.

MRS MCELLIGOT: D'you feel de blood runnin' back into your toes, dearie?

MRS WAYNE: He do speak rough to you, don't he? Not what I'd call a reely gentlemanly kind of man.

SNOUTER: This is —— starvation Corner, this is. Cripes! Couldn't I do a couple of them sausages!

THE TARTS [in chorus]: Kippers 'ere! 'Urry up with them kippers! Mis-ter Wilkins! Kippers all round! AND a doughnut!

CHARLIE: Not 'alf! Got to fill up on the smell of 'em this morning. Sooner be 'ere than on the perishing Square, ALL the same.

GINGER: 'Ere, Deafie! You've 'ad your 'alf! Gimme me that bleeding cup.

MR TALLBOYS [chanting]: Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with joy! . . .

MRS MCELLIGOT: Begod I'm half asleep already. It's de heat o' de room as does it.

MR WILKINS: Stop that singing there! You know the rules.

THE TARTS [in chorus]: Kipp-ers!

SNOUTER: —— doughnuts! Cold prog! It turns my belly sick.

DADDY: Even the tea they give you ain't no more than water with a bit of dust in it. [Belches.]

CHARLIE: Bes' thing— 'ave a bit of shut-eye and forget about it. Dream about perishing cut off the joint and two veg. Less get our

‘eads on the table and pack up comfortable.

MRS MCELLIGOT: Lean up agen me shoulder, dearie. I’ve got more flesh on me bones’n what you have.

GINGER: I’d give a tanner for a bleeding fag, if I ‘ad a bleeding tanner.

CHARLIE: Pack up. Get your ‘ead agenst mine, Snouter. That’s right. Jesus, won’t I perishing sleep!

[A dish of smoking kippers is borne past to the tarts’ table.]

SNOUTER [drowsily]: More —— kippers. Wonder ‘ow many times she’s bin on ‘er back to pay for that lot.

MRS MCELLIGOT [half-asleep]: ’Twas a pity, ’twas a real pity, when Michael went off on his jack an’ left me wid de bloody baby an’ all . . . .

MRS BENDIGO [furiously, following the dish of kippers with accusing finger]: Look at that, girls! Look at that! Kippers! Don’t it make you bloody wild? We don’t get kippers for breakfast, do we, girls? Bloody tarts swallering down kippers as fast as they can turn ‘em out of the pan, and us ‘ere with a cup of tea between four of us and lucky to get that! Kippers!

MR TALLBOYS [stage curate-wise]: The wages of sin is kippers.

GINGER: Don’t breathe in my face, Deafie. I can’t bleeding stand it.

CHARLIE [in his sleep]: Charles-Wisdom-drunk-and-incapable-drunk?- yes-six-shillings-move-on-NEXT!

DOROTHY [on Mrs McElligot’s bosom]: Oh, joy, joy!

[They are asleep.]

2

And so it goes on.

Dorothy endured this life for ten days — to be exact, nine days and ten nights. It was hard to see what else she could do. Her father, seemingly, had abandoned her altogether, and though she had friends in London who would readily have helped her, she did not feel that she could face them after what had happened, or what was supposed to have happened. And she dared not apply to organized charity because it would almost certainly lead to the discovery of her name,

and hence, perhaps, to a fresh hullabaloo about the 'Rector's Daughter'.

So she stayed in London, and became one of that curious tribe, rare but never quite extinct — the tribe of women who are penniless and homeless, but who make such desperate efforts to hide it that they very nearly succeed; women who wash their faces at drinking fountains in the cold of the dawn, and carefully uncrumple their clothes after sleepless nights, and carry themselves with an air of reserve and decency, so that only their faces, pale beneath sunburn, tell you for certain that they are destitute. It was not in her to become a hardened beggar like most of the people about her. Her first twenty-four hours on the Square she spent without any food whatever, except for the cup of tea that she had had overnight and a third of a cup more that she had had at Wilkins's cafe in the morning. But in the evening, made desperate by hunger and the others' example, she walked up to a strange woman, mastered her voice with an effort, and said: 'Please, Madam, could you give me twopence? I have had nothing to eat since yesterday.' The woman stared, but she opened her purse and gave Dorothy threepence. Dorothy did not know it, but her educated accent, which had made it impossible to get work as a servant, was an invaluable asset to her as a beggar.

After that she found that it was really very easy to beg the daily shilling or so that was needed to keep her alive. And yet she never begged — it seemed to her that actually she could not do it — except when hunger was past bearing or when she had got to lay in the precious penny that was the passport to Wilkins's cafe in the morning. With Nobby, on the way to the hopfields, she had begged without fear or scruple. But it had been different then; she had not known what she was doing. Now, it was only under the spur of actual hunger that she could screw her courage to the point, and ask for a few coppers from some woman whose face looked friendly. It was always women that she begged from, of course. She did once try begging from a man — but only once.

For the rest, she grew used to the life that she was leading — used to the enormous sleepless nights, the cold, the dirt, the boredom, and the horrible communism of the Square. After a day or two she had ceased to feel even a flicker of surprise at her situation. She had

come, like everyone about her, to accept this monstrous existence almost as though it were normal. The dazed, witless feeling that she had known on the way to the hopfields had come back upon her more strongly than before. It is the common effect of sleeplessness and still more of exposure. To live continuously in the open air, never going under a roof for more than an hour or two, blurs your perceptions like a strong light glaring in your eyes or a noise drumming in your ears. You act and plan and suffer, and yet all the while it is as though everything were a little out of focus, a little unreal. The world, inner and outer, grows dimmer till it reaches almost the vagueness of a dream.

Meanwhile, the police were getting to know her by sight. On the Square people are perpetually coming and going, more or less unnoticed. They arrive from nowhere with their drums and their bundles, camp for a few days and nights, and then disappear as mysteriously as they come. If you stay for more than a week or thereabouts, the police will mark you down as an habitual beggar, and they will arrest you sooner or later. It is impossible for them to enforce the begging laws at all regularly, but from time to time they make a sudden raid and capture two or three of the people they have had their eye on. And so it happened in Dorothy's case.

One evening she was 'knocked off', in company with Mrs McElligot and another woman whose name she did not know. They had been careless and begged off a nasty old lady with a face like a horse, who had promptly walked up to the nearest policeman and given them in charge.

Dorothy did not mind very much. Everything was dreamlike now — the face of the nasty old lady, eagerly accusing them, and the walk to the station with a young policeman's gentle, almost deferential hand on her arm; and then the white-tiled cell, with the fatherly sergeant handing her a cup of tea through the grille and telling her that the magistrate wouldn't be too hard on her if she pleaded guilty. In the cell next door Mrs McElligot stormed at the sergeant, called him a bloody get, and then spent half the night in bewailing her fate. But Dorothy had no feeling save vague relief at being in so clean and warm a place. She crept immediately on to the plank bed that was fixed like a shelf to the wall, too tired even to pull the blankets about

her, and slept for ten hours without stirring. It was only on the following morning that she began to grasp the reality of her situation, as the Black Maria rolled briskly up to Old Street Police Court, to the tune of ‘Adeste fideles’ shouted by five drunks inside.

CHAPTER 4

Dorothy had wronged her father in supposing that he was willing to let her starve to death in the street. He had, as a matter of fact, made efforts to get in touch with her, though in a roundabout and not very helpful way.

His first emotion on learning of Dorothy's disappearance had been rage pure and simple. At about eight in the morning, when he was beginning to wonder what had become of his shaving water, Ellen had come into his bedroom and announced in a vaguely panic-stricken tone:

'Please, Sir, Miss Dorothy ain't in the house, Sir. I can't find her nowhere!'

'What?' said the Rector.

'She ain't in the house, Sir! And her bed don't look as if it hadn't been slept in, neither. It's my belief as she's GORN, Sir!'

'Gone!' exclaimed the Rector, partly sitting up in bed. 'What do you mean — GONE?'

'Well, Sir, I believe she's run away from 'ome, Sir!'

'Run away from home! At THIS hour of the morning? And what about my breakfast, pray?'

By the time the Rector got downstairs — unshaven, no hot water having appeared — Ellen had gone down into the town to make fruitless inquiries for Dorothy. An hour passed, and she did not return. Whereupon there occurred a frightful, unprecedented thing — a thing never to be forgotten this side of the grave; the Rector was obliged to prepare his own breakfast — yes, actually to mess about with a vulgar black kettle and rashers of Danish bacon — with his own sacerdotal hands.

After that, of course, his heart was hardened against Dorothy for ever. For the rest of the day he was far too busy raging over unpunctual meals to ask himself WHY she had disappeared and whether any harm had befallen her. The point was that the confounded girl (he said several times 'confounded girl', and came near to saying something stronger) HAD disappeared, and had upset the whole household by doing so. Next day, however, the question

became more urgent, because Mrs Semprill was now publishing the story of the elopement far and wide. Of course, the Rector denied it violently, but in his heart he had a sneaking suspicion that it might be true. It was the kind of thing, he now decided, that Dorothy WOULD do. A girl who would suddenly walk out of the house without even taking thought for her father's breakfast was capable of anything.

Two days later the newspapers got hold of the story, and a nosy young reporter came down to Knype Hill and began asking questions. The Rector made matters worse by angrily refusing to interview the reporter, so that Mrs Semprill's version was the only one that got into print. For about a week, until the papers got tired of Dorothy's case and dropped her in favour of a plesiosaurus that had been seen at the mouth of the Thames, the Rector enjoyed a horrible notoriety. He could hardly open a newspaper without seeing some flaming headline about 'Rector's Daughter. Further Revelations', or 'Rector's Daughter. Is she in Vienna? Reported seen in Low- class Cabaret'. Finally there came an article in the Sunday Spyhole, which began, 'Down in a Suffolk Rectory a broken old man sits staring at the wall', and which was so absolutely unbearable that the Rector consulted his solicitor about an action for libel. However, the solicitor was against it; it might lead to a verdict, he said, but it would certainly lead to further publicity. So the Rector did nothing, and his anger against Dorothy, who had brought this disgrace upon him, hardened beyond possibility of forgiveness.

After this there came three letters from Dorothy, explaining what had happened. Of course the Rector never really believed that Dorothy had lost her memory. It was too thin a story altogether. He believed that she either HAD eloped with Mr Warburton, or had gone off on some similar escapade and had landed herself penniless in Kent; at any rate — this he had settled once and for all, and no argument would ever move him from it — whatever had happened to her was entirely her own fault. The first letter he wrote was not to Dorothy herself but to his cousin Tom, the baronet. For a man of the Rector's upbringing it was second nature, in any serious trouble, to turn to a rich relative for help. He had not exchanged a word with his cousin for the last fifteen years, since they had quarrelled over a little matter of a borrowed fifty pounds; still, he wrote fairly confidently,

asking Sir Thomas to get in touch with Dorothy if it could be done, and to find her some kind of job in London. For of course, after what had happened, there could be no question of letting her come back to Knype Hill.

Shortly after this there came two despairing letters from Dorothy, telling him that she was in danger of starvation and imploring him to send her some money. The Rector was disturbed. It occurred to him — it was the first time in his life that he had seriously considered such a thing — that it IS possible to starve if you have no money. So, after thinking it over for the best part of a week, he sold out ten pounds' worth of shares and sent a cheque for ten pounds to his cousin, to be kept for Dorothy till she appeared. At the same time he sent a cold letter to Dorothy herself, telling her that she had better apply to Sir Thomas Hare. But several more days passed before this letter was posted, because the Rector had qualms about addressing a letter to 'Ellen Millborough' — he dimly imagined that it was against the law to use false names — and, of course, he had delayed far too long. Dorothy was already in the streets when the letter reached 'Mary's'.

Sir Thomas Hare was a widower, a good-hearted, chuckle-headed man of about sixty-five, with an obtuse rosy face and curling moustaches. He dressed by preference in checked overcoats and curly brimmed bowler hats that were at once dashingly smart and four decades out of date. At a first glance he gave the impression of having carefully disguised himself as a cavalry major of the 'nineties, so that you could hardly look at him without thinking of devilled bones with a b and s, and the tinkle of hansom bells, and the Pink 'Un in its great 'Pitcher' days, and Lottie Collins and 'Tarara-BOOM-deay'. But his chief characteristic was an abysmal mental vagueness. He was one of those people who say 'Don't you know?' and 'What! What!' and lose themselves in the middle of their sentences. When he was puzzled or in difficulties, his moustaches seemed to bristle forward, giving him the appearance of a well-meaning but exceptionally brainless prawn.

So far as his own inclinations went Sir Thomas was not in the least anxious to help his cousins, for Dorothy herself he had never seen, and the Rector he looked on as a cadging poor relation of the

worst possible type. But the fact was that he had had just about as much of this 'Rector's Daughter' business as he could stand. The accursed chance that Dorothy's surname was the same as his own had made his life a misery for the past fortnight, and he foresaw further and worse scandals if she were left at large any longer. So, just before leaving London for the pheasant shooting, he sent for his butler, who was also his confidant and intellectual guide, and held a council of war.

'Look here, Blyth, dammit,' said Sir Thomas prawnishly (Blyth was the butler's name), 'I suppose you've seen all this damn' stuff in the newspapers, hey? This "Rector's Daughter" stuff? About this damned niece of mine.'

Blyth was a small sharp-featured man with a voice that never rose above a whisper. It was as nearly silent as a voice can be while still remaining a voice. Only by watching his lips as well as listening closely could you catch the whole of what he said. In this case his lips signalled something to the effect that Dorothy was Sir Thomas's cousin, not his niece.

'What, my cousin, is she?' said Sir Thomas. 'So she is, by Jove! Well, look here, Blyth, what I mean to say — it's about time we got hold of the damn' girl and locked her up somewhere. See what I mean? Get hold of her before there's any MORE trouble. She's knocking about somewhere in London, I believe. What's the best way of getting on her track? Police? Private detectives and all that? D'you think we could manage it?'

Blyth's lips registered disapproval. It would, he seemed to be saying, be possible to trace Dorothy without calling in the police and having a lot of disagreeable publicity.

'Good man!' said Sir Thomas. 'Get to it, then. Never mind what it costs. I'd give fifty quid not to have that "Rector's Daughter" business over again. And for God's sake, Blyth,' he added confidentially, 'once you've got hold of the damn' girl, don't let her out of your sight. Bring her back to the house and damn' well keep her here. See what I mean? Keep her under lock and key till I get back. Or else God knows what she'll be up to next.'

Sir Thomas, of course, had never seen Dorothy, and it was therefore excusable that he should have formed his conception of her

from the newspaper reports.

It took Blyth about a week to track Dorothy down. On the morning after she came out of the police-court cells (they had fined her six shillings, and, in default of payment, detained her for twelve hours: Mrs McElligot, as an old offender, got seven days), Blyth came up to her, lifted his bowler hat a quarter of an inch from his head, and inquired noiselessly whether she were not Miss Dorothy Hare. At the second attempt Dorothy understood what he was saying, and admitted that she WAS Miss Dorothy Hare; whereupon Blyth explained that he was sent by her cousin, who was anxious to help her, and that she was to come home with him immediately.

Dorothy followed him without more words said. It seemed queer that her cousin should take this sudden interest in her, but it was no queerer than the other things that had been happening lately. They took the bus to Hyde Park Corner, Blyth paying the fares, and then walked to a large, expensive-looking house with shuttered windows, on the borderland between Knightsbridge and Mayfair. They went down some steps, and Blyth produced a key and they went in. So, after an absence of something over six weeks, Dorothy returned to respectable society, by the area door.

She spent three days in the empty house before her cousin came home. It was a queer, lonely time. There were several servants in the house, but she saw nobody except Blyth, who brought her her meals and talked to her, noiselessly, with a mixture of deference and disapproval. He could not quite make up his mind whether she was a young lady of family or a rescued Magdalen, and so treated her as something between the two. The house had that hushed, corpselike air peculiar to houses whose master is away, so that you instinctively went about on tiptoe and kept the blinds over the windows. Dorothy did not even dare to enter any of the main rooms. She spent all the daytime lurking in a dusty, forlorn room at the top of the house which was a sort of museum of bric-a-brac dating from 1880 onwards. Lady Hare, dead these five years, had been an industrious collector of rubbish, and most of it had been stowed away in this room when she died. It was a doubtful point whether the queerest object in the room was a yellowed photograph of Dorothy's father, aged eighteen but with respectable side-whiskers, standing self-

consciously beside an ‘ordinary’ bicycle — this was in 1888; or whether it was a little sandalwood box labelled ‘Piece of Bread touched by Cecil Rhodes at the City and South Africa Banquet, June 1897’. The sole books in the room were some grisly school prizes that had been won by Sir Thomas’s children — he had three, the youngest being the same age as Dorothy.

It was obvious that the servants had orders not to let her go out of doors. However, her father’s cheque for ten pounds had arrived, and with some difficulty she induced Blyth to get it cashed, and, on the third day, went out and bought herself some clothes. She bought herself a ready-made tweed coat and skirt and a jersey to go with them, a hat, and a very cheap frock of artificial printed silk; also a pair of passable brown shoes, three pairs of lisle stockings, a nasty, cheap little handbag, and a pair of grey cotton gloves that would pass for suede at a little distance. That came to eight pounds ten, and she dared not spend more. As for underclothes, nightdresses, and handkerchiefs, they would have to wait. After all, it is the clothes that show that matter.

Sir Thomas arrived on the following day, and never really got over the surprise that Dorothy’s appearance gave him. He had been expecting to see some rouged and powdered siren who would plague him with temptations to which alas! he was no longer capable of succumbing; and this countrified, spinsterish girl upset all his calculations. Certain vague ideas that had been floating about his mind, of finding her a job as a manicurist or perhaps as a private secretary to a bookie, floated out of it again. From time to time Dorothy caught him studying her with a puzzled, prawnish eye, obviously wondering how on earth such a girl could ever have figured in an elopement. It was very little use, of course, telling him that she had NOT eloped. She had given him her version of the story, and he had accepted it with a chivalrous ‘Of course, m’dear, of course!’ and thereafter, in every other sentence, betrayed the fact that he disbelieved her.

So for a couple of days nothing definite was done. Dorothy continued her solitary life in the room upstairs, and Sir Thomas went to his club for most of his meals, and in the evening there were discussions of the most unutterable vagueness. Sir Thomas was

genuinely anxious to find Dorothy a job, but he had great difficulty in remembering what he was talking about for more than a few minutes at a time. 'Well, m'dear,' he would start off, 'you'll understand, of course, that I'm very keen to do what I can for you. Naturally, being your uncle and all that — what? What's that? Not your uncle? No, I suppose I'm not, by Jove! Cousin — that's it; cousin. Well, now, m'dear, being your cousin — now, what was I saying?' Then, when Dorothy had guided him back to the subject, he would throw out some such suggestion as, 'Well, now, for instance, m'dear, how would you like to be companion to an old lady? Some dear old girl, don't you know — black mittens and rheumatoid arthritis. Die and leave you ten thousand quid and care of the parrot. What, what?' which did not get them very much further. Dorothy repeated a number of times that she would rather be a housemaid or a parlourmaid, but Sir Thomas would not hear of it. The very idea awakened in him a class-instinct which he was usually too vague-minded to remember. 'What!' he would say. 'A dashed skivvy? Girl of your upbringing? No, m'dear — no, no! Can't do THAT kind of thing, dash it!'

But in the end everything was arranged, and with surprising ease; not by Sir Thomas, who was incapable of arranging anything, but by his solicitor, whom he had suddenly thought of consulting. And the solicitor, without even seeing Dorothy, was able to suggest a job for her. She could, he said, almost certainly find a job as a schoolmistress. Of all jobs, that was the easiest to get.

Sir Thomas came home very pleased with this suggestion, which struck him as highly suitable. (Privately, he thought that Dorothy had just the kind of face that a schoolmistress ought to have.) But Dorothy was momentarily aghast when she heard of it.

'A schoolmistress!' she said. 'But I couldn't possibly! I'm sure no school would give me a job. There isn't a single subject I can teach.'

'What? What's that? Can't teach? Oh, dash it! Of course you can! Where's the difficulty?'

'But I don't know enough! I've never taught anybody anything, except cooking to the Girl Guides. You have to be properly qualified to be a teacher.'

'Oh, nonsense! Teaching's the easiest job in the world. Good

thick ruler — rap 'em over the knuckles. They'll be glad enough to get hold of a decently brought up young woman to teach the youngsters their ABC. That's the line for you, m'dear — schoolmistress. You're just cut out for it.'

And sure enough, a schoolmistress Dorothy became. The invisible solicitor had made all the arrangements in less than three days. It appeared that a certain Mrs Creevy, who kept a girls' day school in the suburb of Southbridge, was in need of an assistant, and was quite willing to give Dorothy the job. How it had all been settled so quickly, and what kind of school it could be that would take on a total stranger, and unqualified at that, in the middle of the term, Dorothy could hardly imagine. She did not know, of course, that a bribe of five pounds, miscalled a premium, had changed hands.

So, just ten days after her arrest for begging, Dorothy set out for Ringwood House Academy, Brough Road, Southbridge, with a small trunk decently full of clothes and four pounds ten in her purse — for Sir Thomas had made her a present of ten pounds. When she thought of the ease with which this job had been found for her, and then of the miserable struggles of three weeks ago, the contrast amazed her. It brought home to her, as never before, the mysterious power of money. In fact, it reminded her of a favourite saying of Mr Warburton's, that if you took 1 Corinthians, chapter thirteen, and in every verse wrote 'money' instead of 'charity', the chapter had ten times as much meaning as before.

2

Southbridge was a repellent suburb ten or a dozen miles from London. Brough Road lay somewhere at the heart of it, amid labyrinths of meanly decent streets, all so indistinguishably alike, with their ranks of semi-detached houses, their privet and laurel hedges and plots of ailing shrubs at the crossroads, that you could lose yourself there almost as easily as in a Brazilian forest. Not only the houses themselves, but even their names were the same over and over again. Reading the names on the gates as you came up Brough Road, you were conscious of being haunted by some half-remembered passage of poetry; and when you paused to identify it,

you realized that it was the first two lines of Lycidas.

Ringwood House was a dark-looking, semi-detached house of yellow brick, three storeys high, and its lower windows were hidden from the road by ragged and dusty laurels. Above the laurels, on the front of the house, was a board inscribed in faded gold letters:

Ringwood House Academy for Girls
Ages 5 to 18
Music and Dancing Taught
Apply within for Prospectus

Edge to edge with this board, on the other half of the house, was another board which read:

Rushington Grange High School for Boys
Ages 6 to 16
Book-keeping and Commercial Arithmetic a Speciality
Apply within for Prospectus

The district pullulated with small private schools; there were four of them in Brough Road alone. Mrs Creevy, the Principal of Ringwood House, and Mr Boulger, the Principal of Rushington Grange, were in a state of warfare, though their interests in no way clashed with one another. Nobody knew what the feud was about, not even Mrs Creevy or Mr Boulger themselves; it was a feud that they had inherited from earlier proprietors of the two schools. In the mornings after breakfast they would stalk up and down their respective back gardens, beside the very low wall that separated them, pretending not to see one another and grinning with hatred.

Dorothy's heart sank at the sight of Ringwood House. She had not been expecting anything very magnificent or attractive, but she had expected something a little better than this mean, gloomy house, not one of whose windows was lighted, though it was after 8 o'clock in the evening. She knocked at the door, and it was opened by a woman, tall and gaunt-looking in the dark hallway, whom Dorothy took for a servant, but who was actually Mrs Creevy herself. Without a word, except to inquire Dorothy's name, the woman led the way up

some dark stairs to a twilit, fireless drawing-room, where she turned up a pinpoint of gas, revealing a black piano, stuffed horsehair chairs, and a few yellowed, ghostly photos on the walls.

Mrs Creevy was a woman somewhere in her forties, lean, hard, and angular, with abrupt decided movements that indicated a strong will and probably a vicious temper. Though she was not in the least dirty or untidy there was something discoloured about her whole appearance, as though she lived all her life in a bad light; and the expression of her mouth, sullen and ill-shaped with the lower lip turned down, recalled that of a toad. She spoke in a sharp, commanding voice, with a bad accent and occasional vulgar turns of speech. You could tell her at a glance for a person who knew exactly what she wanted, and would grasp it as ruthlessly as any machine; not a bully exactly — you could somehow infer from her appearance that she would not take enough interest in you to want to bully you — but a person who would make use of you and then throw you aside with no more compunction than if you had been a worn-out scrubbing-brush.

Mrs Creevy did not waste any words on greetings. She motioned Dorothy to a chair, with the air rather of commanding than of inviting her to sir down, and then sat down herself, with her hands clasped on her skinny forearms.

'I hope you and me are going to get on well together, Miss Millborough,' she began in her penetrating, subhectoring voice. (On the advice of Sir Thomas's everwise solicitor, Dorothy had stuck to the name of Ellen Millborough.) 'And I hope I'm not going to have the same nasty business with you as I had with my last two assistants. You say you haven't had an experience of teaching before this?'

'Not in a school,' said Dorothy — there had been a tarradiddle in her letter of introduction, to the effect that she had had experience of 'private teaching'.

Mrs Creevy looked Dorothy over as though wondering whether to induct her into the inner secrets of school-teaching, and then appeared to decide against it.

'Well, we shall see,' she said. 'I must say,' she added complainingly, 'it's not easy to get hold of good hardworking

assistants nowadays. You give them good wages and good treatment, and you get no thanks for it. The last one I had — the one I've just had to get rid of — Miss Strong, wasn't so bad so far as the teaching part went; in fact, she was a B.A., and I don't know what you could have better than a B.A., unless it's an M.A. You don't happen to be a B.A. or an M.A., do you, Miss Millborough?'

'No, I'm afraid not,' said Dorothy.

'Well, that's a pity. It looks so much better on the prospectus if you've got a few letters after your name. Well! Perhaps it doesn't matter. I don't suppose many of OUR parents'd know what B.A. stands for; and they aren't so keen on showing their ignorance. I suppose you can talk French, of course?'

'Well — I've learnt French.'

'Oh, that's all right, then. Just so as we can put it on the prospectus. Well, now, to come back to what I was saying, Miss Strong was all right as a teacher, but she didn't come up to my ideas on what I call the MORAL SIDE. We're very strong on the moral side at Ringwood House. It's what counts most with the parents, you'll find. And the one before Miss Strong, Miss Brewer — well, she had what I call a weak nature. You don't get on with girls if you've got a weak nature. The end of it all was that one morning one little girl crept up to the desk with a box of matches and set fire to Miss Brewer's skirt. Of course I wasn't going to keep her after that. In fact I had her out of the house the same afternoon — and I didn't give her any refs either, I can tell you!'

'You mean you expelled the girl who did it?' said Dorothy, mystified.

'What? The GIRL? Not likely! You don't suppose I'd go and turn fees away from my door, do you? I mean I got rid of Miss Brewer, not the GIRL. It's no good having teachers who let the girls get saucy with them. We've got twenty-one in the class just at present, and you'll find they need a strong hand to keep them down.'

'You don't teach yourself?' said Dorothy.

'Oh dear, no!' said Mrs Creevy almost contemptuously. 'I've got a lot too much on my hands to waste my time TEACHING. There's the house to look after, and seven of the children stay to dinner — I've only a daily woman at present. Besides, it takes me all my time

getting the fees out of the parents. After all, the fees ARE what matter, aren't they?'

'Yes. I suppose so,' said Dorothy.

'Well, we'd better settle about your wages,' continued Mrs Creevy. 'In term time I'll give you your board and lodging and ten shillings a week; in the holidays it'll just be your board and lodging. You can have the use of the copper in the kitchen for your laundering, and I light the geyser for hot baths every Saturday night; or at least MOST Saturday nights. You can't have the use of this room we're in now, because it's my reception-room, and I don't want you to go wasting the gas in your bedroom. But you can have the use of the morning-room whenever you want it.'

'Thank you,' said Dorothy.

'Well, I should think that'll be about all. I expect you're feeling ready for bed. You'll have had your supper long ago, of course?'

This was clearly intended to mean that Dorothy was not going to get any food tonight, so she answered Yes, untruthfully, and the conversation was at an end. That was always Mrs Creevy's way — she never kept you talking an instant longer than was necessary. Her conversation was so very definite, so exactly to the point, that it was not really conversation at all. Rather, it was the skeleton of conversation; like the dialogue in a badly written novel where everyone talks a little too much in character. But indeed, in the proper sense of the word she did not TALK; she merely said, in her brief shrewish way, whatever it was necessary to say, and then got rid of you as promptly as possible. She now showed Dorothy along the passage to her bedroom, and lighted a gas-jet no bigger than an acorn, revealing a gaunt bedroom with a narrow white-quilted bed, a rickety wardrobe, one chair and a wash-hand-stand with a frigid white china basin and ewer. It was very like the bedrooms in seaside lodging houses, but it lacked the one thing that gives such rooms their air of homeliness and decency — the text over the bed.

'This is your room,' Mrs Creevy said; 'and I just hope you'll keep it a bit tidier than what Miss Strong used to. And don't go burning the gas half the night, please, because I can tell what time you turn it off by the crack under the door.'

With this parting salutation she left Dorothy to herself. The room

was dismally cold; indeed, the whole house had a damp, chilly feeling, as though fires were rarely lighted in it. Dorothy got into bed as quickly as possible, feeling bed to be the warmest place. On top of the wardrobe, when she was putting her clothes away, she found a cardboard box containing no less than nine empty whisky bottles — relics, presumably, of Miss Strong's weakness on the MORAL SIDE.

At eight in the morning Dorothy went downstairs and found Mrs Creevy already at breakfast in what she called the 'morning-room'. This was a smallish room adjoining the kitchen, and it had started life as the scullery; but Mrs Creevy had converted it into the 'morning-room' by the simple process of removing the sink and copper into the kitchen. The breakfast table, covered with a cloth of harsh texture, was very large and forbiddingly bare. Up at Mrs Creevy's end were a tray with a very small teapot and two cups, a plate on which were two leathery fried eggs, and a dish of marmalade; in the middle, just within Dorothy's reach if she stretched, was a plate of bread and butter; and beside her plate — as though it were the only thing she could be trusted with — a cruet stand with some dried-up, clotted stuff inside the bottles.

'Good morning, Miss Millborough,' said Mrs Creevy. 'It doesn't matter this morning, as this is the first day, but just remember another time that I want you down here in time to help me get breakfast ready.'

'I'm so sorry,' said Dorothy.

'I hope you're fond of fried eggs for your breakfast?' went on Mrs Creevy.

Dorothy hastened to assure her that she was very fond of fried eggs.

'Well, that's a good thing, because you'll always have to have the same as what I have. So I hope you're not going to be what I call DAINTY about your food. I always think,' she added, picking up her knife and fork, 'that a fried egg tastes a lot better if you cut it well up before you eat it.'

She sliced the two eggs into thin strips, and then served them in such a way that Dorothy received about two-thirds of an egg. With some difficulty Dorothy spun out her fraction of egg so as to make

half a dozen mouthfuls of it, and then, when she had taken a slice of bread and butter, she could not help glancing hopefully in the direction of the dish of marmalade. But Mrs Creevy was sitting with her lean left arm — not exactly ROUND the marmalade, but in a protective position on its left flank, as though she suspected that Dorothy was going to make an attack upon it. Dorothy's nerve failed her, and she had no marmalade that morning — nor, indeed, for many mornings to come.

Mrs Creevy did not speak again during breakfast, but presently the sound of feet on the gravel outside, and of squeaky voices in the schoolroom, announced that the girls were beginning to arrive. They came in by a side-door that was left open for them. Mrs Creevy got up from the table and banged the breakfast things together on the tray. She was one of those women who can never move anything without banging it about; she was as full of thumps and raps as a poltergeist. Dorothy carried the tray into the kitchen, and when she returned Mrs Creevy produced a penny notebook from a drawer in the dresser and laid it open on the table.

'Just take a look at this,' she said. 'Here's a list of the girls' names that I've got ready for you. I shall want you to know the whole lot of them by this evening.' She wetted her thumb and turned over three pages: 'Now, do you see these three lists here?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy.

'Well, you'll just have to learn those three lists by heart, and make sure you know what girls are on which. Because I don't want you to go thinking that all the girls are to be treated alike. They aren't — not by a long way, they aren't. Different girls, different treatment — that's my system. Now, do you see this lot on the first page?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy again.

'Well, the parents of that lot are what I call the good payers. You know what I mean by that? They're the ones that pay cash on the nail and no jibbing at an extra half-guinea or so now and again. You're not to smack any of that lot, not on ANY account. This lot over here are the MEDIUM payers. Their parents do pay up sooner or later, but you don't get the money out of them without you worry them for it night and day. You can smack that lot if they get saucy, but don't go and leave a mark their parents can see. If you'll take MY advice, the

best thing with children is to twist their ears. Have you ever tried that?'

'No,' said Dorothy.

'Well, I find it answers better than anything. It doesn't leave a mark, and the children can't bear it. Now these three over here are the BAD payers. Their fathers are two terms behind already, and I'm thinking of a solicitor's letter. I don't care WHAT you do to that lot — well, short of a police-court case, naturally. Now, shall I take you in and start you with the girls? You'd better bring that book along with you, and just keep your eye on it all the time so as there'll be no mistakes.'

They went into the schoolroom. It was a largish room, with grey-papered walls that were made yet greyer by the dullness of the light, for the heavy laurel bushes outside choked the windows, and no direct ray of the sun ever penetrated into the room. There was a teacher's desk by the empty fireplace, and there were a dozen small double desks, a light blackboard, and, on the mantelpiece, a black clock that looked like a miniature mausoleum; but there were no maps, no pictures, nor even, as far as Dorothy could see, any books. The sole objects in the room that could be called ornamental were two sheets of black paper pinned to the walls, with writing on them in chalk in beautiful copperplate. On one was 'Speech is Silver. Silence is Golden', and on the other 'Punctuality is the Politeness of Princes'.

The girls, twenty-one of them, were already sitting at their desks. They had grown very silent when they heard footsteps approaching, and as Mrs Creevy came in they seemed to shrink down in their places like partridge chicks when a hawk is soaring. For the most part they were dull-looking, lethargic children with bad complexions, and adenoids seemed to be remarkably common among them. The eldest of them might have been fifteen years old, the youngest was hardly more than a baby. The school had no uniform, and one or two of the children were verging on raggedness.

'Stand up, girls,' said Mrs Creevy as she reached the teacher's desk. 'We'll start off with the morning prayer.'

The girls stood up, clasped their hands in front of them, and shut their eyes. They repeated the prayer in unison, in weak piping voices,

Mrs Creevy leading them, her sharp eyes darting over them all the while to see that they were attending.

'Almighty and everlasting Father,' they piped, 'we beseech Thee that our studies this day may be graced by Thy divine guidance. Make us to conduct ourselves quietly and obediently; look down upon our school and make it to prosper, so that it may grow in numbers and be a good example to the neighbourhood and not a disgrace like some schools of which Thou knowest, O Lord. Make us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, industrious, punctual, and ladylike, and worthy in all possible respects to walk in Thy ways: for Jesus Christ's sake, our Lord, Amen.'

This prayer was of Mrs Creevy's own composition. When they had finished it, the girls repeated the Lord's Prayer, and then sat down.

'Now, girls,' said Mrs Creevy, 'this is your new teacher, Miss Millborough. As you know, Miss Strong had to leave us all of a sudden after she was taken so bad in the middle of the arithmetic lesson; and I can tell you I've had a hard week of it looking for a new teacher. I had seventy-three applications before I took on Miss Millborough, and I had to refuse them all because their qualifications weren't high enough. Just you remember and tell your parents that, all of you — seventy-three applications! Well, Miss Millborough is going to take you in Latin, French, history, geography, mathematics, English literature and composition, spelling, grammar, handwriting, and freehand drawing; and Mr Booth will take you in chemistry as usual on Thursday afternoons. Now, what's the first lesson on your time-table this morning?'

'History, Ma'am,' piped one or two voices.

'Very well. I expect Miss Millborough'll start off by asking you a few questions about the history you've been learning. So just you do your best, all of you, and let her see that all the trouble we've taken over you hasn't been wasted. You'll find they can be quite a sharp lot of girls when they try, Miss Millborough.'

'I'm sure they are,' said Dorothy.

'Well, I'll be leaving you, then. And just you behave yourselves, girls! Don't you get trying it on with Miss Millborough like you did with Miss Brewer, because I warn you she won't stand it. If I hear

any noise coming from this room, there'll be trouble for somebody.'

She gave a glance round which included Dorothy and indeed suggested that Dorothy would probably be the 'somebody' referred to, and departed.

Dorothy faced the class. She was not afraid of them — she was too used to dealing with children ever to be afraid of them — but she did feel a momentary qualm. The sense of being an impostor (what teacher has not felt it at times?) was heavy upon her. It suddenly occurred to her, what she had only been dimly aware of before, that she had taken this teaching job under flagrantly false pretences, without having any kind of qualification for it. The subject she was now supposed to be teaching was history, and, like most 'educated' people, she knew virtually no history. How awful, she thought, if it turned out that these girls knew more history than she did! She said tentatively:

'What period exactly were you doing with Miss Strong?'

Nobody answered. Dorothy saw the older girls exchanging glances, as though asking one another whether it was safe to say anything, and finally deciding not to commit themselves.

'Well, whereabouts had you got to?' she said, wondering whether perhaps the word 'period' was too much for them.

Again no answer.

'Well, now, surely you remember SOMETHING about it? Tell me the names of some of the people you were learning about in your last history lesson.'

More glances were exchanged, and a very plain little girl in the front row, in a brown jumper and skirt, with her hair screwed into two tight pigtails, remarked cloudily, 'It was about the Ancient Britons.' At this two other girls took courage, and answered simultaneously. One of them said, 'Columbus', and the other 'Napoleon'.

Somehow, after that, Dorothy seemed to see her way more clearly. It was obvious that instead of being uncomfortably knowledgeable as she had feared, the class knew as nearly as possible no history at all. With this discovery her stage-fright vanished. She grasped that before she could do anything else with them it was necessary to find out what, if anything, these children

knew. So, instead of following the time-table, she spent the rest of the morning in questioning the entire class on each subject in turn; when she had finished with history (and it took about five minutes to get to the bottom of their historical knowledge) she tried them with geography, with English grammar, with French, with arithmetic — with everything, in fact, that they were supposed to have learned. By twelve o'clock she had plumbed, though not actually explored, the frightful abysses of their ignorance.

For they knew nothing, absolutely nothing — nothing, nothing, nothing, like the Dadaists. It was appalling that even children could be so ignorant. There were only two girls in the class who knew whether the earth went round the sun or the sun round the earth, and not a single one of them could tell Dorothy who was the last king before George V, or who wrote Hamlet, or what was meant by a vulgar fraction, or which ocean you crossed to get to America, the Atlantic or the Pacific. And the big girls of fifteen were not much better than the tiny infants of eight, except that the former could at least read consecutively and write neat copperplate. That was the one thing that nearly all of the older girls could do — they could write neatly. Mrs Creevy had seen to that. And of course, here and there in the midst of their ignorance, there were small, disconnected islets of knowledge; for example, some odd stanzas from 'pieces of poetry' that they had learned by heart, and a few Ollendorffian French sentences such as 'Passez-moi le beurre, s'il vous plait' and 'Le fils du jardinier a perdu son chapeau', which they appeared to have learned as a parrot learns 'Pretty Poll'. As for their arithmetic, it was a little better than the other subjects. Most of them knew how to add and subtract, about half of them had some notion of how to multiply, and there were even three or four who had struggled as far as long division. But that was the utmost limit of their knowledge; and beyond, in every direction, lay utter, impenetrable night.

Moreover, not only did they know nothing, but they were so unused to being questioned that it was often difficult to get answers out of them at all. It was obvious that whatever they knew they had learned in an entirely mechanical manner, and they could only gape in a sort of dull bewilderment when asked to think for themselves. However, they did not seem unwilling, and evidently they had made

up their minds to be ‘good’ — children are always ‘good’ with a new teacher; and Dorothy persisted, and by degrees the children grew, or seemed to grow, a shade less lumpish. She began to pick up, from the answers they gave her, a fairly accurate notion of what Miss Strong’s regime had been like.

It appeared that, though theoretically they had learned all the usual school subjects, the only ones that had been at all seriously taught were handwriting and arithmetic. Mrs Creevy was particularly keen on handwriting. And besides this they had spent great quantities of time — an hour or two out of every day, it seemed — in drudging through a dreadful routine called ‘copies.’ ‘Copies’ meant copying things out of textbooks or off the blackboard. Miss Strong would write up, for example, some sententious little ‘essay’ (there was an essay entitled ‘Spring’ which recurred in all the older girls’ books, and which began, ‘Now, when girlish April is tripping through the land, when the birds are chanting gaily on the boughs and the dainty flowerets bursting from their buds’, etc., etc.), and the girls would make fair copies of it in their copybooks; and the parents, to whom the copybooks were shown from time to time, were no doubt suitably impressed. Dorothy began to grasp that everything that the girls had been taught was in reality aimed at the parents. Hence the ‘copies’, the insistence on handwriting, and the parroting of ready-made French phrases; they were cheap and easy ways of creating an impression. Meanwhile, the little girls at the bottom of the class seemed barely able to read and write, and one of them — her name was Mavis Williams, and she was a rather sinister-looking child of eleven, with eyes too far apart — could not even count. This child seemed to have done nothing at all during the past term and a half except to write pothooks. She had quite a pile of books filled with pothooks — page after page of pothooks, looping on and on like the mangrove roots in some tropical swamp.

Dorothy tried not to hurt the children’s feelings by exclaiming at their ignorance, but in her heart she was amazed and horrified. She had not known that schools of this description still existed in the civilized world. The whole atmosphere of the place was so curiously antiquated — so reminiscent of those dreary little private schools that you read about in Victorian novels. As for the few textbooks that the

class possessed, you could hardly look at them without feeling as though you had stepped back into the mid nineteenth century. There were only three textbooks of which each child had a copy. One was a shilling arithmetic, pre Great War but fairly serviceable, and another was a horrid little book called The Hundred Page History of Britain — a nasty little duodecimo book with a gritty brown cover, and, for frontispiece, a portrait of Boadicea with a Union Jack draped over the front of her chariot. Dorothy opened this book at random, came to page 91, and read:

After the French Revolution was over, the self-styled Emperor Napoleon Buonaparte attempted to set up his sway, but though he won a few victories against continental troops, he soon found that in the 'thin red line' he had more than met his match. Conclusions were tried upon the field of Waterloo, where 50,000 Britons put to flight 70,000 Frenchmen — for the Prussians, our allies, arrived too late for the battle. With a ringing British cheer our men charged down the slope and the enemy broke and fled. We now come on to the great Reform Bill of 1832, the first of those beneficent reforms which have made British liberty what it is and marked us off from the less fortunate nations [etc., etc.] . . . .

The date of the book was 1888. Dorothy, who had never seen a history book of this description before, examined it with a feeling approaching horror. There was also an extraordinary little 'reader', dated 1863. It consisted mostly of bits out of Fenimore Cooper, Dr Watts, and Lord Tennyson, and at the end there were the queerest little 'Nature Notes' with woodcut illustrations. There would be a woodcut of an elephant, and underneath in small print: 'The elephant is a sagacious beast. He rejoices in the shade of the Palm Trees, and though stronger than six horses he will allow a little child to lead him. His food is Bananas.' And so on to the Whale, the Zebra, and Porcupine, and the Spotted Camelopard. There were also, in the teacher's desk, a copy of Beautiful Joe, a forlorn book called Peeps at Distant Lands, and a French phrase- book dated 1891. It was called All you will need on your Parisian Trip, and the first phrase given was 'Lace my stays, but not too tightly'. In the whole room there was not such a thing as an atlas or a set of geometrical instruments.

At eleven there was a break of ten minutes, and some of the girls played dull little games at noughts and crosses or quarrelled over pencil-cases, and a few who had got over their first shyness clustered round Dorothy's desk and talked to her. They told her some more about Miss Strong and her methods of teaching, and how she used to twist their ears when they made blots on their copybooks. It appeared that Miss Strong had been a very strict teacher except when she was 'taken bad', which happened about twice a week. And when she was taken bad she used to drink some medicine out of a little brown bottle, and after drinking it she would grow quite jolly for a while and talk to them about her brother in Canada. But on her last day — the time when she was taken so bad during the arithmetic lesson — the medicine seemed to make her worse than ever, because she had no sooner drunk it than she began sinking and fell across a desk, and Mrs Creevy had to carry her out of the room.

After the break there was another period of three quarters of an hour, and then school ended for the morning. Dorothy felt stiff and tired after three hours in the chilly but stuffy room, and she would have liked to go out of doors for a breath of fresh air, but Mrs Creevy had told her beforehand that she must come and help get dinner ready. The girls who lived near the school mostly went home for dinner, but there were seven who had dinner in the 'morning- room' at tenpence a time. It was an uncomfortable meal, and passed in almost complete silence, for the girls were frightened to talk under Mrs Creevy's eye. The dinner was stewed scrag end of mutton, and Mrs Creevy showed extraordinary dexterity in serving the pieces of lean to the 'good payers' and the pieces of fat to the 'medium payers'. As for the three 'bad payers', they ate a shamefaced lunch out of paper bags in the school-room.

School began again at two o'clock. Already, after only one morning's teaching, Dorothy went back to her work with secret shrinking and dread. She was beginning to realize what her life would be like, day after day and week after week, in that sunless room, trying to drive the rudiments of knowledge into unwilling brats. But when she had assembled the girls and called their names over, one of them, a little peaky child with mouse-coloured hair, called Laura Firth, came up to her desk and presented her with a

pathetic bunch of browny-yellow chrysanthemums, ‘from all of us’. The girls had taken a liking to Dorothy, and had subscribed fourpence among themselves, to buy her a bunch of flowers.

Something stirred in Dorothy’s heart as she took the ugly flowers. She looked with more seeing eyes than before at the anaemic faces and shabby clothes of the children, and was all of a sudden horribly ashamed to think that in the morning she had looked at them with indifference, almost with dislike. Now, a profound pity took possession of her. The poor children, the poor children! How they had been stunted and maltreated! And with it all they had retained the childish gentleness that could make them squander their few pennies on flowers for their teacher.

She felt quite differently towards her job from that moment onwards. A feeling of loyalty and affection had sprung up in her heart. This school was HER school; she would work for it and be proud of it, and make every effort to turn it from a place of bondage into a place human and decent. Probably it was very little that she could do. She was so inexperienced and unfitted for her job that she must educate herself before she could even begin to educate anybody else. Still, she would do her best; she would do whatever willingness and energy could do to rescue these children from the horrible darkness in which they had been kept.

3

During the next few weeks there were two things that occupied Dorothy to the exclusion of all others. One, getting her class into some kind of order; the other, establishing a concordat with Mrs Creevy.

The second of the two was by a great deal the more difficult. Mrs Creevy’s house was as vile a house to live in as one could possibly imagine. It was always more or less cold, there was not a comfortable chair in it from top to bottom, and the food was disgusting. Teaching is harder work than it looks, and a teacher needs good food to keep him going. It was horribly dispiriting to have to work on a diet of tasteless mutton stews, damp boiled potatoes full of little black eyeholes, watery rice puddings, bread and scrape, and

weak tea — and never enough even of these. Mrs Creevy, who was mean enough to take a pleasure in skimping even her own food, ate much the same meals as Dorothy, but she always had the lion's share of them. Every morning at breakfast the two fried eggs were sliced up and unequally partitioned, and the dish of marmalade remained for ever sacrosanct. Dorothy grew hungrier and hungrier as the term went on. On the two evenings a week when she managed to get out of doors she dipped into her dwindling store of money and bought slabs of plain chocolate, which she ate in the deepest secrecy — for Mrs Creevy, though she starved Dorothy more or less intentionally, would have been mortally offended if she had known that she bought food for herself.

The worst thing about Dorothy's position was that she had no privacy and very little time that she could call her own. Once school was over for the day her only refuge was the 'morning-room', where she was under Mrs Creevy's eye, and Mrs Creevy's leading idea was that Dorothy must never be left in peace for ten minutes together. She had taken it into her head, or pretended to do so, that Dorothy was an idle person who needed keeping up to the mark. And so it was always, 'Well, Miss Millborough, you don't seem to have very much to do this evening, do you? Aren't there some exercise books that want correcting? Or why don't you get your needle and do a bit of sewing? I'm sure *I* couldn't bear to just sit in my chair doing nothing like you do!' She was for ever finding household jobs for Dorothy to do, even making her scrub the schoolroom floor on Saturday mornings when the girls did not come to school; but this was done out of pure ill nature, for she did not trust Dorothy to do the work properly, and generally did it again after her. One evening Dorothy was unwise enough to bring back a novel from the public library. Mrs Creevy flared up at the very sight of it. 'Well, really, Miss Millborough! I shouldn't have thought you'd have had time to READ!' she said bitterly. She herself had never read a book right through in her life, and was proud of it.

Moreover, even when Dorothy was not actually under her eye, Mrs Creevy had ways of making her presence felt. She was for ever prowling in the neighbourhood of the schoolroom, so that Dorothy never felt quite safe from her intrusion; and when she thought there

was too much noise she would suddenly rap on the wall with her broom-handle in a way that made the children jump and put them off their work. At all hours of the day she was restlessly, noisily active. When she was not cooking meals she was banging about with broom and dustpan, or harrying the charwoman, or pouncing down upon the schoolroom to 'have a look round' in hopes of catching Dorothy or the children up to mischief, or 'doing a bit of gardening' — that is, mutilating with a pair of shears the unhappy little shrubs that grew amid wastes of gravel in the back garden. On only two evenings a week was Dorothy free of her, and that was when Mrs Creevy sallied forth on forays which she called 'going after the girls'; that is to say, canvassing likely parents. These evenings Dorothy usually spent in the public library, for when Mrs Creevy was not at home she expected Dorothy to keep out of the house, to save fire and gaslight. On other evenings Mrs Creevy was busy writing dunning letters to the parents, or letters to the editor of the local paper, haggling over the price of a dozen advertisements, or poking about the girls' desks to see that their exercise books had been properly corrected, or 'doing a bit of sewing'. Whenever occupation failed her for even five minutes she got out her workbox and 'did a bit of sewing' — generally restitching some bloomers of harsh white linen of which she had pairs beyond number. They were the most chilly looking garments that one could possibly imagine; they seemed to carry upon them, as no nun's coif or anchorite's hair shirt could ever have done, the impress of a frozen and awful chastity. The sight of them set you wondering about the late Mr Creevy, even to the point of wondering whether he had ever existed.

Looking with an outsider's eye at Mrs Creevy's manner of life, you would have said that she had no PLEASURES whatever. She never did any of the things that ordinary people do to amuse themselves — never went to the pictures, never looked at a book, never ate sweets, never cooked a special dish for dinner or dressed herself in any kind of finery. Social life meant absolutely nothing to her. She had no friends, was probably incapable of imagining such a thing as friendship, and hardly ever exchanged a word with a fellow being except on business. Of religious belief she had not the smallest vestige. Her attitude towards religion, though she went to the Baptist

Chapel every Sunday to impress the parents with her piety, was a mean anti-clericalism founded on the notion that the clergy are 'only after your money'. She seemed a creature utterly joyless, utterly submerged by the dullness of her existence. But in reality it was not so. There were several things from which she derived acute and inexhaustible pleasure.

For instance, there was her avarice over money. It was the leading interest of her life. There are two kinds of avaricious person — the bold, grasping type who will ruin you if he can, but who never looks twice at twopence, and the petty miser who has not the enterprise actually to MAKE money, but who will always, as the saying goes, take a farthing from a dunghill with his teeth. Mrs Creevy belonged to the second type. By ceaseless canvassing and impudent bluff she had worked her school up to twenty-one pupils, but she would never get it much further, because she was too mean to spend money on the necessary equipment and to pay proper wages to her assistant. The fees the girls paid, or didn't pay, were five guineas a term with certain extras, so that, starve and sweat her assistant as she might, she could hardly hope to make more than a hundred and fifty pounds a year clear profit. But she was fairly satisfied with that. It meant more to her to save sixpence than to earn a pound. So long as she could think of a way of docking Dorothy's dinner of another potato, or getting her exercise books a halfpenny a dozen cheaper, or shoving an unauthorized half guinea on to one of the 'good payers'' bills, she was happy after her fashion.

And again, in pure, purposeless malignity — in petty acts of spite, even when there was nothing to be gained by them — she had a hobby of which she never wearied. She was one of those people who experience a kind of spiritual orgasm when they manage to do somebody else a bad turn. Her feud with Mr Boulger next door — a one-sided affair, really, for poor Mr Boulger was not up to Mrs Creevy's fighting weight — was conducted ruthlessly, with no quarter given or expected. So keen was Mrs Creevy's pleasure in scoring off Mr Boulger that she was even willing to spend money on it occasionally. A year ago Mr Boulger had written to the landlord (each of them was for ever writing to the landlord, complaining

about the other's behaviour), to say that Mrs Creevy's kitchen chimney smoked into his back windows, and would she please have it heightened two feet. The very day the landlord's letter reached her, Mrs Creevy called in the bricklayers and had the chimney lowered two feet. It cost her thirty shillings, but it was worth it. After that there had been the long guerrilla campaign of throwing things over the garden wall during the night, and Mrs Creevy had finally won with a dustbinful of wet ashes thrown on to Mr Boulger's bed of tulips. As it happened, Mrs Creevy won a neat and bloodless victory soon after Dorothy's arrival. Discovering by chance that the roots of Mr Boulger's plum tree had grown under the wall into her own garden, she promptly injected a whole tin of weed-killer into them and killed the tree. This was remarkable as being the only occasion when Dorothy ever heard Mrs Creevy laugh.

But Dorothy was too busy, at first, to pay much attention to Mrs Creevy and her nasty characteristics. She saw quite clearly that Mrs Creevy was an odious woman and that her own position was virtually that of a slave; but it did not greatly worry her. Her work was too absorbing, too all-important. In comparison with it, her own comfort and even her future hardly seemed to matter.

It did not take her more than a couple of days to get her class into running order. It was curious, but though she had no experience of teaching and no preconceived theories about it, yet from the very first day she found herself, as though by instinct, rearranging, scheming, innovating. There was so much that was crying out to be done. The first thing, obviously, was to get rid of the grisly routine of 'copies', and after Dorothy's second day no more 'copies' were done in the class, in spite of a sniff or two from Mrs Creevy. The handwriting lessons, also, were cut down. Dorothy would have liked to do away with handwriting lessons altogether so far as the older girls were concerned — it seemed to her ridiculous that girls of fifteen should waste time in practising copperplate — but Mrs Creevy would not hear of it. She seemed to attach an almost superstitious value to handwriting lessons. And the next thing, of course, was to scrap the repulsive Hundred Page History and the preposterous little 'readers'. It would have been worse than useless to ask Mrs Creevy to buy new books for the children, but on her first Saturday afternoon Dorothy

begged leave to go up to London, was grudgingly given it, and spent two pounds three shillings out of her precious four pounds ten on a dozen secondhand copies of a cheap school edition of Shakespeare, a big second-hand atlas, some volumes of Hans Andersen's stories for the younger children, a set of geometrical instruments, and two pounds of plasticine. With these, and history books out of the public library, she felt that she could make a start.

She had seen at a glance that what the children most needed, and what they had never had, was individual attention. So she began by dividing them up into three separate classes, and so arranging things that two lots could be working by themselves while she 'went through' something with the third. It was difficult at first, especially with the younger girls, whose attention wandered as soon as they were left to themselves, so that you could never really take your eyes off them. And yet how wonderfully, how unexpectedly, nearly all of them improved during those first few weeks! For the most part they were not really stupid, only dazed by a dull, mechanical rigmarole. For a week, perhaps, they continued unteachable; and then, quite suddenly, their warped little minds seemed to spring up and expand like daisies when you move the garden roller off them.

Quite quickly and easily Dorothy broke them in to the habit of thinking for themselves. She got them to make up essays out of their own heads instead of copying out drivel about the birds chanting on the boughs and the flowerets bursting from their buds. She attacked their arithmetic at the foundations and started the little girls on multiplication and piloted the older ones through long division to fractions; she even got three of them to the point where there was talk of starting on decimals. She taught them the first rudiments of French grammar in place of 'Passez-moi le beurre, s'il vous plait' and 'Le fils du jardinier a perdu son chapeau'. Finding that not a girl in the class knew what any of the countries of the world looked like (though several of them knew that Quito was the capital of Ecuador), she set them to making a large contour-map of Europe in plasticine, on a piece of three-ply wood, copying it in scale from the atlas. The children adored making the map; they were always clamouring to be allowed to go on with it. And she started the whole class, except the six youngest girls and Mavis Williams, the pothook specialist, on

reading Macbeth. Not a child among them had ever voluntarily read anything in her life before, except perhaps the Girl's Own Paper; but they took readily to Shakespeare, as all children do when he is not made horrible with parsing and analysing.

History was the hardest thing to teach them. Dorothy had not realized till now how hard it is for children who come from poor homes to have even a conception of what history means. Every upper-class person, however ill-informed, grows up with some notion of history; he can visualize a Roman centurion, a medieval knight, an eighteenth-century nobleman; the terms Antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Industrial Revolution evoke some meaning, even if a confused one, in his mind. But these children came from bookless homes and from parents who would have laughed at the notion that the past has any meaning for the present. They had never heard of Robin Hood, never played at being Cavaliers and Roundheads, never wondered who built the English churches or what Fid. Def. on a penny stands for. There were just two historical characters of whom all of them, almost without exception, had heard, and those were Columbus and Napoleon. Heaven knows why — perhaps Columbus and Napoleon get into the newspapers a little oftener than most historical characters. They seemed to have swelled up in the children's minds, like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, till they blocked out the whole landscape of the past. Asked when motor-cars were invented, one child, aged ten, vaguely hazarded, 'About a thousand years ago, by Columbus.'

Some of the older girls, Dorothy discovered, had been through the Hundred Page History as many as four times, from Boadicea to the first Jubilee, and forgotten practically every word of it. Not that that mattered greatly, for most of it was lies. She started the whole class over again at Julius Caesar's invasion, and at first she tried taking history books out of the public library and reading them aloud to the children; but that method failed, because they could understand nothing that was not explained to them in words of one or two syllables. So she did what she could in her own words and with her own inadequate knowledge, making a sort of paraphrase of what she read and delivering it to the children; striving all the while to drive into their dull little minds some picture of the past, and what was

always more difficult, some interest in it. But one day a brilliant idea struck her. She bought a roll of cheap plain wallpaper at an upholsterer's shop, and set the children to making an historical chart. They marked the roll of paper into centuries and years, and stuck scraps that they cut out of illustrated papers — pictures of knights in armour and Spanish galleons and printing-presses and railway trains — at the appropriate places. Pinned round the walls of the room, the chart presented, as the scraps grew in number, a sort of panorama of English history. The children were even fonder of the chart than of the contour map. They always, Dorothy found, showed more intelligence when it was a question of MAKING something instead of merely learning. There was even talk of making a contour map of the world, four feet by four, in papiermache, if Dorothy could 'get round' Mrs Creevy to allow the preparation of the papiermache — a messy process needing buckets of water.

Mrs Creevy watched Dorothy's innovations with a jealous eye, but she did not interfere actively at first. She was not going to show it, of course, but she was secretly amazed and delighted to find that she had got hold of an assistant who was actually willing to work. When she saw Dorothy spending her own money on textbooks for the children, it gave her the same delicious sensation that she would have had in bringing off a successful swindle. She did, however, sniff and grumble at everything that Dorothy did, and she wasted a great deal of time by insisting on what she called 'thorough correction' of the girls' exercise books. But her system of correction, like everything else in the school curriculum, was arranged with one eye on the parents. Periodically the children took their books home for their parents' inspection, and Mrs Creevy would never allow anything disparaging to be written in them. Nothing was to be marked 'bad' or crossed out or too heavily underlined; instead, in the evenings, Dorothy decorated the books, under Mrs Creevy's dictation, with more or less applauding comments in red ink. 'A very creditable performance', and 'Excellent! You are making great strides. Keep it up!' were Mrs Creevy's favourites. All the children in the school, apparently, were for ever 'making great strides'; in what direction they were striding was not stated. The parents, however, seemed willing to swallow an almost unlimited amount of

this kind of thing.

There were times, of course, when Dorothy had trouble with the girls themselves. The fact that they were all of different ages made them difficult to deal with, and though they were fond of her and were very 'good' with her at first, they would not have been children at all if they had been invariably 'good'. Sometimes they were lazy and sometimes they succumbed to that most damnable vice of schoolgirls — giggling. For the first few days Dorothy was greatly exercised over little Mavis Williams, who was stupider than one would have believed it possible for any child of eleven to be. Dorothy could do nothing with her at all. At the first attempt to get her to do anything beyond pothooks a look of almost subhuman blankness would come into her wide-set eyes. Sometimes, however, she had talkative fits in which she would ask the most amazing and unanswerable questions. For instance, she would open her 'reader', find one of the illustrations — the sagacious Elephant, perhaps — and ask Dorothy:

'Please, Miss, wass 'at thing there?' (She mispronounced her words in a curious manner.)

'That's an elephant, Mavis.'

'Wass a elephant?'

'An elephant's a kind of wild animal.'

'Wass a animal?'

'Well — a dog's an animal.'

'Wass a dog?'

And so on, more or less indefinitely. About half-way through the fourth morning Mavis held up her hand and said with a sly politeness that ought to have put Dorothy on her guard:

'Please, Miss, may I be 'scused?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy.

One of the bigger girls put up her hand, blushed, and put her hand down again as though too bashful to speak. On being prompted by Dorothy, she said shamefacedly:

'Please, Miss, Miss Strong didn't used to let Mavis go to the lavatory alone. She locks herself in and won't come out, and then Mrs Creevy gets angry, Miss.'

Dorothy dispatched a messenger, but it was too late. Mavis

remained in latebra pudenda till twelve o'clock. Afterwards, Mrs Creevy explained privately to Dorothy that Mavis was a congenital idiot — or, as she put it, 'not right in the head'. It was totally impossible to teach her anything. Of course, Mrs Creevy didn't 'let on' to Mavis's parents, who believed that their child was only 'backward' and paid their fees regularly. Mavis was quite easy to deal with. You just had to give her a book and a pencil and tell her to draw pictures and be quiet. But Mavis, a child of habit, drew nothing but pothooks — remaining quiet and apparently happy for hours together, with her tongue hanging out, amid festoons of pothooks.

But in spite of these minor difficulties, how well everything went during those first few weeks! How ominously well, indeed! About the tenth of November, after much grumbling about the price of coal, Mrs Creevy started to allow a fire in the schoolroom. The children's wits brightened noticeably when the room was decently warm. And there were happy hours, sometimes, when the fire crackled in the grate, and Mrs Creevy was out of the house, and the children were working quietly and absorbedly at one of the lessons that were their favourites. Best of all was when the two top classes were reading Macbeth, the girls squeaking breathlessly through the scenes, and Dorothy pulling them up to make them pronounce the words properly and to tell them who Bellona's bridegroom was and how witches rode on broomsticks; and the girls wanting to know, almost as excitedly as though it had been a detective story, how Birnam Wood could possible come to Dunsinane and Macbeth be killed by a man who was not of woman born. Those are the times that make teaching worth while — the times when the children's enthusiasm leaps up, like an answering flame, to meet your own, and sudden unlooked-for gleams of intelligence reward your earlier drudgery. No job is more fascinating than teaching if you have a free hand at it. Nor did Dorothy know, as yet, that that 'if' is one of the biggest 'ifs' in the world.

Her job suited her, and she was happy in it. She knew the minds of the children intimately by this time, knew their individual peculiarities and the special stimulants that were needed before you could get them to think. She was more fond of them, more interested in their development, more anxious to do her best for them, than she

would have conceived possible a short while ago. The complex, never-ended labour of teaching filled her life just as the round of parish jobs had filled it at home. She thought and dreamed of teaching; she took books out of the public library and studied theories of education. She felt that quite willingly she would go on teaching all her life, even at ten shillings a week and her keep, if it could always be like this. It was her vocation, she thought.

Almost any job that fully occupied her would have been a relief after the horrible futility of the time of her destitution. But this was more than a mere job; it was — so it seemed to her — a mission, a life-purpose. Trying to awaken the dulled minds of these children, trying to undo the swindle that had been worked upon them in the name of education — that, surely, was something to which she could give herself heart and soul? So for the time being, in the interest of her work, she disregarded the beastliness of living in Mrs Creevy's house, and quite forgot her strange, anomalous position and the uncertainty of her future.

4

But of course, it could not last.

Not many weeks had gone by before the parents began interfering with Dorothy's programme of work. That — trouble with the parents — is part of the regular routine of life in a private school. All parents are tiresome from a teacher's point of view, and the parents of children at fourth-rate private schools are utterly impossible. On the one hand, they have only the dimmest idea of what is meant by education; on the other hand, they look on 'schooling' exactly as they look on a butcher's bill or a grocer's bill, and are perpetually suspicious that they are being cheated. They bombard the teacher with ill-written notes making impossible demands, which they send by hand and which the child reads on the way to school. At the end of the first fortnight Mabel Briggs, one of the most promising girls in the class, brought Dorothy the following note:

Dear Miss, — Would you please give Mabel a bit more ARITHMETIC? I feel that what your giving her is not practacle enough. All these maps and that. She wants practacle work, not all

this fancy stuff. So more ARITHMETIC, please. And remain,

Yours Faithfully,

Geo. Briggs

P.S. Mabel says your talking of starting her on something called decimals. I don't want her taught decimals, I want her taught ARITHMETIC.

So Dorothy stopped Mabel's geography and gave her extra arithmetic instead, whereat Mabel wept. More letters followed. One lady was disturbed to hear that her child was being given Shakespeare to read. 'She had heard', she wrote, 'that this Mr Shakespeare was a writer of stage-plays, and was Miss Millborough quite certain that he wasn't a very IMMORAL writer? For her own part she had never so much as been to the pictures in her life, let alone to a stage- play, and she felt that even in READING stage-plays there was a very grave danger,' etc., etc. She gave way, however, on being informed that Mr Shakespeare was dead. This seemed to reassure her. Another parent wanted more attention to his child's handwriting, and another thought French was a waste of time; and so it went on, until Dorothy's carefully arranged time-table was almost in ruins. Mrs Creevy gave her clearly to understand that whatever the parents demanded she must do, or pretend to do. In many cases it was next door to impossible, for it disorganized everything to have one child studying, for instance, arithmetic while the rest of the class were doing history or geography. But in private schools the parents' word is law. Such schools exist, like shops, by flattering their customers, and if a parent wanted his child taught nothing but cat's-cradle and the cuneiform alphabet, the teacher would have to agree rather than lose a pupil.

The fact was that the parents were growing perturbed by the tales their children brought home about Dorothy's methods. They saw no sense whatever in these new-fangled ideas of making plasticine maps and reading poetry, and the old mechanical routine which had so horrified Dorothy struck them as eminently sensible. They became more and more restive, and their letters were peppered with the word 'practical', meaning in effect more handwriting lessons and more arithmetic. And even their notion of arithmetic was limited to addition, subtraction, multiplication and 'practice', with long

division thrown in as a spectacular tour de force of no real value. Very few of them could have worked out a sum in decimals themselves, and they were not particularly anxious for their children to be able to do so either.

However, if this had been all, there would probably never have been any serious trouble. The parents would have nagged at Dorothy, as all parents do; but Dorothy would finally have learned — as, again, all teachers finally learn — that if one showed a certain amount of tact one could safely ignore them. But there was one fact that was absolutely certain to lead to trouble, and that was the fact that the parents of all except three children were Nonconformists, whereas Dorothy was an Anglican. It was true that Dorothy had lost her faith — indeed, for two months past, in the press of varying adventures, had hardly thought either of her faith or of its loss. But that made very little difference; Roman or Anglican, Dissenter, Jew, Turk or infidel, you retain the habits of thought that you have been brought up with. Dorothy, born and bred in the precincts of the Church, had no understanding of the Nonconformist mind. With the best will in the world, she could not help doing things that would cause offence to some of the parents.

Almost at the beginning there was a skirmish over the Scripture lessons — twice a week the children used to read a couple of chapters from the Bible. Old Testament and New Testament alternately — several of the parents writing to say, would Miss Millborough please NOT answer the children when they asked questions about the Virgin Mary; texts about the Virgin Mary were to be passed over in silence, or, if possible, missed out altogether. But it was Shakespeare, that immoral writer, who brought things to a head. The girls had worked their way through Macbeth, pining to know how the witches' prophecy was to be fulfilled. They reached the closing scenes. Birnam Wood had come to Dunsinane — that part was settled, anyway; now what about the man who was not of woman born? They came to the fatal passage:

MACBETH: Thou losest labour;
As easy may'st thou the intrenchant air
With thy keen sword impress, as make me bleed:

Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests,
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born.

MACDUFF: Despair thy charm,
And let the Angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

The girls looked puzzled. There was a momentary silence, and then a chorus of voices round the room:

'Please, Miss, what does that mean?'

Dorothy explained. She explained haltingly and incompletely, with a sudden horrid misgiving — a premonition that this was going to lead to trouble — but still, she did explain. And after that, of course, the fun began.

About half the children in the class went home and asked their parents the meaning of the word 'womb'. There was a sudden commotion, a flying to and fro of messages, an electric thrill of horror through fifteen decent Nonconformist homes. That night the parents must have held some kind of conclave, for the following evening, about the time when school ended, a deputation called upon Mrs Creevy. Dorothy heard them arriving by ones and twos, and guessed what was going to happen. As soon as she had dismissed the children, she heard Mrs Creevy call sharply down the stairs:

'Come up here a minute, Miss Millborough!'

Dorothy went up, trying to control the trembling of her knees. In the gaunt drawing-room Mrs Creevy was standing grimly beside the piano, and six parents were sitting round on horsehair chairs like a circle of inquisitors. There was the Mr Geo. Briggs who had written the letter about Mabel's arithmetic — he was an alert- looking greengrocer with a dried-up, shrewish wife — and there was a large, buffalo-like man with drooping moustaches and a colourless, peculiarly FLAT wife who looked as though she had been flattened out by the pressure of some heavy object — her husband, perhaps. The names of these two Dorothy did not catch. There was also Mrs Williams, the mother of the congenital idiot, a small, dark, very

obtuse woman who always agreed with the last speaker, and there was a Mr Poynder, a commercial traveller. He was a youngish to middle- aged man with a grey face, mobile lips, and a bald scalp across which some strips of rather nasty-looking damp hair were carefully plastered. In honour of the parents' visit, a fire composed of three large coals was sulking in the grate.

'Sit down there, Miss Millborough,' said Mrs Creevy, pointing to a hard chair which stood like a stool of repentance in the middle of the ring of parents.

Dorothy sat down.

'And now,' said Mrs Creevy, 'just you listen to what Mr Poynder's got to say to you.'

Mr Poynder had a great deal to say. The other parents had evidently chosen him as their spokesman, and he talked till flecks of yellowish foam appeared at the corners of his mouth. And what was remarkable, he managed to do it all — so nice was his regard for the decencies — without ever once repeating the word that had caused all the trouble.

'I feel that I'm voicing the opinion of all of us,' he said with his facile bagman's eloquence, 'in saying that if Miss Millborough knew that this play — Macduff, or whatever its name is — contained such words as — well, such words as we're speaking about, she never ought to have given it to the children to read at all. To my mind it's a disgrace that schoolbooks can be printed with such words in them. I'm sure if any of us had ever known that Shakespeare was that kind of stuff, we'd have put our foot down at the start. It surprises me, I must say. Only the other morning I was reading a piece in my News Chronicle about Shakespeare being the father of English Literature; well, if that's Literature, let's have a bit LESS Literature, say I! I think everyone'll agree with me there. And on the other hand, if Miss Millborough didn't know that the word — well, the word I'm referring to — was coming, she just ought to have gone straight on and taken no notice when it did come. There wasn't the slightest need to go explaining it to them. Just tell them to keep quiet and not get asking questions — that's the proper way with children.'

'But the children wouldn't have understood the play if I hadn't explained!' protested Dorothy for the third or fourth time.

‘Of course they wouldn’t! You don’t seem to get my point, Miss Millborough! We don’t want them to understand. Do you think we want them to go picking up dirty ideas out of books? Quite enough of that already with all these dirty films and these twopenny girls’ papers that they get hold of — all these filthy, dirty love- stories with pictures of — well, I won’t go into it. We don’t send our children to school to have ideas put into their heads. I’m speaking for all the parents in saying this. We’re all of decent God-fearing folk — some of us are Baptists and some of us are Methodists, and there’s even one or two Church of England among us; but we can sink our differences when it comes to a case like this — and we try to bring our children up decent and save them from knowing anything about the Facts of Life. If I had my way, no child — at any rate, no girl — would know anything about the Facts of Life till she was twenty-one.’

There was a general nod from the parents, and the buffalo-like man added, ‘Yer, yer! I’m with you there, Mr Poynder. Yer, yer!’ deep down in his inside.

After dealing with the subject of Shakespeare, Mr Poynder added some remarks about Dorothy’s new-fangled methods of teaching, which gave Mr Geo. Briggs the opportunity to rap out from time to time, ‘That’s it! Practical work — that’s what we want — practical work! Not all this messy stuff like po’try and making maps and sticking scraps of paper and such like. Give ‘em a good bit of figuring and handwriting and bother the rest. Practical work! You’ve said it!’

This went on for about twenty minutes. At first Dorothy attempted to argue, but she saw Mrs Creevy angrily shaking her head at her over the buffalo-like man’s shoulder, which she rightly took as a signal to be quiet. By the time the parents had finished they had reduced Dorothy very nearly to tears, and after this they made ready to go. But Mrs Creevy stopped them.

‘JUST a minute, ladies and gentlemen,’ she said. ‘Now that you’ve all had your say — and I’m sure I’m most glad to give you the opportunity — I’d just like to say a little something on my own account. Just to make things clear, in case any of you might think *I* was to blame for this nasty business that’s happened. And YOU stay

here too, Miss Millborough!' she added.

She turned on Dorothy, and, in front of the parents, gave her a venomous 'talking to' which lasted upwards of ten minutes. The burden of it all was that Dorothy had brought these dirty books into the house behind her back; that it was monstrous treachery and ingratitude; and that if anything like it happened again, out Dorothy would go with a week's wages in her pocket. She rubbed it in and in and in. Phrases like 'girl that I've taken into my house', 'eating my bread', and even 'living on my charity', recurred over and over again. The parents sat round watching, and in their crass faces — faces not harsh or evil, only blunted by ignorance and mean virtues — you could see a solemn approval, a solemn pleasure in the spectacle of sin rebuked. Dorothy understood this; she understood that it was necessary that Mrs Creevy should give her her 'talking to' in front of the parents, so that they might feel that they were getting their money's worth and be satisfied. But still, as the stream of mean, cruel reprimand went on and on, such anger rose in her heart that she could with pleasure have stood up and struck Mrs Creevy across the face. Again and again she thought, 'I won't stand it, I won't stand it any longer! I'll tell her what I think of her and then walk straight out of the house!' But she did nothing of the kind. She saw with dreadful clarity the helplessness of her position. Whatever happened, whatever insults it meant swallowing, she had got to keep her job. So she sat still, with pink humiliated face, amid the circle of parents, and presently her anger turned to misery, and she realized that she was going to begin crying if she did not struggle to prevent it. But she realized, too, that if she began crying it would be the last straw and the parents would demand her dismissal. To stop herself, she dug her nails so hard into the palms that afterwards she found that she had drawn a few drops of blood.

Presently the 'talking to' wore itself out in assurances from Mrs Creevy that this should never happen again and that the offending Shakespeares should be burnt immediately. The parents were now satisfied. Dorothy had had her lesson and would doubtless profit by it; they did not bear her any malice and were not conscious of having humiliated her. They said good-bye to Mrs Creevy, said good-bye rather more coldly to Dorothy, and departed. Dorothy also rose to go,

but Mrs Creevy signed to her to stay where she was.

'Just you wait a minute,' she said ominously as the parents left the room. 'I haven't finished yet, not by a long way I haven't.'

Dorothy sat down again. She felt very weak at the knees, and nearer to tears than ever. Mrs Creevy, having shown the parents out by the front door, came back with a bowl of water and threw it over the fire — for where was the sense of burning good coals after the parents had gone? Dorothy supposed that the 'talking to' was going to begin afresh. However, Mrs Creevy's wrath seemed to have cooled — at any rate, she had laid aside the air of outraged virtue that it had been necessary to put on in front of the parents.

'I just want to have a bit of a talk with you, Miss Millborough,' she said. 'It's about time we got it settled once and for all how this school's going to be run and how it's not going to be run.'

'Yes,' said Dorothy.

'Well, I'll be straight with you. When you came here I could see with half an eye that you didn't know the first thing about school-teaching; but I wouldn't have minded that if you'd just had a bit of common sense like any other girl would have had. Only it seems you hadn't. I let you have your own way for a week or two, and the first thing you do is to go and get all the parents' backs up. Well, I'm not going to have THAT over again. From now on I'm going to have things done MY way, not YOUR way. Do you understand that?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy again.

'You're not to think as I can't do without you, mind,' proceeded Mrs Creevy. 'I can pick up teachers at two a penny any day of the week, M.A.s and B.A.s and all. Only the M.A.s and B.A.s mostly take to drink, or else they — well, no matter what — and I will say for you you don't seem to be given to the drink or anything of that kind. I dare say you and me can get on all right if you'll drop these new-fangled ideas of yours and understand what's meant by practical school-teaching. So just you listen to me.'

Dorothy listened. With admirable clarity, and with a cynicism that was all the more disgusting because it was utterly unconscious, Mrs Creevy explained the technique of the dirty swindle that she called practical school-teaching.

‘What you’ve got to get hold of once and for all,’ she began, ‘is that there’s only one thing that matters in a school, and that’s the fees. As for all this stuff about “developing the children’s minds”, as you call it, it’s neither here nor there. It’s the fees I’m after, not DEVELOPING THE CHILDREN’S MINDS. After all, it’s no more than common sense. It’s not to be supposed as anyone’d go to all the trouble of keeping school and having the house turned upside down by a pack of brats, if it wasn’t that there’s a bit of money to be made out of it. The fees come first, and everything else comes afterwards. Didn’t I tell you that the very first day you came here?’

‘Yes,’ admitted Dorothy humbly.

‘Well, then, it’s the parents that pay the fees, and it’s the parents you’ve got to think about. Do what the parents want — that’s our rule here. I dare say all this messing about with plasticine and paper-scraps that you go in for doesn’t do the children any particular harm; but the parents don’t want it, and there’s an end of it. Well, there’s just two subjects that they DO want their children taught, and that’s handwriting and arithmetic. Especially handwriting. That’s something they CAN see the sense of. And so handwriting’s the thing you’ve got to keep on and on at. Plenty of nice neat copies that the girls can take home, and that the parents’ll show off to the neighbours and give us a bit of a free advert. I want you to give the children two hours a day just at handwriting and nothing else.’

‘Two hours a day just at handwriting,’ repeated Dorothy obediently.

‘Yes. And plenty of arithmetic as well. The parents are very keen on arithmetic: especially money-sums. Keep your eye on the parents all the time. If you meet one of them in the street, get hold of them and start talking to them about their own girl. Make out that she’s the best girl in the class and that if she stays just three terms longer she’ll be working wonders. You see what I mean? Don’t go and tell them there’s no room for improvement; because if you tell them THAT, they generally take their girls away. Just three terms longer — that’s the thing to tell them. And when you make out the end of term reports, just you bring them to me and let me have a good look at them. I like to do the marking myself.’

Mrs Creevy’s eye met Dorothy’s. She had perhaps been about to

say that she always arranged the marks so that every girl came out somewhere near the top of the class; but she refrained. Dorothy could not answer for a moment. Outwardly she was subdued, and very pale, but in her heart were anger and deadly repulsion against which she had to struggle before she could speak. She had no thought, however, of contradicting Mrs Creevy. The 'talking to' had quite broken her spirit. She mastered her voice, and said:

'I'm to teach nothing but handwriting and arithmetic — is that it?'

'Well, I didn't say that exactly. There's plenty of other subjects that look well on the prospectus. French, for instance — French looks VERY well on the prospectus. But it's not a subject you want to waste much time over. Don't go filling them up with a lot of grammar and syntax and verbs and all that. That kind of stuff doesn't get them anywhere so far as *I* can see. Give them a bit of "Parley vous Francey", and "Passey moi le beurre", and so forth; that's a lot more use than grammar. And then there's Latin — I always put Latin on the prospectus. But I don't suppose you're very great on Latin, are you?'

'No,' admitted Dorothy.

'Well, it doesn't matter. You won't have to teach it. None of OUR parents'd want their children to waste time over Latin. But they like to see it on the prospectus. It looks classy. Of course there's a whole lot of subjects that we can't actually teach, but we have to advertise them all the same. Book-keeping and typing and shorthand, for instance; besides music and dancing. It all looks well on the prospectus.'

'Arithmetic, handwriting, French — is there anything else?' Dorothy said.

'Oh, well, history and geography and English Literature, of course. But just drop that map-making business at once — it's nothing but waste of time. The best geography to teach is lists of capitals. Get them so that they can rattle off the capitals of all the English counties as if it was the multiplication table. Then they've got something to show for what they've learnt, anyway. And as for history, keep on with the Hundred Page History of Britain. I won't have them taught out of those big history books you keep bringing home from the library. I opened one of those books the other day,

and the first thing I saw was a piece where it said the English had been beaten in some battle or other. There's a nice thing to go teaching children! The parents won't stand for THAT kind of thing, I can tell you!'

'And Literature?' said Dorothy.

'Well, of course they've got to do a bit of reading, and I can't think why you wanted to turn up your nose at those nice little readers of ours. Keep on with the readers. They're a bit old, but they're quite good enough for a pack of children, I should have thought. And I suppose they might as well learn a few pieces of poetry by heart. Some of the parents like to hear their children say a piece of poetry. "The Boy stood on the Burning Deck" — that's a very good piece — and then there's "The Wreck of the Steamer" — now, what was that ship called? "The Wreck of the Steamer Hesperus". A little poetry doesn't hurt now and again. But don't let's have any more SHAKESPEARE, please!'

Dorothy got no tea that day. It was now long past tea-time, but when Mrs Creevy had finished her harangue she sent Dorothy away without saying anything about tea. Perhaps this was a little extra punishment for l'affaire Macbeth.

Dorothy had not asked permission to go out, but she did not feel that she could stay in the house any longer. She got her hat and coat and set out down the ill-lit road, for the public library. It was late into November. Though the day had been damp the night wind blew sharply, like a threat, through the almost naked trees, making the gas-lamps flicker in spite of their glass chimneys, and stirring the sodden plane leaves that littered the pavement. Dorothy shivered slightly. The raw wind sent through her a bone- deep memory of the cold of Trafalgar Square. And though she did not actually think that if she lost her job it would mean going back to the sub-world from which she had come — indeed, it was not so desperate as that; at the worst her cousin or somebody else would help her — still, Mrs Creevy's 'talking to' had made Trafalgar Square seem suddenly very much nearer. It had driven into her a far deeper understanding than she had had before of the great modern commandment — the eleventh commandment which has wiped out all the others: 'Thou shalt not lose thy job.'

But as to what Mrs Creevy had said about 'practical school-teaching', it had been no more than a realistic facing of the facts. She had merely said aloud what most people in her position think but never say. Her oft-repeated phrase, 'It's the fees I'm after', was a motto that might be — indeed, ought to be — written over the doors of every private school in England.

There are, by the way, vast numbers of private schools in England. Second-rate, third-rate, and fourth-rate (Ringwood House was a specimen of the fourth-rate school), they exist by the dozen and the score in every London suburb and every provincial town. At any given moment there are somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten thousand of them, of which less than a thousand are subject to Government inspection. And though some of them are better than others, and a certain number, probably, are better than the council schools with which they compete, there is the same fundamental evil in all of them; that is, that they have ultimately no purpose except to make money. Often, except that there is nothing illegal about them, they are started in exactly the same spirit as one would start a brothel or a bucket shop. Some snuffy little man of business (it is quite usual for these schools to be owned by people who don't teach themselves) says one morning to his wife:

'Emma, I got a notion! What you say to us two keeping school, eh? There's plenty of cash in a school, you know, and there ain't the same work in it as what there is in a shop or a pub. Besides, you don't risk nothing; no over'ead to worry about, 'cept jest your rent and few desks and a blackboard. But we'll do it in style. Get in one of these Oxford and Cambridge chaps as is out of a job and'll come cheap, and dress 'im up in a gown and — what do they call them little square 'ats with tassels on top? That 'ud fetch the parents, eh? You jest keep your eyes open and see if you can't pick on a good district where there's not too many on the same game already.'

He chooses a situation in one of those middle-class districts where the people are too poor to afford the fees of a decent school and too proud to send their children to the council schools, and 'sets up'. By degrees he works up a connexion in very much the same manner as a milkman or a greengrocer, and if he is astute and tactful and has not too many competitors, he makes his few hundreds a year out of it.

Of course, these schools are not all alike. Not every principal is a grasping low-minded shrew like Mrs Creevy, and there are plenty of schools where the atmosphere is kindly and decent and the teaching is as good as one could reasonably expect for fees of five pounds a term. On the other hand, some of them are crying scandals. Later on, when Dorothy got to know one of the teachers at another private school in Southbridge, she heard tales of schools that were worse by far than Ringwood House. She heard of a cheap boarding-school where travelling actors dumped their children as one dumps luggage in a railway cloakroom, and where the children simply vegetated, doing absolutely nothing, reaching the age of sixteen without learning to read; and another school where the days passed in a perpetual riot, with a broken-down old hack of a master chasing the boys up and down and slashing at them with a cane, and then suddenly collapsing and weeping with his head on a desk, while the boys laughed at him. So long as schools are run primarily for money, things like this will happen. The expensive private schools to which the rich send their children are not, on the surface, so bad as the others, because they can afford a proper staff, and the Public School examination system keeps them up to the mark; but they have the same essential taint.

It was only later, and by degrees, that Dorothy discovered these facts about private schools. At first, she used to suffer from an absurd fear that one day the school inspectors would descend upon Ringwood House, find out what a sham and a swindle it all was, and raise the dust accordingly. Later on, however, she learned that this could never happen. Ringwood House was not ‘recognized’, and therefore was not liable to be inspected. One day a Government inspector did, indeed, visit the school, but beyond measuring the dimensions of the schoolroom to see whether each girl had her right number of cubic feet of air, he did nothing; he had no power to do more. Only the tiny minority of ‘recognized’ schools — less than one in ten — are officially tested to decide whether they keep up a reasonable educational standard. As for the others, they are free to teach or not teach exactly as they choose. No one controls or inspects them except the children’s parents — the blind leading the blind.

5

Next day Dorothy began altering her programme in accordance with Mrs Creevy's orders. The first lesson of the day was handwriting, and the second was geography.

'That'll do, girls,' said Dorothy as the funereal clock struck ten. 'We'll start our geography lesson now.'

The girls flung their desks open and put their hated copybooks away with audible sighs of relief. There were murmurs of 'Oo, jography! Good!' It was one of their favourite lessons. The two girls who were 'monitors' for the week, and whose job it was to clean the blackboard, collect exercise books and so forth (children will fight for the privilege of doing jobs of that kind), leapt from their places to fetch the half-finished contour map that stood against the wall. But Dorothy stopped them.

'Wait a moment. Sit down, you two. We aren't going to go on with the map this morning.'

There was a cry of dismay. 'Oh, Miss! Why can't we, Miss? PLEASE let's go on with it!'

'No. I'm afraid we've been wasting a little too much time over the map lately. We're going to start learning some of the capitals of the English counties. I want every girl in the class to know the whole lot of them by the end of the term.'

The children's faces fell. Dorothy saw it, and added with an attempt at brightness — that hollow, undeceiving brightness of a teacher trying to palm off a boring subject as an interesting one:

'Just think how pleased your parents will be when they can ask you the capital of any county in England and you can tell it them!'

The children were not in the least taken in. They writhed at the nauseous prospect.

'Oh, CAPITALS! Learning CAPITALS! That's just what we used to do with Miss Strong. Please, Miss, WHY can't we go on with the map?'

'Now don't argue. Get your notebooks out and take them down as I give them to you. And afterwards we'll say them all together.'

Reluctantly, the children fished out their notebooks, still groaning. 'Please, Miss, can we go on with the map NEXT time?'

‘I don’t know. We’ll see.’

That afternoon the map was removed from the schoolroom, and Mrs Creevy scraped the plasticine off the board and threw it away. It was the same with all the other subjects, one after another. All the changes that Dorothy had made were undone. They went back to the routine of interminable ‘copies’ and interminable ‘practice’ sums, to the learning parrot-fashion of ‘Passez-moi le beurre’ and ‘Le fils du jardinier a perdu son chapeau’, to the Hundred Page History and the insufferable little ‘reader’. (Mrs Creevy had impounded the Shakespeares, ostensibly to burn them. The probability was that she had sold them.) Two hours a day were set apart for handwriting lessons. The two depressing pieces of black paper, which Dorothy had taken down from the wall, were replaced, and their proverbs written upon them afresh in neat copperplate. As for the historical chart, Mrs Creevy took it away and burnt it.

When the children saw the hated lessons, from which they had thought to have escaped for ever, coming back upon them one by one, they were first astonished, then miserable, then sulky. But it was far worse for Dorothy than for the children. After only a couple of days the rigmarole through which she was obliged to drive them so nauseated her that she began to doubt whether she could go on with it any longer. Again and again she toyed with the idea of disobeying Mrs Creevy. Why not, she would think, as the children whined and groaned and sweated under their miserable bondage — why not stop it and go back to proper lessons, even if it was only for an hour or two a day? Why not drop the whole pretence of lessons and simply let the children play? It would be so much better for them than this. Let them draw pictures or make something out of plasticine or begin making up a fairy tale — anything REAL, anything that would interest them, instead of this dreadful nonsense. But she dared not. At any moment Mrs Creevy was liable to come in, and if she found the children ‘messing about’ instead of getting on with their routine work, there would be fearful trouble. So Dorothy hardened her heart, and obeyed Mrs Creevy’s instructions to the letter, and things were very much as they had been before Miss Strong was ‘taken bad’.

The lessons reached such a pitch of boredom that the brightest spot in the week was Mr Booth’s so-called chemistry lecture on

Thursday afternoons. Mr Booth was a seedy, tremulous man of about fifty, with long, wet, cowdung-coloured moustaches. He had been a Public School master once upon a time, but nowadays he made just enough for a life of chronic sub-drunkenness by delivering lectures at two and sixpence a time. The lectures were unrelieved drivel. Even in his palmiest days Mr Booth had not been a particularly brilliant lecturer, and now, when he had had his first go of delirium tremens and lived in a daily dread of his second, what chemical knowledge he had ever had was fast deserting him. He would stand dithering in front of the class, saying the same thing over and over again and trying vainly to remember what he was talking about. 'Remember, girls,' he would say in his husky, would-be fatherly voice, 'the number of the elements is ninety-three — ninety-three elements, girls — you all of you know what an element is, don't you? — there are just ninety-three of them — remember that number, girls — ninety-three,' until Dorothy (she had to stay in the schoolroom during the chemistry lectures, because Mrs Creevy considered that it DIDN'T DO to leave the girls alone with a man) was miserable with vicarious shame. All the lectures started with the ninety-three elements, and never got very much further. There was also talk of 'a very interesting little experiment that I'm going to perform for you next week, girls — very interesting you'll find it — we'll have it next week without fail — a very interesting little experiment', which, needless to say, was never performed. Mr Booth possessed no chemical apparatus, and his hands were far too shaky to have used it even if he had had any. The girls sat through his lectures in a suety stupor of boredom, but even he was a welcome change from handwriting lessons.

The children were never quite the same with Dorothy after the parents' visit. They did not change all in a day, of course. They had grown to be fond of 'old Millie', and they expected that after a day or two of tormenting them with handwriting and 'commercial arithmetic' she would go back to something interesting. But the handwriting and arithmetic went on, and the popularity Dorothy had enjoyed, as a teacher whose lessons weren't boring and who didn't slap you, pinch you, or twist your ears, gradually vanished. Moreover, the story of the row there had been over Macbeth was not

long in leaking out. The children grasped that old Millie had done something wrong — they didn't exactly know what — and had been given a 'talking to'. It lowered her in their eyes. There is no dealing with children, even with children who are fond of you, unless you can keep your prestige as an adult; let that prestige be once damaged, and even the best-hearted children will despise you.

So they began to be naughty in the normal, traditional way. Before, Dorothy had only had to deal with occasional laziness, outbursts of noise and silly giggling fits; now there were spite and deceitfulness as well. The children revolted ceaselessly against the horrible routine. They forgot the short weeks when old Millie had seemed quite a good sort and school itself had seemed rather fun. Now, school was simply what it had always been, and what indeed you expected it to be — a place where you slacked and yawned and whiled the time away by pinching your neighbour and trying to make the teacher lose her temper, and from which you burst with a yell of relief the instant the last lesson was over. Sometimes they sulked and had fits of crying, sometimes they argued in the maddening persistent way that children have, 'WHY should we do this? WHY does anyone have to learn to read and write?' over and over again, until Dorothy had to stand over them and silence them with threats of blows. She was growing almost habitually irritable nowadays; it surprised and shocked her, but she could not stop it. Every morning she vowed to herself, 'Today I will NOT lose my temper', and every morning, with depressing regularity, she DID lose her temper, especially at about half past eleven when the children were at their worst. Nothing in the world is quite so irritating as dealing with mutinous children. Sooner or later, Dorothy knew, she would lose control of herself and begin hitting them. It seemed to her an unforgivable thing to do, to hit a child; but nearly all teachers come to it in the end. It was impossible now to get any child to work except when your eye was upon it. You had only to turn your back for an instant and blotting-paper pellets were flying to and fro. Nevertheless, with ceaseless slave-driving the children's handwriting and 'commercial arithmetic' did certainly show some improvement, and no doubt the parents were satisfied.

The last few weeks of the term were a very bad time. For over a

fortnight Dorothy was quite penniless, for Mrs Creevy had told her that she couldn't pay her her term's wages 'till some of the fees came in'. So she was deprived of the secret slabs of chocolate that had kept her going, and she suffered from a perpetual slight hunger that made her languid and spiritless. There were leaden mornings when the minutes dragged like hours, when she struggled with herself to keep her eyes away from the clock, and her heart sickened to think that beyond this lesson there loomed another just like it, and more of them and more, stretching on into what seemed like a dreary eternity. Worse yet were the times when the children were in their noisy mood and it needed a constant exhausting effort of the will to keep them under control at all; and beyond the wall, of course, lurked Mrs Creevy, always listening, always ready to descend upon the schoolroom, wrench the door open, and glare round the room with 'Now then! What's all this noise about, please?' and the sack in her eye.

Dorothy was fully awake, now, to the beastliness of living in Mrs Creevy's house. The filthy food, the cold, and the lack of baths seemed much more important than they had seemed a little while ago. Moreover, she was beginning to appreciate, as she had not done when the joy of her work was fresh upon her, the utter loneliness of her position. Neither her father nor Mr Warburton had written to her, and in two months she had made not a single friend in Southbridge. For anyone so situated, and particularly for a woman, it is all but impossible to make friends. She had no money and no home of her own, and outside the school her sole places of refuge were the public library, on the few evenings when she could get there, and church on Sunday mornings. She went to church regularly, of course — Mrs Creevy had insisted on that. She had settled the question of Dorothy's religious observances at breakfast on her first Sunday morning.

'I've just been wondering what Place of Worship you ought to go to,' she said. 'I suppose you were brought up C. of E., weren't you?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy.

'Hm, well. I can't quite make up my mind where to send you. There's St George's — that's the C. of E. — and there's the Baptist Chapel where I go myself. Most of our parents are Nonconformists,

and I don't know as they'd quite approve of a C. of E. teacher. You can't be too careful with the parents. They had a bit of a scare two years ago when it turned out that the teacher I had then was actually a Roman Catholic, if you please! Of course she kept it dark as long as she could, but it came out in the end, and three of the parents took their children away. I got rid of her the same day as I found it out, naturally.'

Dorothy was silent.

'Still,' went on Mrs Creevy, 'we HAVE got three C. of E. pupils, and I don't know as the Church connexion mightn't be worked up a bit. So perhaps you'd better risk it and go to St George's. But you want to be a bit careful, you know. I'm told St George's is one of these churches where they go in for a lot of bowing and scraping and crossing yourself and all that. We've got two parents that are Plymouth Brothers, and they'd throw a fit if they heard you'd been seen crossing yourself. So don't go and do THAT, whatever you do.'

'Very well,' said Dorothy.

'And just you keep your eyes well open during the sermon. Have a good look round and see if there's any young girls in the congregation that we could get hold of. If you see any likely looking ones, get on to the parson afterwards and try and find out their names and addresses.'

So Dorothy went to St George's. It was a shade 'Higher' than St Athelstan's had been; chairs, not pews, but no incense, and the vicar (his name was Mr Gore-Williams) wore a plain cassock and surplice except on festival days. As for the services, they were so like those at home that Dorothy could go through them, and utter all the responses at the right moment, in a state of the completest abstraction.

There was never a moment when the power of worship returned to her. Indeed, the whole concept of worship was meaningless to her now; her faith had vanished, utterly and irrevocably. It is a mysterious thing, the loss of faith — as mysterious as faith itself. Like faith, it is ultimately not rooted in logic; it is a change in the climate of the mind. But however little the church services might mean to her, she did not regret the hours she spent in church. On the contrary, she looked forward to her Sunday mornings as blessed interludes of peace; and that not only because Sunday morning meant

a respite from Mrs Creevy's prying eye and nagging voice. In another and deeper sense the atmosphere of the church was soothing and reassuring to her. For she perceived that in all that happens in church, however absurd and cowardly its supposed purpose may be, there is something — it is hard to define, but something of decency, of spiritual comeliness — that is not easily found in the world outside. It seemed to her that even though you no longer believe, it is better to go to church than not; better to follow in the ancient ways, than to drift in rootless freedom. She knew very well that she would never again be able to utter a prayer and mean it; but she knew also that for the rest of her life she must continue with the observances to which she had been bred. Just this much remained to her of the faith that had once, like the bones in a living frame, held all her life together.

But as yet she did not think very deeply about the loss of her faith and what it might mean to her in the future. She was too busy merely existing, merely struggling to make her nerves hold out for the rest of that miserable term. For as the term drew to an end, the job of keeping the class in order grew more and more exhausting. The girls behaved atrociously, and they were all the bitterer against Dorothy because they had once been fond of her. She had deceived them, they felt. She had started off by being decent, and now she had turned out to be just a beastly old teacher like the rest of them — a nasty old beast who kept on and on with those awful handwriting lessons and snapped your head off if you so much as made a blot on your book. Dorothy caught them eyeing her face, sometimes, with the aloof, cruel scrutiny of children. They had thought her pretty once, and now they thought her ugly, old, and scraggy. She had grown, indeed, much thinner since she had been at Ringwood House. They hated her now, as they had hated all their previous teachers.

Sometimes they baited her quite deliberately. The older and more intelligent girls understood the situation well enough — understood that Millie was under old Creevy's thumb and that she got dropped on afterwards when they had been making too much noise; sometimes they made all the noise they dared, just so as to bring old Creevy in and have the pleasure of watching Millie's face while old Creevy told her off. There were times when Dorothy could keep her

temper and forgive them all they did, because she realized that it was only a healthy instinct that made them rebel against the loathsome monotony of their work. But there were other times when her nerves were more on edge than usual, and when she looked round at the score of silly little faces, grinning or mutinous, and found it possible to hate them. Children are so blind, so selfish, so merciless. They do not know when they are tormenting you past bearing, and if they did know they would not care. You may do your very best for them, you may keep your temper in situations that would try a saint, and yet if you are forced to bore them and oppress them, they will hate you for it without ever asking themselves whether it is you who are to blame. How true — when you happen not to be a school-teacher yourself — how true those often- quoted lines sound —

Under a cruel eye outworn
The little ones spend the day
In sighing and dismay!

But when you yourself are the cruel eye outworn, you realize that there is another side to the picture.

The last week came, and the dirty farce of ‘exams’, was carried through. The system, as explained by Mrs Creevy, was quite simple. You coached the children in, for example, a series of sums until you were quite certain that they could get them right, and then set them the same sums as an arithmetic paper before they had time to forget the answers; and so with each subject in turn. The children’s papers were, of course, sent home for their parents’ inspection. And Dorothy wrote the reports under Mrs Creevy’s dictation, and she had to write ‘excellent’ so many times that — as sometimes happens when you write a word over and over again — she forgot how to spell it and began writing in ‘excelent’, ‘exsellent’, ‘ecsellent’, ‘eccelent’.

The last day passed in fearful tumults. Not even Mrs Creevy herself could keep the children in order. By midday Dorothy’s nerves were in rags, and Mrs Creevy gave her a ‘talking to’ in front of the seven children who stayed to dinner. In the afternoon the noise was worse than ever, and at last Dorothy, overcome, appealed to the girls almost tearfully to stop.

‘Girls!’ she called out, raising her voice to make herself heard through the din. ‘PLEASE stop it, PLEASE! You’re behaving horribly to me. Do you think it’s kind to go on like this?’

That was fatal, of course. Never, never, never throw yourself on the mercy of a child! There was an instant’s hush, and then one child cried out, loudly and derisively, ‘Mill-iee!’ The next moment the whole class had taken it up, even the imbecile Mavis, chanting all together ‘Mill-iee! Mill-iee! Mill-iee!’ At that, something within Dorothy seemed to snap. She paused for an instant, picked out the girl who was making the most noise, walked up to her, and gave her a smack across the ear almost as hard as she could hit. Happily it was only one of the ‘medium payers’.

6

On the first day of the holidays Dorothy received a letter from Mr Warburton.

My Dear Dorothy [he wrote], — Or should I call you Ellen, as I understand that is your new name? You must, I am afraid, have thought it very heartless of me not to have written sooner, but I assure you that it was not until ten days ago that I even heard anything about our supposed escapade. I have been abroad, first in various parts of France, then in Austria and then in Rome, and, as you know, I avoid my fellow countrymen most strenuously on these trips. They are disgusting enough even at home, but in foreign parts their behaviour makes me so ashamed of them that I generally try to pass myself off as an American.

When I got to Knype Hill your father refused to see me, but I managed to get hold of Victor Stone, who gave me your address and the name you are using. He seemed rather reluctant to do so, and I gathered that even he, like everyone else in this poisonous town, still believes that you have misbehaved yourself in some way. I think the theory that you and I eloped together has been dropped, but you must, they feel, have done SOMETHING scandalous. A young woman has left home suddenly, therefore there must be a man in the case; that is how the provincial mind works, you see. I need not tell you that I have been contradicting the whole story with the utmost

vigour. You will be glad to hear that I managed to corner that disgusting hag, Mrs Semprill, and give her a piece of my mind; and I assure you that a piece of MY mind is distinctly formidable. But the woman is simply sub-human. I could get nothing out of her except hypocritical snivellings about 'poor, POOR Dorothy'.

I hear that your father misses you very much, and would gladly have you home again if it were not for the scandal. His meals are never punctual nowadays, it seems. He gives it out that you 'went away to recuperate from a slight illness and have now got an excellent post at a girls' school'. You will be surprised to hear of one thing that has happened to him. He has been obliged to pay off all his debts! I am told that the tradesmen rose in a body and held what was practically a creditors' meeting in the Rectory. Not the kind of thing that could have happened at Plumstead Episcopi — but these are democratic days, alas! You, evidently, were the only person who could keep the tradesmen permanently at bay.

And now I must tell you some of my own news, etc., etc., etc.

At this point Dorothy tore the letter up in disappointment and even in annoyance. He might have shown a little more sympathy! she thought. It was just like Mr Warburton after getting her into serious trouble — for after all, he was principally to blame for what had happened — to be so flippant and unconcerned about it. But when she had thought it over she acquitted him of heartlessness. He had done what little was possible to help her, and he could not be expected to pity her for troubles of which he had not heard. Besides, his own life had been a series of resounding scandals; probably he could not understand that to a woman a scandal is a serious matter.

At Christmas Dorothy's father also wrote, and what was more, sent her a Christmas present of two pounds. It was evident from the tone of his letter that he had forgiven Dorothy by this time. WHAT exactly he had forgiven her was not certain, because it was not certain what exactly she had done; but still, he had forgiven her. The letter started with some perfunctory but quite friendly inquiries. He hoped her new job suited her, he wrote. And were her rooms at the school comfortable and the rest of the staff congenial? He had heard that they did one very well at schools nowadays — very different from what it had been forty years ago. Now, in his day, etc., etc., etc.

He had, Dorothy perceived, not the dimmest idea of her present circumstances. At the mention of schools his mind flew to Winchester, his old school; such a place as Ringwood House was beyond his imagining.

The rest of the letter was taken up with grumblings about the way things were going in the parish. The Rector complained of being worried and overworked. The wretched churchwardens kept bothering him with this and that, and he was growing very tired of Proggett's reports about the collapsing belfry, and the daily woman whom he had engaged to help Ellen was a great nuisance and had put her broom-handle through the face of the grandfather clock in his study — and so on, and so forth, for a number of pages. He said several times in a mumbling roundabout way that he wished Dorothy were there to help him; but he did not actually suggest that she should come home. Evidently it was still necessary that she should remain out of sight and out of mind — a skeleton in a distant and well-locked cupboard.

The letter filled Dorothy with sudden painful homesickness. She found herself pining to be back at her parish visiting and her Girl Guides' cooking class, and wondering unhappily how her father had got on without her all this while and whether those two women were looking after him properly. She was fond of her father, in a way that she had never dared to show; for he was not a person to whom you could make any display of affection. It surprised and rather shocked her to realize how little he had been in her thoughts during the past four months. There had been periods of weeks at a time when she had forgotten his existence. But the truth was that the mere business of keeping body and soul together had left her with no leisure for other emotions.

Now, however, school work was over, and she had leisure and to spare, for though Mrs Creevy did her best she could not invent enough household jobs to keep Dorothy busy for more than part of the day. She made it quite plain to Dorothy that during the holidays she was nothing but a useless expense, and she watched her at her meals (obviously feeling it an outrage that she should eat when she wasn't working) in a way that finally became unbearable. So Dorothy kept out of the house as much as possible, and, feeling fairly rich

with her wages (four pounds ten, for nine weeks) and her father's two pounds, she took to buying sandwiches at the ham and beef shop in the town and eating her dinner out of doors. Mrs Creevy acquiesced, half sulkily because she liked to have Dorothy in the house to nag at her, and half pleased at the chance of skimping a few more meals.

Dorothy went for long solitary walks, exploring Southbridge and its yet more desolate neighbours, Dorley, Wembridge, and West Holton. Winter had descended, dank and windless, and more gloomy in those colourless labyrinthine suburbs than in the bleakest wilderness. On two or three occasions, though such extravagance would probably mean hungry days later on, Dorothy took a cheap return ticket to Iver Heath or Burnham Beeches. The woods were sodden and wintry, with great beds of drifted beech leaves that glowed like copper in the still, wet air, and the days were so mild that you could sit out of doors and read if you kept your gloves on. On Christmas Eve Mrs Creevy produced some sprigs of holly that she had saved from last year, dusted them, and nailed them up; but she did not, she said, intend to have a Christmas dinner. She didn't hold with all this Christmas nonsense, she said — it was just a lot of humbug got up by the shopkeepers, and such an unnecessary expense; and she hated turkey and Christmas pudding anyway. Dorothy was relieved; a Christmas dinner in that joyless 'morning-room' (she had an awful momentary vision of Mrs Creevy in a paper hat out of a cracker) was something that didn't bear thinking about. She ate her Christmas dinner — a hard-boiled egg, two cheese sandwiches, and a bottle of lemonade — in the woods near Burnham, against a great gnarled beech tree, over a copy of George Gissing's The Odd Women.

On days when it was too wet to go for walks she spent most of her time in the public library — becoming, indeed, one of the regular habituees of the library, along with the out-of-work men who sat drearily musing over illustrated papers which they did not read, and the elderly discoloured bachelor who lived in 'rooms' on two pounds a week and came to the library to study books on yachting by the hour together. It had been a great relief to her when the term ended, but this feeling soon wore off; indeed, with never a soul to talk to, the

days dragged even more heavily than before. There is perhaps no quarter of the inhabited world where one can be quite so completely alone as in the London suburbs. In a big town the throng and bustle give one at least the illusion of companionship, and in the country everyone is interested in everyone else — too much so, indeed. But in places like Southbridge, if you have no family and no home to call your own, you could spend half a lifetime without managing to make a friend. There are women in such places, and especially derelict gentlewomen in ill-paid jobs, who go for years upon end in almost utter solitude. It was not long before Dorothy found herself in a perpetually low-spirited, jaded state in which, try as she would, nothing seemed able to interest her. And it was in the hateful ennui of this time — the corrupting ennui that lies in wait for every modern soul — that she first came to a full understanding of what it meant to have lost her faith.

She tried drugging herself with books, and it succeeded for a week or so. But after a while very nearly all books seemed wearisome and unintelligible; for the mind will not work to any purpose when it is quite alone. In the end she found that she could not cope with anything more difficult than a detective story. She took walks of ten and fifteen miles, trying to tire herself into a better mood; but the mean suburban roads, and the damp, miry paths through the woods, the naked trees, the sodden moss and great spongy fungi, afflicted her with a deadly melancholy. It was human companionship that she needed, and there seemed no way of getting it. At nights' when she walked back to the school and looked at the warm-lit windows of the houses, and heard voices laughing and gramophones playing within, her heart swelled with envy. Ah, to be like those people in there — to have at least a home, a family, a few friends who were interested in you! There were days when she pined for the courage to speak to strangers in the street. Days, too, when she contemplated shamming piety in order to scrape acquaintance with the Vicar of St George's and his family, and perhaps get the chance of occupying herself with a little parish work; days, even, when she was so desperate that she thought of joining the Y.W.C.A.

But almost at the end of the holidays, through a chance encounter at the library, she made friends with a little woman named Miss

Beaver, who was geography mistress at Toot's Commercial College, another of the private schools in Southbridge. Toot's Commerical College was a much larger and more pretentious school than Ringwood House — it had about a hundred and fifty day-pupils of both sexes and even rose to the dignity of having a dozen boarders — and its curriculum was a somewhat less blatant swindle. It was one of those schools that are aimed at the type of parent who blathers about 'up-to-date business training', and its watch-word was Efficiency; meaning a tremendous parade of hustling, and the banishment of all humane studies. One of its features was a kind of catechism called the Efficiency Ritual, which all the children were required to learn by heart as soon as they joined the school. It had questions and answers such as:

Q. What is the secret of success? A. The secret of success is efficiency. Q. What is the test of efficiency? A. The test of efficiency is success.

And so on and so on. It was said that the spectacle of the whole school, boys and girls together, reciting the Efficiency Ritual under the leadership of the Headmaster — they had this ceremony two mornings a week instead of prayers — was most impressive.

Miss Beaver was a prim little woman with a round body, a thin face, a reddish nose, and the gait of a guinea-hen. After twenty years of slave-driving she had attained to an income of four pounds a week and the privilege of 'living out' instead of having to put the boarders to bed at nights. She lived in 'rooms' — that is, in a bed-sitting room — to which she was sometimes able to invite Dorothy when both of them had a free evening. How Dorothy looked forward to those visits! They were only possible at rare intervals, because Miss Beaver's landlady 'didn't approve of visitors', and even when you got there there was nothing much to do except to help solve the crossword puzzle out of the Daily Telegraph and look at the photographs Miss Beaver had taken on her trip (this trip had been the summit and glory of her life) to the Austrian Tyrol in 1913. But still, how much it meant to sit talking to somebody in a friendly way and to drink a cup of tea less wishy-washy than Mrs Creevy's! Miss Beaver had a spirit lamp in a japanned travelling case (it had been with her to the Tyrol in 1913) on which she brewed herself pots of

tea as black as coal-tar, swallowing about a bucketful of this stuff during the day. She confided to Dorothy that she always took a Thermos flask to school and had a nice hot cup of tea during the break and another after dinner. Dorothy perceived that by one of two well-beaten roads every third-rate schoolmistress must travel: Miss Strong's road, via whisky to the workhouse; or Miss Beaver's road, via strong tea to a decent death in the Home for Decayed Gentlewomen.

Miss Beaver was in truth a dull little woman. She was a memento mori, or rather memento senescere, to Dorothy. Her soul seemed to have withered until it was as forlorn as a dried-up cake of soap in a forgotten soap dish. She had come to a point where life in a bed-sitting room under a tyrannous landlady and the 'efficient' thrusting of Commercial Geography down children's retching throats, were almost the only destiny she could imagine. Yet Dorothy grew to be very fond of Miss Beaver, and those occasional hours that they spent together in the bed-sitting room, doing the Daily Telegraph crossword over a nice hot cup of tea, were like oases in her life.

She was glad when the Easter term began, for even the daily round of slave-driving was better than the empty solitude of the holidays. Moreover, the girls were much better in hand this term; she never again found it necessary to smack their heads. For she had grasped now that it is easy enough to keep children in order if you are ruthless with them from the start. Last term the girls had behaved badly, because she had started by treating them as human beings, and later on, when the lessons that interested them were discontinued, they had rebelled like human beings. But if you are obliged to teach children rubbish, you mustn't treat them as human beings. You must treat them like animals — driving, not persuading. Before all else, you must teach them that it is more painful to rebel than to obey. Possibly this kind of treatment is not very good for children, but there is no doubt they understand it and respond to it.

She learned the dismal arts of the school-teacher. She learned to glaze her mind against the interminable boring hours, to economize her nervous energy, to be merciless and ever-vigilant, to take a kind of pride and pleasure in seeing a futile rigmarole well done. She had grown, quite suddenly it seemed, much tougher and maturer. Her

eyes had lost the half-childish look that they had once had, and her face had grown thinner, making her nose seem longer. At times it was quite definitely a schoolmarm's face; you could imagine pince-nez upon it. But she had not become cynical as yet. She still knew that these children were the victims of a dreary swindle, still longed, if it had been possible, to do something better for them. If she harried them and stuffed their heads with rubbish, it was for one reason alone: because whatever happened she had got to keep her job.

There was very little noise in the schoolroom this term. Mrs Creevy, anxious as she always was for a chance of finding fault, seldom had reason to rap on the wall with her broom-handle. One morning at breakfast she looked rather hard at Dorothy, as though weighing a decision, and then pushed the dish of marmalade across the table.

'Have some marmalade if you like, Miss Millborough,' she said, quite graciously for her.

It was the first time that marmalade had crossed Dorothy's lips since she had come to Ringwood House. She flushed slightly. 'So the woman realizes that I have done my best for her,' she could not help thinking.

Thereafter she had marmalade for breakfast every morning. And in other ways Mrs Creevy's manner became — not indeed, genial, for it could never be that, but less brutally offensive. There were even times when she produced a grimace that was intended for a smile; her face, it seemed to Dorothy, CREASED with the effort. About this time her conversation became peppered with references to 'next term'. It was always 'Next term we'll do this', and 'Next term I shall want you to do that', until Dorothy began to feel that she had won Mrs Creevy's confidence and was being treated more like a colleague than a slave. At that a small, unreasonable but very exciting hope took root in her heart. Perhaps Mrs Creevy was going to raise her wages! It was profoundly unlikely, and she tried to break herself of hoping for it, but could not quite succeed. If her wages were raised even half a crown a week, what a difference it would make!

The last day came. With any luck Mrs Creevy might pay her wages tomorrow, Dorothy thought. She wanted the money very badly indeed; she had been penniless for weeks past, and was not

only unbearably hungry, but also in need of some new stockings, for she had not a pair that were not darned almost out of existence. The following morning she did the household jobs allotted to her, and then, instead of going out, waited in the 'morning-room' while Mrs Creevy banged about with her broom and pan upstairs. Presently Mrs Creevy came down.

'Ah, so THERE you are, Miss Millborough!' she said in a peculiar meaning tone. 'I had a sort of an idea you wouldn't be in such a hurry to get out of doors this morning. Well, as you ARE here, I suppose I may as well pay you your wages.'

'Thank you,' said Dorothy.

'And after that,' added Mrs Creevy, 'I've got a little something as I want to say to you.'

Dorothy's heart stirred. Did that 'little something' mean the longed-for rise in wages? It was just conceivable. Mrs Creevy produced a worn, bulgy leather purse from a locked drawer in the dresser, opened it and licked her thumb.

'Twelve weeks and five days,' she said. 'Twelve weeks is near enough. No need to be particular to a day. That makes six pounds.'

She counted out five dingy pound notes and two ten-shilling notes; then, examining one of the notes and apparently finding it too clean, she put it back into her purse and fished out another that had been torn in half. She went to the dresser, got a piece of transparent sticky paper and carefully stuck the two halves together. Then she handed it, together with the other six, to Dorothy.

'There you are, Miss Millborough,' she said. 'And now, will you just leave the house AT once, please? I shan't be wanting you any longer.'

'You won't be— '

Dorothy's entrails seemed to have turned to ice. All the blood drained out of her face. But even now, in her terror and despair, she was not absolutely sure of the meaning of what had been said to her. She still half thought that Mrs Creevy merely meant that she was to stay out of the house for the rest of the day.

'You won't be wanting me any longer?' she repeated faintly.

'No. I'm getting in another teacher at the beginning of next term. And it isn't to be expected as I'd keep you through the holidays all

free for nothing, is it?'

'But you don't mean that you want me to LEAVE — that you're dismissing me?'

'Of course I do. What else did you think I meant?'

'But you've given me no notice!' said Dorothy.

'Notice!' said Mrs Creevy, getting angry immediately. 'What's it got to do with YOU whether I give you notice or not? You haven't got a written contract, have you?'

'No . . . I suppose not.'

'Well, then! You'd better go upstairs and start packing your box. It's no good your staying any longer, because I haven't got anything in for your dinner.'

Dorothy went upstairs and sat down on the side of the bed. She was trembling uncontrollably, and it was some minutes before she could collect her wits and begin packing. She felt dazed. The disaster that had fallen upon her was so sudden, so apparently causeless, that she had difficulty in believing that it had actually happened. But in truth the reason why Mrs Creevy had sacked her was quite simple and adequate.

Not far from Ringwood House there was a poor, moribund little school called The Gables, with only seven pupils. The teacher was an incompetent old hack called Miss Allcock, who had been at thirty-eight different schools in her life and was not fit to have charge of a tame canary. But Miss Allcock had one outstanding talent; she was very good at double-crossing her employers. In these third-rate and fourth-rate private schools a sort of piracy is constantly going on. Parents are 'got round' and pupils stolen from one school to another. Very often the treachery of the teacher is at the bottom of it. The teacher secretly approaches the parents one by one ('Send your child to me and I'll take her at ten shillings a term cheaper'), and when she has corrupted a sufficient number she suddenly deserts and 'sets up' on her own, or carries the children off to another school. Miss Allcock had succeeded in stealing three out of her employer's seven pupils, and had come to Mrs Creevy with the offer of them. In return, she was to have Dorothy's place and a fifteen-per-cent commission on the pupils she brought.

There were weeks of furtive chaffering before the bargain was

clinched, Miss Allcock being finally beaten down from fifteen per cent to twelve and a half. Mrs Creevy privately resolved to sack old Allcock the instant she was certain that the three children she brought with her would stay. Simultaneously, Miss Allcock was planning to begin stealing old Creevy's pupils as soon as she had got a footing in the school.

Having decided to sack Dorothy, it was obviously most important to prevent her from finding it out. For, of course, if she knew what was going to happen, she would begin stealing pupils on her own account, or at any rate wouldn't do a stroke of work for the rest of the term. (Mrs Creevy prided herself on knowing human nature.) Hence the marmalade, the creaky smiles, and the other ruses to allay Dorothy's suspicions. Anyone who knew the ropes would have begun thinking of another job the very moment when the dish of marmalade was pushed across the table.

Just half an hour after her sentence of dismissal, Dorothy, carrying her handbag, opened the front gate. It was the fourth of April, a bright blowy day, too cold to stand about in, with a sky as blue as a hedgesparrow's egg, and one of those spiteful spring winds that come tearing along the pavement in sudden gusts and blow dry, stinging dust into your face. Dorothy shut the gate behind her and began to walk very slowly in the direction of the main-line station.

She had told Mrs Creevy that she would give her an address to which her box could be sent, and Mrs Creevy had instantly exacted five shillings for the carriage. So Dorothy had five pounds fifteen in hand, which might keep her for three weeks with careful economy. What she was going to do, except that she must start by going to London and finding a suitable lodging, she had very little idea. But her first panic had worn off, and she realized that the situation was not altogether desperate. No doubt her father would help her, at any rate for a while, and at the worst, though she hated even the thought of doing it, she could ask her cousin's help a second time. Besides, her chances of finding a job were probably fairly good. She was young, she spoke with a genteel accent, and she was willing to drudge for a servant's wages — qualities that are much sought after by the proprietors of fourth-rate schools. Very likely all would be well. But that there was an evil time ahead of her, a time of job-

hunting, of uncertainty and possibly of hunger — that, at any rate, was certain.

CHAPTER 5

However, it turned out quite otherwise. For Dorothy had not gone five yards from the gate when a telegraph boy came riding up the street in the opposite direction, whistling and looking at the names of the houses. He saw the name Ringwood House, wheeled his bicycle round, propped it against the kerb, and accosted Dorothy.

'Miss Mill-BURROW live 'ere?' he said, jerking his head in the direction of Ringwood House.

'Yes. I am Miss Millborough.'

'Gotter wait case there's a answer,' said the boy, taking an orange-coloured envelope from his belt.

Dorothy put down her bag. She had once more begun trembling violently. And whether this was from joy or fear she was not certain, for two conflicting thoughts had sprung almost simultaneously into her brain. One, 'This is some kind of good news!' The other, 'Father is seriously ill!' She managed to tear the envelope open, and found a telegram which occupied two pages, and which she had the greatest difficulty in understanding. It ran:

Rejoice in the lord o ye righteous note of exclamation great news note of exclamation your reputation absolutely reestablished stop mrs semprill fallen into the pit that she hath digged stop action for libel stop no one believes her any longer stop your father wishes you return home immediately stop am coming up to town myself comma will pick you up if you like stop arriving shortly after this stop wait for me stop praise him with the loud cymbals note of exclamation much love stop.

No need to look at the signature. It was from Mr Warburton, of course. Dorothy felt weaker and more tremulous than ever. She was dimly aware the telegraph boy was asking her something.

'Any answer?' he said for the third or fourth time.

'Not today, thank you,' said Dorothy vaguely.

The boy remounted his bicycle and rode off, whistling with extra loudness to show Dorothy how much he despised her for not tipping him. But Dorothy was unaware of the telegraph's boy's scorn. The only phrase of the telegram that she had fully understood was 'your

father wishes you return home immediately', and the surprise of it had left her in a semi-dazed condition. For some indefinite time she stood on the pavement, until presently a taxi rolled up the street, with Mr Warburton inside it. He saw Dorothy, stopped the taxi, jumped out and came across to meet her, beaming. He seized her both hands.

'Hullo!' he cried, and at once threw his arm pseudo-paternally about her and drew her against him, heedless of who might be looking. 'How are you? But by Jove, how thin you've got! I can feel all your ribs. Where is this school of yours?'

Dorothy, who had not yet managed to get free of his arm, turned partly round and cast a glance towards the dark windows of Ringwood House.

'What! That place? Good God, what a hole! What have you done with your luggage?'

'It's inside. I've left them the money to send it on. I think it'll be all right.'

'Oh, nonsense! Why pay? We'll take it with us. It can go on top of the taxi.'

'No, no! Let them send it. I daren't go back. Mrs Creevy would be horribly angry.'

'Mrs Creevy? Who's Mrs Creevy?'

'The headmistress — at least, she owns the school.'

'What, a dragon, is she? Leave her to me — I'll deal with her. Perseus and the Gorgon, what? You are Andromeda. Hi!' he called to the taxi-driver.

The two of them went up to the front door and Mr Warburton knocked. Somehow, Dorothy never believed that they would succeed in getting her box from Mrs Creevy. In fact, she half expected to see them come out flying for their lives, and Mrs Creevy after them with her broom. However, in a couple of minutes they reappeared, the taxi- driver carrying the box on his shoulder. Mr Warburton handed Dorothy into the taxi and, as they sat down, dropped half a crown into her hand.

'What a woman! What a woman!' he said comprehensively as the taxi bore them away. 'How the devil have you put up with it all this time?'

'What is this?' said Dorothy, looking at the coin.

‘Your half-crown that you left to pay for the luggage. Rather a feat getting it out of the old girl, wasn’t it?’

‘But I left five shillings!’ said Dorothy.

‘What! The woman told me you only left half a crown. By God, what impudence! We’ll go back and have the half-crown out of her. Just to spite her!’ He tapped on the glass.

‘No, no!’ said Dorothy, laying her hand on his arm. ‘It doesn’t matter in the least. Let’s get away from here — right away. I couldn’t bear to go back to that place again — EVER!’

It was quite true. She felt that she would sacrifice not merely half a crown, but all the money in her possession, sooner than set eyes on Ringwood House again. So they drove on, leaving Mrs Creevy victorious. It would be interesting to know whether this was another of the occasions when Mrs Creevy laughed.

Mr Warburton insisted on taking the taxi the whole way into London, and talked so voluminously in the quieter patches of the traffic that Dorothy could hardly get a word in edgeways. It was not till they had reached the inner suburbs that she got from him an explanation of the sudden change in her fortunes.

‘Tell me,’ she said, ‘what is it that’s happened? I don’t understand. Why is it all right for me to go home all of a sudden? Why don’t people believe Mrs Semprill any longer? Surely she hasn’t confessed?’

‘Confessed? Not she! But her sins have found her out, all the same. It was the kind of thing that you pious people would ascribe to the finger of Providence. Cast thy bread upon the waters, and all that. She got herself into a nasty mess — an action for libel. We’ve talked of nothing else in Knype Hill for the last fortnight. I though you would have seen something about it in the newspapers.’

‘I’ve hardly looked at a paper for ages. Who brought an action for libel? Not my father, surely?’

‘Good gracious, no! Clergymen can’t bring actions for libel. It was the bank manager. Do you remember her favourite story about him — how he was keeping a woman on the bank’s money, and so forth?’

‘Yes, I think so.’

‘A few months ago she was foolish enough to put some of it in

writing. Some kind friend — some female friend, I presume — took the letter round to the bank manager. He brought an action — Mrs Semprill was ordered to pay a hundred and fifty pounds damages. I don't suppose she paid a halfpenny, but still, that's the end of her career as a scandalmonger. You can go on blackening people's reputations for years, and everyone will believe you, more or less, even when it's perfectly obvious that you're lying. But once you've been proved a liar in open court, you're disqualified, so to speak. Mrs Semprill's done for, so far as Knype Hill goes. She left the town between days — practically did a moonlight flit, in fact. I believe she's inflicting herself on Bury St Edmunds at present.'

'But what has all that got to do with the things she said about you and me?'

'Nothing — nothing whatever. But why worry? The point is that you're reinstated; and all the hags who've been smacking their chops over you for months past are saying, "Poor, poor Dorothy, how SHOCKINGLY that dreadful woman has treated her!"'

'You mean they think that because Mrs Semprill was telling lies in one case she must have been telling lies in another?'

'No doubt that's what they'd say if they were capable of reasoning it out. At any rate, Mrs Semprill's in disgrace, and so all the people she's slandered must be martyrs. Even MY reputation is practically spotless for the time being.'

'And do you think that's really the end of it? Do you think they honestly believe that it was all an accident — that I only lost my memory and didn't elope with anybody?'

'Oh, well, I wouldn't go as far as that. In these country places there's always a certain amount of suspicion knocking about. Not suspicion of anything in particular, you know; just generalized suspicion. A sort of instinctive rustic dirty-mindedness. I can imagine its being vaguely rumoured in the bar parlour of the Dog and Bottle in ten years' time that you've got some nasty secret in your past, only nobody can remember what. Still, your troubles are over. If I were you I wouldn't give any explanations till you're asked for them. The official theory is that you had a bad attack of flu and went away to recuperate. I should stick to that. You'll find they'll accept it all right. Officially, there's nothing against you.

Presently they got to London, and Mr Warburton took Dorothy to lunch at a restaurant in Coventry Street, where they had a young chicken, roasted, with asparagus and tiny, pearly-white potatoes that had been ripped untimely from their mother earth, and also treacle tart and a nice warm bottle of Burgundy; but what gave Dorothy the most pleasure of all, after Mrs Creevy's lukewarm water tea, was the black coffee they had afterwards. After lunch they took another taxi to Liverpool Street Station and caught the 2.45. It was a four-hour journey to Knype Hill.

Mr Warburton insisted on travelling first-class, and would not hear of Dorothy paying her own fare; he also, when Dorothy was not looking, tipped the guard to let them have a carriage to themselves. It was one of those bright cold days which are spring or winter according as you are indoors or out. From behind the shut windows of the carriage the too-blue sky looked warm and kind, and all the slummy wilderness through which the train was rattling — the labyrinths of little dingy-coloured houses, the great chaotic factories, the miry canals, and derelict building lots littered with rusty boilers and overgrown by smoke-blackened weeds — all were redeemed and gilded by the sun. Dorothy hardly spoke for the first half-hour of the journey. For the moment she was too happy to talk. She did not even think of anything in particular, but merely sat there luxuriating in the glass-filtered sunlight, in the comfort of the padded seat and the feeling of having escaped from Mrs Creevy's clutches. But she was aware that this mood could not last very much longer. Her contentment, like the warmth of the wine that she had drunk at lunch, was ebbing away, and thoughts either painful or difficult to express were taking shape in her mind. Mr Warburton had been watching her face, more observantly than was usual for him, as though trying to gauge the changes that the past eight months had worked in her.

'You look older,' he said finally.

'I am older,' said Dorothy.

'Yes; but you look — well, more completely grown up. Tougher. Something has changed in your face. You look — if you'll forgive the expression — as though the Girl Guide had been exorcized from you for good and all. I hope seven devils haven't entered into you instead?' Dorothy did not answer, and he added: 'I suppose, as a

matter of fact, you must have had the very devil of a time?'

'Oh, beastly! Sometimes too beastly for words. Do you know that sometimes— '

She paused. She had been about to tell him how she had had to beg for her food; how she had slept in the streets; how she had been arrested for begging and spent a night in the police cells; how Mrs Creevy had nagged at her and starved her. But she stopped, because she had suddenly realized that these were not the things that she wanted to talk about. Such things as these, she perceived, are of no real importance; they are mere irrelevant accidents, not essentially different from catching a cold in the head or having to wait two hours at a railway junction. They are disagreeable, but they do not matter. The truism that all real happenings are in the mind struck her more forcibly than ever before, and she said:

'Those things don't really matter. I mean, things like having no money and not having enough to eat. Even when you're practically starving — it doesn't CHANGE anything inside you.'

'Doesn't it? I'll take your word for it. I should be very sorry to try.'

'Oh, well, it's beastly while it's happening, of course; but it doesn't make any real difference; it's the things that happen inside you that matter.'

'Meaning?' said Mr Warburton.

'Oh — things change in your mind. And then the whole world changes, because you look at it differently.'

She was still looking out of the window. The train had drawn clear of the eastern slums and was running at gathering speed past willow-bordered streams and low-lying meadows upon whose hedges the first buds made a faint soft greenness, like a cloud. In a field near the line a month-old calf, flat as a Noah's Ark animal, was bounding stiff-legged after its mother, and in a cottage garden an old labourer, with slow, rheumatic movements, was turning over the soil beneath a pear tree covered with ghostly bloom. His spade flashed in the sun as the train passed. The depressing hymn-line 'Change and decay in all around I see' moved through Dorothy's mind. It was true what she had said just now. Something had happened in her heart, and the world was a little emptier, a little poorer from that minute.

On such a day as this, last spring or any earlier spring, how joyfully, and how unthinkingly, she would have thanked God for the first blue skies and the first flowers of the reviving year! And now, seemingly, there was no God to thank, and nothing — not a flower or a stone or a blade of grass — nothing in the universe would ever be the same again.

'Things change in your mind,' she repeated. 'I've lost my faith,' she added, somewhat abruptly, because she found herself half ashamed to utter the words.

'You've lost your WHAT?' said Mr Warburton, less accustomed than she to this kind of phraseology.

'My faith. Oh, you know what I mean! A few months ago, all of a sudden, it seemed as if my whole mind had changed. Everything that I'd believed in till then — everything — seemed suddenly meaningless and almost silly. God — what I'd meant by God — immortal life, Heaven and Hell — everything. It had all gone. And it wasn't that I'd reasoned it out; it just happened to me. It was like when you're a child, and one day, for no particular reason, you stop believing in fairies. I just couldn't go on believing in it any longer.'

'You never did believe in it,' said Mr Warburton unconcernedly.

'But I did, really I did! I know you always thought I didn't — you thought I was just pretending because I was ashamed to own up. But it wasn't that at all. I believed it just as I believe that I'm sitting in this carriage.'

'Of course you didn't, my poor child! How could you, at your age? You were far too intelligent for that. But you'd been brought up in these absurd beliefs, and you'd allowed yourself to go on thinking, in a sort of way, that you could still swallow them. You'd built yourself a life-pattern — if you'll excuse a bit of psychological jargon — that was only possible for a believer, and naturally it was beginning to be a strain on you. In fact, it was obvious all the time what was the matter with you. I should say that in all probability that was why you lost your memory.'

'What do you mean?' she said, rather puzzled by this remark.

He saw that she did not understand, and explained to her that loss of memory is only a device, unconsciously used, to escape from an impossible situation. The mind, he said, will play curious tricks when

it is in a tight corner. Dorothy had never heard of anything of this kind before, and she could not at first accept his explanation. Nevertheless she considered it for a moment, and perceived that, even if it were true, it did not alter the fundamental fact.

'I don't see that it makes any difference,' she said finally.

'Doesn't it? I should have said it made a considerable difference.'

'But don't you see, if my faith is gone, what does it matter whether I've only lost it now or whether I'd really lost it years ago? All that matters is that it's gone, and I've got to begin my life all over again.'

'Surely I don't take you to mean,' said Mr Warburton, 'that you actually REGRET losing your faith, as you call it? One might as well regret losing a goitre. Mind you, I'm speaking, as it were, without the book — as a man who never had very much faith to lose. The little I had passed away quite painlessly at the age of nine. But it's hardly the kind of thing I should have thought anyone would REGRET losing. Used you not, if I remember rightly, to do horrible things like getting up at five in the morning to go to Holy Communion on an empty belly? Surely you're not homesick for that kind of thing?'

'I don't believe in it any longer, if that's what you mean. And I see now that a lot of it was rather silly. But that doesn't help. The point is that all the beliefs I had are gone, and I've nothing to put in their place.'

'But good God! why do you want to put anything in their place? You've got rid of a load of superstitious rubbish, and you ought to be glad of it. Surely it doesn't make you any happier to go about quaking in fear of Hell fire?'

'But don't you see — you must see — how different everything is when all of a sudden the whole world is empty?'

'Empty?' exclaimed Mr Warburton. 'What do you mean by saying it's empty? I call that perfectly scandalous in a girl of your age. It's not empty at all, it's a deuced sight too full, that's the trouble with it. We're here today and gone tomorrow, and we've no time to enjoy what we've got.'

'But how CAN one enjoy anything when all the meaning's been taken out of it?'

'Good gracious! What do you want with a meaning? When I eat

my dinner I don't do it to the greater glory of God; I do it because I enjoy it. The world's full of amusing things — books, pictures, wine, travel, friends — everything. I've never seen any meaning in it all, and I don't want to see one. Why not take life as you find it?'

'But— '

She broke off, for she saw already that she was wasting words in trying to make herself clear to him. He was quite incapable of understanding her difficulty — incapable of realizing how a mind naturally pious must recoil from a world discovered to be meaningless. Even the loathsome platitudes of the pantheists would be beyond his understanding. Probably the idea that life was essentially futile, if he thought of it at all, struck him as rather amusing than otherwise. And yet with all this he was sufficiently acute. He could see the difficulty of her own particular position, and he adverted to it a moment later.

'Of course,' he said, 'I can see that things are going to be a little awkward for you when you get home. You're going to be, so to speak, a wolf in sheep's clothing. Parish work — Mothers' Meetings, prayers with the dying, and all that — I suppose it might be a little distasteful at times. Are you afraid you won't be able to keep it up — is that the trouble?'

'Oh, no. I wasn't thinking of that. I shall go on with it, just the same as before. It's what I'm most used to. Besides, Father needs my help. He can't afford a curate, and the work's got to be done.'

'Then what's the matter? Is it the hypocrisy that's worrying you? Afraid that the consecrated bread might stick in your throat, and so forth? I shouldn't trouble. Half the parsons' daughters in England are probably in the same difficulty. And quite nine-tenths of the parsons, I should say.'

'It's partly that. I shall have to be always pretending — oh, you can't imagine in what ways! But that's not the worst. Perhaps that part of it doesn't matter, really. Perhaps it's better to be a hypocrite — THAT kind of hypocrite — than some things.'

'Why do you say THAT kind of hypocrite? I hope you don't mean that pretending to believe is the next best thing to believing?'

'Yes . . . I suppose that's what I do mean. Perhaps it's better — less selfish — to pretend one believes even when one doesn't, than to

say openly that one's an unbeliever and perhaps help turn other people into unbelievers too.'

'My dear Dorothy,' said Mr Warburton, 'your mind, if you'll excuse my saying so, is in a morbid condition. No, dash it! it's worse than morbid; it's downright septic. You've a sort of mental gangrene hanging over from your Christian upbringing. You tell me that you've got rid of these ridiculous beliefs that were stuffed into you from your cradle upwards, and yet you're taking an attitude to life which is simply meaningless without those beliefs. Do you call that reasonable?'

'I don't know. No perhaps it's not. But I suppose it's what comes naturally to me.'

'What you're trying to do, apparently,' pursued Mr Warburton, 'is to make the worst of both worlds. You stick to the Christian scheme of things, but you leave Paradise out of it. And I suppose, if the truth were known, there are quite a lot of your kind wandering about among the ruins of C. of E. You're practically a sect in yourselves,' he added reflectively: 'the Anglican Atheists. Not a sect I should care to belong to, I must say.'

They talked for a little while longer, but not to much purpose. In reality the whole subject of religious belief and religious doubt was boring and incomprehensible to Mr Warburton. Its only appeal to him was as a pretext for blasphemy. Presently he changed the subject, as though giving up the attempt to understand Dorothy's outlook.

'This is nonsense that we're talking,' he said. 'You've got hold of some very depressing ideas, but you'll grow out of them later on, you know. Christianity isn't really an incurable disease. However, there was something quite different that I was going to say to you. I want you to listen to me for a moment. You're coming home, after being away eight months, to what I expect you realize is a rather uncomfortable situation. You had a hard enough life before — at least, what I should call a hard life — and now that you aren't quite such a good Girl Guide as you used to be, it's going to be a great deal harder. Now, do you think it's absolutely necessary to go back to it?'

'But I don't see what else I can do, unless I could get another job.

I've really no alternative.'

Mr Warburton, with his head cocked a little on one side, gave Dorothy a rather curious look.

'As a matter of fact,' he said, in a more serious tone than usual, 'there's at least one other alternative that I could suggest to you.'

'You mean that I could go on being a schoolmistress? Perhaps that's what I ought to do, really. I shall come back to it in the end, in any case.'

'No. I don't think that's what I should advise.'

All this time Mr Warburton, unwilling as ever to expose his baldness, had been wearing his rakish, rather broad-brimmed grey felt hat. Now, however, he took it off and laid it carefully on the empty seat beside him. His naked cranium, with only a wisp or two of golden hair lingering in the neighbourhood of the ears, looked like some monstrous pink pearl. Dorothy watched him with a slight surprise.

'I am taking my hat off,' he said, 'in order to let you see me at my very worst. You will understand why in a moment. Now, let me offer you another alternative besides going back to your Girl Guides and your Mothers' Union, or imprisoning yourself in some dungeon of a girls' school.'

'What do you mean?' said Dorothy.

'I mean, will you — think well before you answer; I admit there are some very obvious objections, but — will you marry me?'

Dorothy's lips parted with surprise. Perhaps she turned a little paler. With a hasty, almost unconscious recoil she moved as far away from him as the back of the seat would allow. But he had made no movement towards her. He said with complete equanimity:

'You know, of course, that Dolores [Dolores was Mr Warburton's ex- mistress] left me a year ago?'

'But I can't, I can't!' exclaimed Dorothy. 'You know I can't! I'm not — like that. I thought you always knew. I shan't ever marry.'

Mr Warburton ignored this remark.

'I grant you,' he said, still with exemplary calmness, 'that I don't exactly come under the heading of eligible young men. I am somewhat older than you. We both seem to be putting our cards on the table today, so I'll let you into a great secret and tell you that my

age is forty-nine. And then I've three children and a bad reputation. It's a marriage that your father would — well, regard with disfavour. And my income is only seven hundred a year. But still, don't you think it's worth considering!'

'I can't, you know why I can't!' repeated Dorothy.

She took it for granted that he 'knew why she couldn't', though she had never explained to him, or to anyone else, why it was impossible for her to marry. Very probably, even if she had explained, he would not have understood her. He went on speaking, not appearing to notice what she had said.

'Let me put it to you', he said, 'in the form of a bargain. Of course, I needn't tell you that it's a great deal more than that. I'm not a marrying kind of man, as the saying goes, and I shouldn't ask you to marry me if you hadn't a rather special attraction for me. But let me put the business side of it first. You need a home and a livelihood; I need a wife to keep me in order. I'm sick of these disgusting women I've spent my life with, if you'll forgive my mentioning them, and I'm rather anxious to settle down. A bit late in the day, perhaps, but better late than never. Besides, I need somebody to look after the children; the BASTARDS, you know. I don't expect you to find me overwhelmingly attractive,' he added, running a hand reflectively over his bald crown, 'but on the other hand I am very easy to get on with. Immoral people usually are, as a matter of fact. And from your own point of view the scheme would have certain advantages. Why should you spend your life delivering parish magazines and rubbing nasty old women's legs with Elliman's embrocation? You would be happier married, even to a husband with a bald head and a clouded past. You've had a hard, dull life for a girl of your age, and your future isn't exactly rosy. Have you really considered what your future will be like if you don't marry?'

'I don't know. I have to some extent,' she said.

As he had not attempted to lay hands on her or to offer any endearments, she answered his question without repeating her previous refusal. He looked out of the window, and went on in a musing voice, much quieter than his normal tone, so that at first she could barely hear him above the rattle of the train; but presently his voice rose, and took on a note of seriousness that she had never heard

in it before, or even imagined that it could hold.

'Consider what your future would be like,' he repeated. 'It's the same future that lies before any woman of your class with no husband and no money. Let us say your father will live another ten years. By the end of that time the last penny of his money will have gone down the sink. The desire to squander it will keep him alive just as long as it lasts, and probably no longer. All that time he will be growing more senile, more tiresome, more impossible to live with; he will tyrannize over you more and more, keep you shorter and shorter of money, make more and more trouble for you with the neighbours and the tradesmen. And you will go on with that slavish, worrying life that you have lived, struggling to make both ends meet, drilling the Girl Guides, reading novels to the Mothers' Union, polishing the altar brasses, cadging money for the organ fund, making brown paper jackboots for the schoolchildren's plays, keeping your end up in the vile little feuds and scandals of the church hen-coop. Year after year, winter and summer, you will bicycle from one reeking cottage to another, to dole out pennies from the poor box and repeat prayers that you don't even believe in any longer. You will sit through interminable church services which in the end will make you physically sick with their sameness and futility. Every year your life will be a little bleaker, a little fuller of those deadly little jobs that are shoved off on to lonely women. And remember that you won't always be twenty-eight. All the while you will be fading, withering, until one morning you will look in the glass and realize that you aren't a girl any longer, only a skinny old maid. You'll fight against it, of course. You'll keep your physical energy and your girlish mannerisms — you'll keep them just a little bit too long. Do you know that type of bright — too bright — spinster who says "topping" and "ripping" and "right-ho", and prides herself on being such a good sport, and she's such a good sport that she makes everyone feel a little unwell? And she's so splendidly hearty at tennis and so handy at amateur theatricals, and she throws herself with a kind of desperation into her Girl Guide work and her parish visiting, and she's the life and soul of Church socials, and always, year after year, she thinks of herself as a young girl still and never realizes that behind her back everyone laughs at her for a poor, disappointed old

maid? That's what you'll become, what you must become, however much you foresee it and try to avoid it. There's no other future possible to you unless you marry. Women who don't marry wither up — they wither up like aspidistras in back-parlour windows; and the devilish thing is that they don't even know that they're withering.'

Dorothy sat silent and listening with intent and horrified fascination. She did not even notice that he had stood up, with one hand on the door to steady him against the swaying of the train. She was as though hypnotized, not so much by his voice as by the visions that his words had evoked in her. He had described her life, as it must inevitably be, with such dreadful fidelity that he seemed actually to have carried her ten years onward into the menacing future, and she felt herself no longer a girl full of youth and energy, but a desperate, worn virgin of thirty-eight. As he went on he took her hand, which was lying idle on the arm of the seat; and even that she scarcely noticed.

'After ten years,' he continued, 'your father will die, and he will leave you with not a penny, only debts. You will be nearly forty, with no money, no profession, no chance of marrying; just a derelict parson's daughter like the ten thousand others in England. And after that, what do you suppose will become of you? You will have to find yourself a job — the sort of job that parsons' daughters get. A nursery governess, for instance, or companion to some diseased hag who will occupy herself in thinking of ways to humiliate you. Or you will go back to school-teaching; English mistress in some grisly girls' school, seventy-five pounds a year and your keep, and a fortnight in a seaside boarding-house every August. And all the time withering, drying up, growing more sour and more angular and more friendless. And therefore— '

As he said 'therefore' he pulled Dorothy to her feet. She made no resistance. His voice had put her under a spell. As her mind took in the prospect of that forbidding future, whose emptiness she was far more able to appreciate than he, such a despair had grown in her that if she had spoken at all it would have been to say, 'Yes, I will marry you.' He put his arm very gently about her and drew her a little towards him, and even now she did not attempt to resist. Her eyes,

half hypnotized, were fixed upon his. When he put his arm about her it was as though he were protecting her, sheltering her, drawing her away from the brink of grey, deadly poverty and back to the world of friendly and desirable things — to security and ease, to comely houses and good clothes, to books and friends and flowers, to summer days and distant lands. So for nearly a minute the fat, debauched bachelor and the thin, spinsterish girl stood face to face, their eyes meeting, their bodies all but touching, while the train swayed them in its motion, and clouds and telegraph poles and bud-misted hedges and fields green with young wheat raced past unseen.

Mr Warburton tightened his grip and pulled her against him. It broke the spell. The visions that had held her helpless — visions of poverty and of escape from poverty — suddenly vanished and left only a shocked realization of what was happening to her. She was in the arms of a man — a fattish, oldish man! A wave of disgust and deadly fear went through her, and her entrails seemed to shrink and freeze. His thick male body was pressing her backwards and downwards, his large, pink face, smooth, but to her eyes old, was bearing down upon her own. The harsh odour of maleness forced itself into her nostrils. She recoiled. Furry thighs of satyrs! She began to struggle furiously, though indeed he made hardly any effort to retain her, and in a moment she had wrenched herself free and fallen back into her seat, white and trembling. She looked up at him with eyes which, from fear and aversion, were for a moment those of a stranger.

Mr Warburton remained on his feet, regarding her with an expression of resigned, almost amused disappointment. He did not seem in the least distressed. As her calmness returned to her she perceived that all he had said had been no more than a trick to play upon her feelings and cajole her into saying that she would marry him; and what was stranger yet, that he had said it without seriously caring whether she married him or not. He had, in fact, merely been amusing himself. Very probably the whole thing was only another of his periodical attempts to seduce her.

He sat down, but more deliberately than she, taking care of the creases of his trousers as he did so.

‘If you want to pull the communication cord,’ he said mildly, ‘you

had better let me make sure that I have five pounds in my pocket-book.'

After that he was quite himself again, or as nearly himself as anyone could possibly be after such a scene, and he went on talking without the smallest symptom of embarrassment. His sense of shame, if he had ever possessed one, had perished many years ago. Perhaps it had been killed by overwork in a lifetime of squalid affairs with women.

For an hour, perhaps, Dorothy was ill at ease, but after that the train reached Ipswich, where it stopped for a quarter of an hour, and there was the diversion of going to the refreshment room for a cup of tea. For the last twenty miles of the journey they talked quite amicably. Mr Warburton did not refer again to his proposal of marriage, but as the train neared Knype Hill he returned, less seriously than before, to the question of Dorothy's future.

'So you really propose', he said 'to go back to your parish work? "The trivial round, the common task?" Mrs Pither's rheumatism and Mrs Lewin's corn-plaster and all the rest of it? The prospect doesn't dismay you?'

'I don't know — sometimes it does. But I expect it'll be all right once I'm back at work. I've got the habit, you see.'

'And you really feel equal to years of calculated hypocrisy? For that's what it amounts to, you know. Not afraid of the cat getting out of the bag? Quite sure you won't find yourself teaching the Sunday School kids to say the Lord's Prayer backwards, or reading Gibbon's fifteenth chapter to the Mothers' Union instead of Gene Stratton Porter?'

'I don't think so. Because, you see, I do feel that that kind of work, even if it means saying prayers that one doesn't believe in, and even if it means teaching children things that one doesn't always think are true — I do feel that in a way it's useful.'

'Useful?' said Mr Warburton distastefully. 'You're a little too fond of that depressing word "useful". Hypertrophy of the sense of duty — that's what's the matter with you. Now, to me, it seems the merest common sense to have a bit of fun while the going's good.'

'That's just hedonism,' Dorothy objected.

'My dear child, can you show me a philosophy of life that isn't

hedonism? Your verminous Christian saints are the biggest hedonists of all. They're out for an eternity of bliss, whereas we poor sinners don't hope for more than a few years of it. Ultimately we're all trying for a bit of fun; but some people take it in such perverted forms. Your notion of fun seems to be massaging Mrs Pither's legs.'

'It's not that exactly, but — oh! somehow I can't explain!'

What she would have said was that though her faith had left her, she had not changed, could not change, did not want to change, the spiritual background of her mind; that her cosmos, though now it seemed to her empty and meaningless, was still in a sense the Christian cosmos; that the Christian way of life was still the way that must come naturally to her. But she could not put this into words, and felt that if she tried to do so he would probably begin making fun of her. So she concluded lamely:

'Somehow I feel that it's better for me to go on as I was before.'

'EXACTLY the same as before? The whole bill of fare? The Girl Guides, the Mothers' Union, the Band of Hope, the Companionship of Marriage, parish visiting and Sunday School teaching, Holy Communion twice a week and here we go round the doxology-bush, chanting Gregorian plain-song? You're quite certain you can manage it?'

Dorothy smiled in spite of herself. 'Not plain-song. Father doesn't like it.'

'And you think that, except for your inner thoughts, your life will be precisely what it was before you lost your faith? There will be NO change in your habits?'

Dorothy thought. Yes, there WOULD be changes in her habits; but most of them would be secret ones. The memory of the disciplinary pin crossed her mind. It had always been a secret from everyone except herself and she decided not to mention it.

'Well,' she said finally, 'perhaps at Holy Communion I shall kneel down on Miss Mayfill's right instead of on her left.'

2

A week had gone by.

Dorothy rode up the hill from the town and wheeled her bicycle in

at the Rectory gate. It was a fine evening, clear and cold, and the sun, unclouded, was sinking in remote, greenish skies. Dorothy noticed that the ash tree by the gate was in bloom, with clotted dark red blossoms that looked like festerings from a wound.

She was rather tired. She had had a busy week of it, what with visiting all the women on her list in turn and trying to get the parish affairs into some kind of order again. Everything was in a fearful mess after her absence. The church was dirty beyond all belief — in fact, Dorothy had had to spend the best part of a day cleaning up with scrubbing-brushes, broom and dustpan, and the beds of 'mouse dirts' that she had found behind the organ made her wince when she thought of them. (The reason why the mice came there was because Georgie Frew, the organ-blower, WOULD bring penny packets of biscuits into church and eat them during the sermon.) All the Church associations had been neglected, with the result that the Band of Hope and the Companionship of Marriage had now given up the ghost, Sunday School attendance had dropped by half, and there was internecine warfare going on in the Mothers' Union because of some tactless remark that Miss Foote had made. The belfry was in a worse state than ever. The parish magazine had not been delivered regularly and the money for it had not been collected. None of the accounts of the Church Funds had been properly kept up, and there was nineteen shillings unaccounted for in all, and even the parish registers were in a muddle — and so on and so on, ad infinitum. The Rector had let everything slide.

Dorothy had been up to her eyes in work from the moment of reaching home. Indeed, things had slipped back into their old routine with astonishing swiftness. It was as though it had been only yesterday that she had gone away. Now that the scandal had blown over, her return to Knype Hill had aroused very little curiosity. Some of the women on her visiting list, particularly Mrs Pither, were genuinely glad to see her back, and Victor Stone, perhaps, seemed just a little ashamed of having temporarily believed Mrs Semprill's libel; but he soon forgot it in recounting to Dorothy his latest triumph in the Church Times. Various of the coffee-ladies, of course, had stopped Dorothy in the street with 'My dear, how VERY nice to see you back again! You HAVE been away a long time! And you know,

dear, we all thought it such a SHAME when that horrible woman was going round telling those stories about you. But I do hope you'll understand, dear, that whatever anyone else may have thought, I never believed a word of them', etc., etc., etc. But nobody had asked her the uncomfortable questions that she had been fearing. 'I've been teaching in a school near London' had satisfied everyone; they had not even asked her the name of the school. Never, she saw, would she have to confess that she had slept in Trafalgar Square and been arrested for begging. The fact is that people who live in small country towns have only a very dim conception of anything that happens more than ten miles from their own front door. The world outside is a terra incognita, inhabited, no doubt, by dragons and anthropophagi, but not particularly interesting.

Even Dorothy's father had greeted her as though she had only been away for the week-end. He was in his study when she arrived, musingly smoking his pipe in front of the grandfather clock, whose glass, smashed by the charwoman's broom-handle four months ago, was still unmended. As Dorothy came into the room he took his pipe out of his mouth and put it away in his pocket with an absent-minded, old-mannish movement. He looked a great deal older, Dorothy thought.

'So here you are at last,' he said. 'Did you have a good journey?'

Dorothy put her arms round his neck and touched his silver-pale cheek with her lips. As she disengaged herself he patted her shoulder with a just perceptible trace more affection than usual.

'What made you take it into your head to run away like that?' he said.

'I told you, Father — I lost my memory.'

'Hm,' said the Rector; and Dorothy saw that he did not believe her, never would believe her, and that on many and many a future occasion, when he was in a less agreeable mood than at present, that escapade would be brought up against her. 'Well,' he added, 'when you've taken your bag upstairs, just bring your typewriter down here, would you? I want you to type out my sermon.'

Not much that was of interest had happened in the town. Ye Olde Tea Shoppe was enlarging its premises, to the further disfigurement of the High Street. Mrs Pither's rheumatism was better (thanks to the

angelica tea, no doubt), but Mr Pither had 'been under the doctor' and they were afraid he had stone in the bladder. Mr Blifil-Gordon was now in Parliament, a docile deadhead on the back benches of the Conservative Party. Old Mr Tombs had died just after Christmas, and Miss Foote had taken over seven of his cats and made heroic efforts to find homes for the others. Eva Twiss, the niece of Mr Twiss the ironmonger, had had an illegitimate baby, which had died. Proggett had dug the kitchen garden and sowed a few seeds, and the broad beans and the first peas were just showing. The shop-debts had begun to mount up again after the creditors' meeting, and there was six pounds owing to Cargill. Victor Stone had had a controversy with Professor Coulton in the Church Times, about the Holy Inquisition, and utterly routed him. Ellen's eczema had been very bad all the winter. Walph Blifil- Gordon had had two poems accepted by the London Mercury.

Dorothy went into the conservatory. She had got a big job on hand — costumes for a pageant that the schoolchildren were going to have on St George's Day, in aid of the organ fund. Not a penny had been paid towards the organ during the past eight months, and it was perhaps as well that the Rector always threw the organ-people's bills away unopened, for their tone was growing more and more sulphurous. Dorothy had racked her brains for a way of raising some money, and finally decided on a historical pageant, beginning with Julius Caesar and ending with the Duke of Wellington. They might raise two pounds by a pageant, she thought — with luck and a fine day, they might even raise three pounds!

She looked round the conservatory. She had hardly been in here since coming home, and evidently nothing had been touched during her absence. Her things were lying just as she had left them; but the dust was thick on everything. Her sewing-machine was on the table amid the old familiar litter of scraps of cloth, sheets of brown paper, cotton-reels and pots of paint, and though the needle had rusted, the thread was still in it. And, yes! there were the jackboots that she had been making the night she went away. She picked one of them up and looked at it. Something stirred in her heart. Yes, say what you like, they WERE good jackboots! What a pity they had never been used! However, they would come in useful for the pageant. For

Charles II, perhaps — or, no, better not have Charles II; have Oliver Cromwell instead; because if you had Oliver Cromwell you wouldn't have to make him a wig.

Dorothy lighted the oilstove, found her scissors and two sheets of brown paper, and sat down. There was a mountain of clothes to be made. Better start off with Julius Caesar's breastplate, she thought. It was always that wretched armour that made all the trouble! What did a Roman soldier's armour look like? Dorothy made an effort, and called to mind the statue of some idealized curly-bearded emperor in the Roman Room at the British Museum. You might make a sort of rough breastplate out of glue and brown paper, and glue narrow strips of paper across it to represent the plates of the armour, and then silver them over. No helmet to make, thank goodness! Julius Caesar always wore a laurel wreath — ashamed of his baldness, no doubt, like Mr Warburton. But what about greaves? Did they wear greaves in Julius Caesar's time? And boots? Was a caligum a boot or a sandal?

After a few moments she stopped with the shears resting on her knee. A thought which had been haunting her like some inexorcizable ghost at every unoccupied moment during the past week had returned once more to distract her. It was the thought of what Mr Warburton had said to her in the train — of what her life was going to be like hereafter, unmarried and without money.

It was not that she was in any doubt about the external facts of her future. She could see it all quite clearly before her. Ten years, perhaps, as unsalaried curate, and then back to school- teaching. Not necessarily in quite such a school as Mrs Creevy's — no doubt she could do something rather better for herself than that — but at least in some more or less shabby, more or less prison-like school; or perhaps in some even bleaker, even less human kind of drudgery. Whatever happened, at the very best, she had got to face the destiny that is common to all lonely and penniless women. 'The Old Maids of Old England', as somebody called them. She was twenty-eight — just old enough to enter their ranks.

But it didn't matter, it didn't matter! That was the thing that you could never drive into the heads of the Mr Warburtons of this world, not if you talked to them for a thousand years; that mere outward

things like poverty and drudgery, and even loneliness, don't matter in themselves. It is the things that happen in your heart that matter. For just a moment — an evil moment — while Mr Warburton was talking to her in the train, she had known the fear of poverty. But she had mastered it; it was not a thing worth worrying about. It was not because of THAT that she had got to stiffen her courage and remake the whole structure of her mind.

No, it was something far more fundamental; it was the deadly emptiness that she had discovered at the heart of things. She thought of how a year ago she had sat in this chair, with these scissors in her hand, doing precisely what she was doing now; and yet it was as though then and now she had been two different beings. Where had she gone, that well-meaning, ridiculous girl who had prayed ecstatically in summer-scented fields and pricked her arm as a punishment for sacrilegious thoughts? And where is any of ourselves of even a year ago? And yet after all — and here lay the trouble — she WAS the same girl. Beliefs change, thoughts change, but there is some inner part of the soul that does not change. Faith vanishes, but the need for faith remains the same as before.

And given only faith, how can anything else matter? How can anything dismay you if only there is some purpose in the world which you can serve, and which, while serving it, you can understand? Your whole life is illumined by the sense of purpose. There is no weariness in your heart, no doubts, no feeling of futility, no Baudelairean ennui waiting for unguarded hours. Every act is significant, every moment sanctified, woven by faith as into a pattern, a fabric of never-ending joy.

She began to meditate upon the nature of life. You emerged from the womb, you lived sixty or seventy years, and then you died and rotted. And in every detail of your life, if no ultimate purpose redeemed it, there was a quality of greyness, of desolation, that could never be described, but which you could feel like a physical pang at your heart. Life, if the grave really ends it, is monstrous and dreadful. No use trying to argue it away. Think of life as it really is, think of the DETAILS of life; and then think that there is no meaning in it, no purpose, no goal except the grave. Surely only fools or self-deceivers, or those whose lives are exceptionally fortunate, can face

that thought without flinching?

She shifted her position in her chair. But after all there must be SOME meaning, SOME purpose in it all! The world cannot be an accident. Everything that happens must have a cause — ultimately, therefore, a purpose. Since you exist, God must have created you, and since He created you a conscious being, He must be conscious. The greater doesn't come out of the less. He created you, and He will kill you, for His own purpose. But that purpose is inscrutable. It is in the nature of things that you can never discover it, and perhaps even if you did discover it you would be averse to it. Your life and death, it may be, are a single note in the eternal orchestra that plays for His diversion. And suppose you don't like the tune? She thought of that dreadful unfrocked clergyman in Trafalgar Square. Had she dreamed the things he said, or had he really said them? 'Therefore with Demons and Archdemons and with all the company of Hell'. But that was silly, really. For your not liking the tune was also part of the tune.

Her mind struggled with the problem, while perceiving that there was no solution. There was, she saw clearly, no possible substitute for faith; no pagan acceptance of life as sufficient to itself, no pantheistic cheer-up stuff, no pseudo-religion of 'progress' with visions of glittering Utopias and ant-heaps of steel and concrete. It is all or nothing. Either life on earth is a preparation for something greater and more lasting, or it is meaningless, dark, and dreadful.

Dorothy started. A frizzling sound was coming from the glue-pot. She had forgotten to put any water in the saucepan, and the glue was beginning to burn. She took the saucepan, hastened to the scullery sink to replenish it, then brought it back and put it on the oilstove again. I simply MUST get that breastplate done before supper! she thought. After Julius Caesar there was William the Conqueror to be thought of. More armour! And presently she must go along to the kitchen and remind Ellen to boil some potatoes to go with the minced beef for supper; also there was her 'memo list' to be written out for tomorrow. She shaped the two halves of the breastplate, cut out the armholes and neckholes, and then stopped again.

Where had she got to? She had been saying that if death ends all, then there is no hope and no meaning in anything. Well, what then?

The action of going to the scullery and refilling the saucepan had changed the tenor of her thoughts. She perceived, for a moment at least, that she had allowed herself to fall into exaggeration and self-pity. What a fuss about nothing, after all! As though in reality there were not people beyond number in the same case as herself! All over the world, thousands, millions of them; people who had lost their faith without losing their need of faith. 'Half the parsons' daughters in England,' Mr Warburton had said. He was probably right. And not only parsons' daughters; people of every description — people in illness and loneliness and failure, people leading thwarted, discouraging lives — people who needed faith to support them, and who hadn't got it. Perhaps even nuns in convents, scrubbing floors and singing Ave Marias, secretly unbelieving.

And how cowardly, after all, to regret a superstition that you had got rid of — to want to believe something that you knew in your bones to be untrue!

And yet — !

Dorothy had put down her scissors. Almost from force of habit, as though her return home, which had not restored her faith, had restored the outward habits of piety, she knelt down beside her chair. She buried her face in her hands. She began to pray.

'Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. Lord, I believe, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.'

It was useless, absolutely useless. Even as she spoke the words she was aware of their uselessness, and was half ashamed of her action. She raised her head. And at that moment there stole into her nostrils a warm, evil smell, forgotten these eight months but unutterably familiar — the smell of glue. The water in the saucepan was bubbling noisily. Dorothy jumped to her feet and felt the handle of the glue-brush. The glue was softening — would be liquid in another five minutes.

The grandfather clock in her father's study struck six. Dorothy started. She realized that she had wasted twenty minutes, and her conscience stabbed her so hard that all the questions that had been worrying her fled out of her mind. What on earth have I been doing all this time? she thought; and at that moment it really seemed to her that she did not know what she had been doing. She admonished

herself. Come on, Dorothy! No slacking, please! You've got to get that breastplate done before supper. She sat down, filled her mouth with pins and began pinning the two halves of the breastplate together, to get it into shape before the glue should be ready.

The smell of glue was the answer to her prayer. She did not know this. She did not reflect, consciously, that the solution to her difficulty lay in accepting the fact that there was no solution; that if one gets on with the job that lies to hand, the ultimate purpose of the job fades into insignificance; that faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful, and acceptable. She could not formulate these thoughts as yet, she could only live them. Much later, perhaps, she would formulate them and draw comfort from them.

There was still a minute or two before the glue would be ready to use. Dorothy finished pinning the breastplate together, and in the same instant began mentally sketching the innumerable costumes that were yet to be made. After William the Conqueror — was it chain mail in William the Conqueror's day? — there were Robin Hood — Lincoln Green and a bow and arrow — and Thomas a Becket in his cope and mitre, and Queen Elizabeth's ruff, and a cocked hat for the Duke of Wellington. And I must go and see about those potatoes at half past six, she thought. And there was her 'memo list' to be written out for tomorrow. Tomorrow was Wednesday — mustn't forget to set the alarm clock for half past five. She took a slip of paper and began writing out the 'memo list':

7 oc. H.C.
Mrs J. baby next month go and see her.
BREAKFAST. Bacon.

She paused to think of fresh items. Mrs J. was Mrs Jowett, the blacksmith's wife; she came sometimes to be churched after her babies were born, but only if you coaxed her tactfully beforehand. And I must take old Mrs Frew some paregoric lozenges, Dorothy thought, and then perhaps she'll speak to Georgie and stop him eating those biscuits during the sermon. She added Mrs Frew to her list. And then what about tomorrow's dinner — luncheon? We

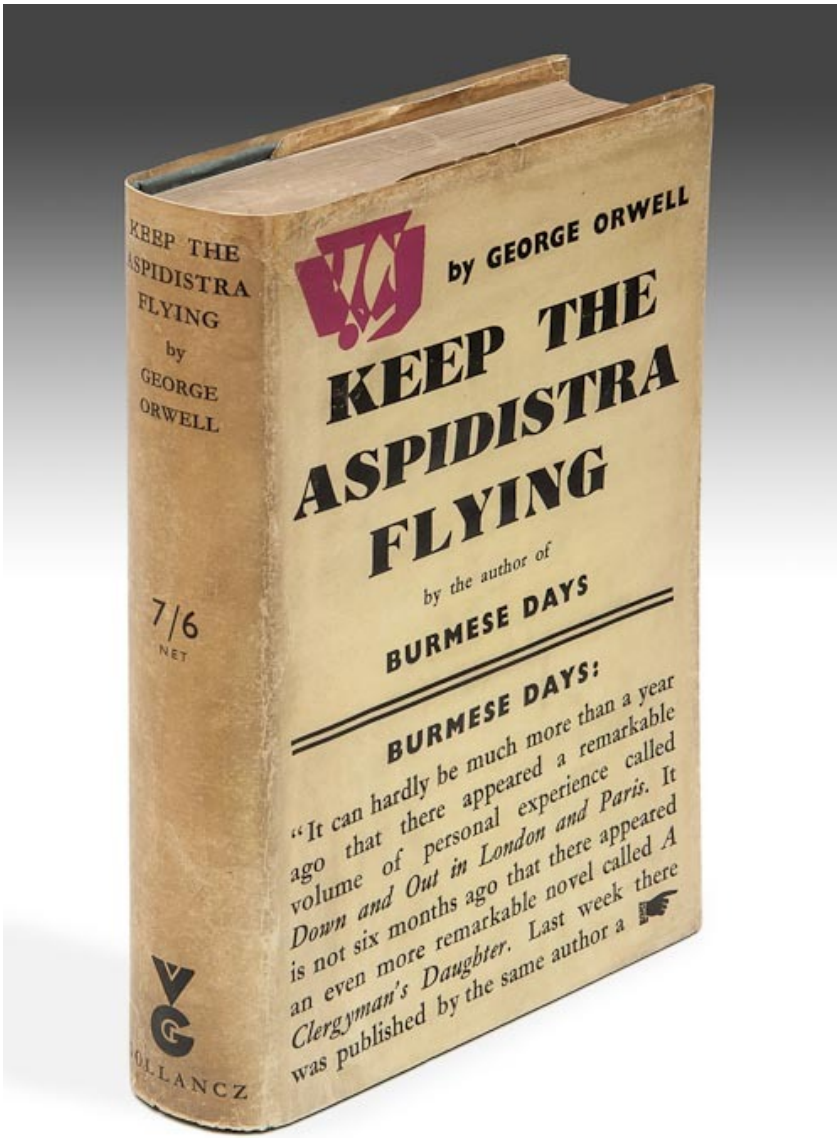
simply MUST pay Cargill something! she thought. And tomorrow was the day of the Mothers' Union tea, and they had finished the novel that Miss Foote had been reading to them. The question was, what to get for them next? There didn't seem to be any more books by Gene Stratton Porter, their favourite. What about Warwick Deeping? Too highbrow, perhaps? And I must ask Proggett to get us some young cauliflowers to plant out, she thought finally.

The glue had liquefied. Dorothy took two fresh sheets of brown paper, sliced them into narrow strips, and — rather awkwardly, because of the difficulty of keeping the breastplate convex — pasted the strips horizontally across it, back and front. By degrees it stiffened under her hands. When she had reinforced it all over she set it on end to look at it. It really wasn't half bad! One more coating of paper and it would be almost like real armour. We MUST make that pageant a success! she thought. What a pity we can't borrow a horse from somebody and have Boadicea in her chariot! We might make five pounds if we had a really good chariot, with scythes on the wheels. And what about Hengist and Horsa? Cross- gartering and winged helmets. Dorothy sliced two more sheets of brown paper into strips, and took up the breastplate to give it its final coating. The problem of faith and no faith had vanished utterly from her mind. It was beginning to get dark, but, too busy to stop and light the lamp, she worked on, pasting strip after strip of paper into place, with absorbed, with pious concentration, in the penetrating smell of the glue-pot.

KEEP THE ASPIDISTRA FLYING

Keep the Aspidistra Flying was published by Victor Gollancz on the 20th of April 1936. It was Orwell's third novel and was partly inspired by his living circumstances and financial situation during the late 1920's and the first half of the 1930's. Orwell considered it one of his works he was ashamed of and he regretted publishing it. He believed it should have remained a writing experiment just for himself, but his poor finances meant that he was desperate to make money and needed to have the work published. Orwell's position of being an aspiring literary talent while struggling for money and his experiences chronicling the poverty stricken areas of London and Paris mirror aspects of his central character's life. Gordon Comstock loathes his job as a copy writer for an advertising agency, which he views as a symptom of a life and society governed by money. He decides to quit his lucrative job to write poetry and takes low paying employment.

The novel explores Comstock's desire to avoid worshipping money and the resulting difficulty of attempting to live in poverty. Comstock is looking to escape, to get away from wage-labour and to exist in a world where conventional ideas are gone and these notions of success and failure lose their meaning. Of course he realises being free from money does not come from being penniless, and it is only when one has enough money that one stops being slave to it; but Comstock continues his ideological quest to escape into the abyss and avoid the capitalist drudge of life. It is a tale that Orwell relays with sharp humour as his protagonist desperately searches for a less oppressive existence. The text also vividly details how Comstock's attempts to find freedom blight and complicate his relationships with those around him. They are unable to connect to him any longer and attempt to persuade him to return to his former life.


KEEP THE ASPIDISTRA FLYING
by GEORGE ORWELL
7/6 NET
VG
GOLLANCZ
by GEORGE ORWELL
KEEP THE ASPIDISTRA FLYING
by the author of
BURMESE DAYS
BURMESE DAYS:
"It can hardly be much more than a year ago that there appeared a remarkable volume of personal experience called *Down and Out in London and Paris*. It is not six months ago that there appeared an even more remarkable novel called *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Last week there was published by the same author a

The first edition

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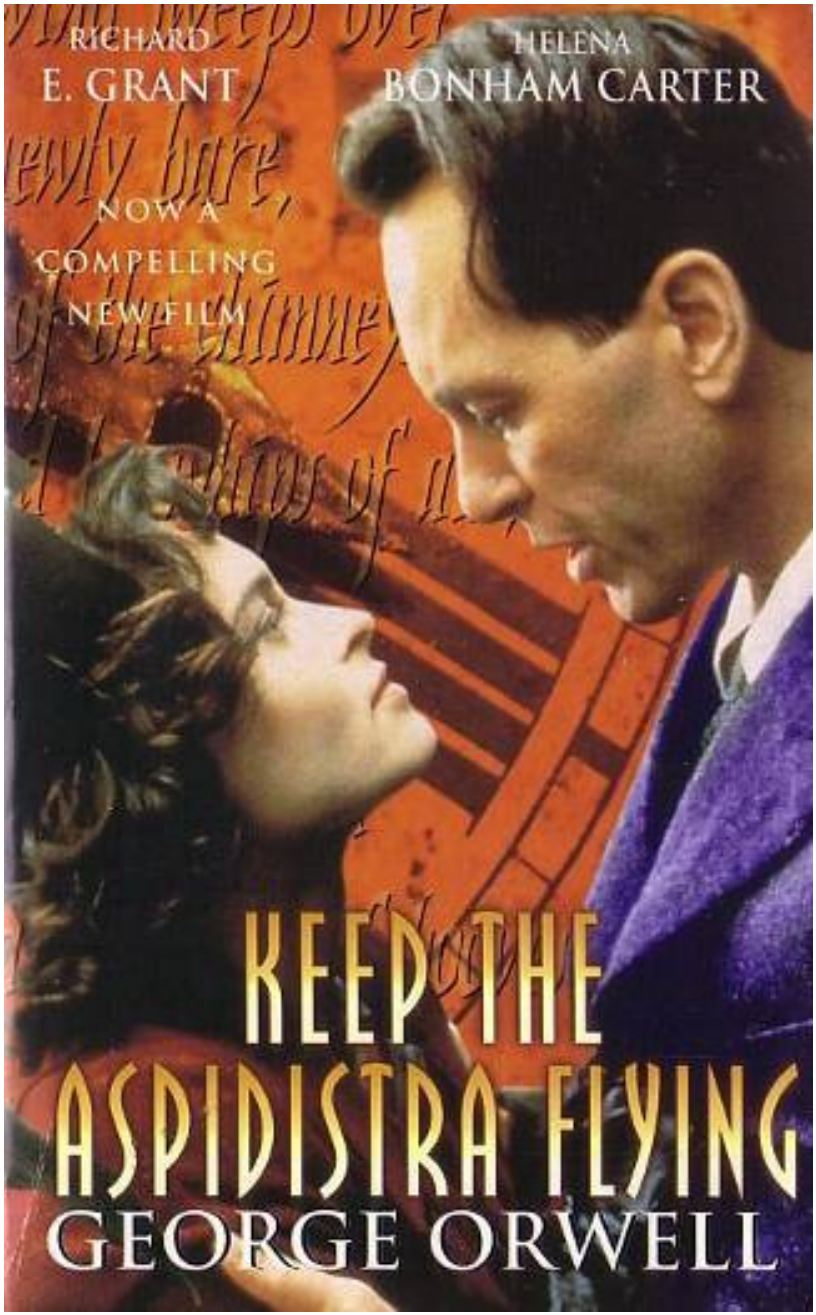

RICHARD
E. GRANT
HELENA
BONHAM CARTER
NOW A
COMPELLING
NEW FILM
KEEP THE
ASPIDISTRA FLYING
GEORGE ORWELL

Chapter 1

The clock struck half past two. In the little office at the back of Mr McKechnie's bookshop, Gordon — Gordon Comstock, last member of the Comstock family, aged twenty-nine and rather moth-eaten already — lounged across the table, pushing a four-penny packet of Player's Weights open and shut with his thumb.

The ding-dong of another, remoter clock — from the Prince of Wales, the other side of the street — rippled the stagnant air. Gordon made an effort, sat upright, and stowed his packet of cigarettes away in his inside pocket. He was perishing for a smoke. However, there were only four cigarettes left. Today was Wednesday and he had no money coming to him till Friday. It would be too bloody to be without tobacco tonight as well as all tomorrow.

Bored in advance by tomorrow's tobaccoless hours, he got up and moved towards the door — a small frail figure, with delicate bones and fretful movements. His coat was out at elbow in the right sleeve and its middle button was missing; his ready-made flannel trousers were stained and shapeless. Even from above you could see that his shoes needed resoling.

The money clinked in his trouser pocket as he got up. He knew the precise sum that was there. Fivepence halfpenny — twopence halfpenny and a Joey. He paused, took out the miserable little threepenny-bit, and looked at it. Beastly, useless thing! And bloody fool to have taken it! It had happened yesterday, when he was buying cigarettes. 'Don't mind a threepenny-bit, do you, sir?' the little bitch of a shop-girl had chirped. And of course he had let her give it him. 'Oh no, not at all!' he had said — fool, bloody fool!

His heart sickened to think that he had only fivepence halfpenny in the world, threepence of which couldn't even be spent. Because how can you buy anything with a threepenny-bit? It isn't a coin, it's the answer to a riddle. You look such a fool when you take it out of your pocket, unless it's in among a whole handful of other coins. 'How much?' you say. 'Threepence,' the shop-girl says. And then you feel all round your pocket and fish out that absurd little thing, all by itself, sticking on the end of your finger like a tiddley-wink. The

shop-girl sniffs. She spots immediately that it's your last threepence in the world. You see her glance quickly at it — she's wondering whether there's a piece of Christmas pudding still sticking to it. And you stalk out with your nose in the air, and can't ever go to that shop again. No! We won't spend our Joey. Twopence halfpenny left — twopence halfpenny to last till Friday.

This was the lonely after-dinner hour, when few or no customers were to be expected. He was alone with seven thousand books. The small dark room, smelling of dust and decayed paper, that gave on the office, was filled to the brim with books, mostly aged and unsaleable. On the top shelves near the ceiling the quarto volumes of extinct encyclopedias slumbered on their sides in piles like the tiered coffins in common graves. Gordon pushed aside the blue, dust-sodden curtains that served as a doorway to the next room. This, better lighted than the other, contained the lending library. It was one of those 'twopenny no-deposit' libraries beloved of book-pinchers. No books in it except novels, of course. And WHAT novels! But that too was a matter of course.

Eight hundred strong, the novels lined the room on three sides ceiling-high, row upon row of gaudy oblong backs, as though the walls had been built of many-coloured bricks laid upright. They were arranged alphabetically. Arlen, Burroughs, Deeping, Dell, Frankau, Galsworthy, Gibbs, Priestley, Sapper, Walpole. Gordon eyed them with inert hatred. At this moment he hated all books, and novels most of all. Horrible to think of all that soggy, half-baked trash massed together in one place. Pudding, suet pudding. Eight hundred slabs of pudding, walling him in — a vault of puddingstone. The thought was oppressive. He moved on through the open doorway into the front part of the shop. In doing so, he smoothed his hair. It was an habitual movement. After all, there might be girls outside the glass door. Gordon was not impressive to look at. He was just five feet seven inches high, and because his hair was usually too long he gave the impression that his head was a little too big for his body. He was never quite unconscious of his small stature. When he knew that anyone was looking at him he carried himself very upright, throwing a chest, with a you-be-damned air which occasionally deceived simple people.

However, there was nobody outside. The front room, unlike the rest of the shop, was smart and expensive-looking, and it contained about two thousand books, exclusive of those in the window. On the right there was a glass showcase in which children's books were kept. Gordon averted his eyes from a beastly Rackhamesque dust-jacket; elvish children tripping Wendily through a bluebell glade. He gazed out through the glass door. A foul day, and the wind rising. The sky was leaden, the cobbles of the street were slimy. It was St Andrew's day, the thirtieth of November. McKechnie's stood on a corner, on a sort of shapeless square where four streets converged. To the left, just within sight from the door, stood a great elm-tree, leafless now, its multitudinous twigs making sepia-coloured lace against the sky. Opposite, next to the Prince of Wales, were tall hoardings covered with ads for patent foods and patent medicines. A gallery of monstrous doll-faces — pink vacuous faces, full of goofy optimism. Q.T. Sauce, Truweet Breakfast Crisps ('Kiddies clamour for their Breakfast Crisps'), Kangaroo Burgundy, Vitamalt Chocolate, Bovex. Of them all, the Bovex one oppressed Gordon the most. A spectacled rat-faced clerk, with patent-leather hair, sitting at a cafe table grinning over a white mug of Bovex. 'Corner Table enjoys his meal with Bovex', the legend ran.

Gordon shortened the focus of his eyes. From the dust-dulled pane the reflection of his own face looked back at him. Not a good face. Not thirty yet, but moth-eaten already. Very pale, with bitter, ineradicable lines. What people call a 'good' forehead — high, that is — but a small pointed chin, so that the face as a whole was pear-shaped rather than oval. Hair mouse-coloured and unkempt, mouth unamiable, eyes hazel inclining to green. He lengthened the focus of his eyes again. He hated mirrors nowadays. Outside, all was bleak and wintry. A tram, like a raucous swan of steel, glided groaning over the cobbles, and in its wake the wind swept a debris of trampled leaves. The twigs of the elm-tree were swirling, straining eastward. The poster that advertised Q.T. Sauce was torn at the edge; a ribbon of paper fluttered fitfully like a tiny pennant. In the side street too, to the right, the naked poplars that lined the pavement bowed sharply as the wind caught them. A nasty raw wind. There was a threatening note in it as it swept over; the first growl of winter's anger. Two lines

of a poem struggled for birth in Gordon's mind:

Sharply the something wind — for instance, threatening wind? No, better, menacing wind. The menacing wind blows over — no, sweeps over, say.

The something poplars — yielding poplars? No, better, bending poplars. Assonance between bending and menacing? No matter. The bending poplars, newly bare. Good.

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare.

Good. 'Bare' is a sod to rhyme; however, there's always 'air', which every poet since Chaucer has been struggling to find rhymes for. But the impulse died away in Gordon's mind. He turned the money over in his pocket. Twopence halfpenny and a Joey — twopence halfpenny. His mind was sticky with boredom. He couldn't cope with rhymes and adjectives. You can't, with only twopence halfpenny in your pocket.

His eyes refocused themselves upon the posters opposite. He had his private reasons for hating them. Mechanically he re-read their slogans. 'Kangaroo Burgundy — the wine for Britons.' 'Asthma was choking her!' 'Q.T. Sauce Keeps Hubby Smiling.' 'Hike all day on a Slab of Vitamalt!' 'Curve Cut — the Smoke for Outdoor Men.' 'Kiddies clamour for their Breakfast Crisps.' 'Corner Table enjoys his meal with Bovex.'

Ha! A customer — potential, at any rate. Gordon stiffened himself. Standing by the door, you could get an oblique view out of the front window without being seen yourself. He looked the potential customer over.

A decentish middle-aged man, black suit, bowler hat, umbrella, and dispatch-case — provincial solicitor or Town Clerk — keeking at the window with large pale-coloured eyes. He wore a guilty look. Gordon followed the direction of his eyes. Ah! So that was it! He had nosed out those D. H. Lawrence first editions in the far corner. Pining for a bit of smut, of course. He had heard of Lady Chatterley afar off. A bad face he had, Gordon thought. Pale, heavy, downy, with bad contours. Welsh, by the look of him — Nonconformist, anyway. He had the regular Dissenting pouches round the corners of his mouth. At home, president of the local Purity League or Seaside

Vigilance Committee (rubber-soled slippers and electric torch, spotting kissing couples along the beach parade), and now up in town on the razzle. Gordon wished he would come in. Sell him a copy of Women in Love. How it would disappoint him!

But no! The Welsh solicitor had funked it. He tucked his umbrella under his arm and moved off with righteously turned backside. But doubtless tonight, when darkness hid his blushes, he'd slink into one of the rubber-shops and buy High Jinks in a Parisian Convent, by Sadie Blackeyes.

Gordon turned away from the door and back to the book-shelves. In the shelves to your left as you came out of the library the new and nearly-new books were kept — a patch of bright colour that was meant to catch the eye of anyone glancing through the glass door. Their sleek unspotted backs seemed to yearn at you from the shelves. 'Buy me, buy me!' they seemed to be saying. Novels fresh from the press — still unravished brides, pining for the paperknife to deflower them — and review copies, like youthful widows, blooming still though virgin no longer, and here and there, in sets of half a dozen, those pathetic spinster-things, 'remainders', still guarding hopefully their long preserv'd virginity. Gordon turned his eyes away from the 'remainders'. They called up evil memories. The single wretched little book that he himself had published, two years ago, had sold exactly a hundred and fifty-three copies and then been 'remaindered'; and even as a 'remainder' it hadn't sold. He passed the new books by and paused in front of the shelves which ran at right angles to them and which contained more second-hand books.

Over to the right were shelves of poetry. Those in front of him were prose, a miscellaneous lot. Upwards and downwards they were graded, from clean and expensive at eye-level to cheap and dingy at top and bottom. In all book-shops there goes on a savage Darwinian struggle in which the works of living men gravitate to eye-level and the works of dead men go up or down — down to Gehenna or up to the throne, but always away from any position where they will be noticed. Down in the bottom shelves the 'classics', the extinct monsters of the Victorian age, were quietly rotting. Scott, Carlyle, Meredith, Ruskin, Pater, Stevenson — you could hardly read the names upon their broad dowdy backs. In the top shelves, almost out

of sight, slept the pudgy biographies of dukes. Below those, saleable still and therefore placed within reach, was 'religious' literature — all sects and all creeds, lumped indiscriminately together. The World Beyond, by the author of Spirit Hands Have Touched me. Dean Farrar's Life of Christ. Jesus the First Rotarian. Father Hilaire Chestnut's latest book of R. C. propaganda. Religion always sells provided it is soppy enough. Below, exactly at eye-level, was the contemporary stuff. Priestley's latest. Dinky little books of reprinted 'middles'. Cheer-up 'humour' from Herbert and Knox and Milne. Some highbrow stuff as well. A novel or two by Hemingway and Virginia Woolf. Smart pseudo-Strachey predigested biographies. Snooty, refined books on safe painters and safe poets by those moneyed young beasts who glide so gracefully from Eton to Cambridge and from Cambridge to the literary reviews.

Dull-eyed, he gazed at the wall of books. He hated the whole lot of them, old and new, highbrow and lowbrow, snooty and chirpy. The mere sight of them brought home to him his own sterility. For here was he, supposedly a 'writer', and he couldn't even 'write'! It wasn't merely a question of not getting published; it was that he produced nothing, or next to nothing. And all that tripe cluttering the shelves — well, at any rate it existed; it was an achievement of sorts. Even the Dells and Deepings do at least turn out their yearly acre of print. But it was the snooty 'cultured' kind of books that he hated the worst. Books of criticism and belles-lettres. The kind of thing that those moneyed young beasts from Cambridge write almost in their sleep — and that Gordon himself might have written if he had had a little more money. Money and culture! In a country like England you can no more be cultured without money than you can join the Cavalry Club. With the same instinct that makes a child waggle a loose tooth, he took out a snooty-looking volume — Some Aspects of the Italian Baroque — opened it, read a paragraph, and shoved it back with mingled loathing and envy. That devastating omniscience! That noxious, horn-spectacled refinement! And the money that such refinement means! For after all, what is there behind it, except money? Money for the right kind of education, money for influential friends, money for leisure and peace of mind, money for trips to Italy. Money writes books, money sells them. Give me not

righteousness, O Lord, give me money, only money.

He jingled the coins in his pocket. He was nearly thirty and had accomplished nothing; only his miserable book of poems that had fallen flatter than any pancake. And ever since, for two whole years, he had been struggling in the labyrinth of a dreadful book that never got any further, and which, as he knew in his moments of clarity, never would get any further. It was the lack of money, simply the lack of money, that robbed him of the power to 'write'. He clung to that as to an article of faith. Money, money, all is money! Could you write even a penny novelette without money to put heart in you? Invention, energy, wit, style, charm — they've all got to be paid for in hard cash.

Nevertheless, as he looked along the shelves he felt himself a little comforted. So many of the books were faded and unreadable. After all, we're all in the same boat. Memento mori. For you and for me and for the snooty young men from Cambridge, the same oblivion waits — though doubtless it'll wait rather longer for those snooty young men from Cambridge. He looked at the time-dulled 'classics' near his feet. Dead, all dead. Carlyle and Ruskin and Meredith and Stevenson — all are dead, God rot them. He glanced over their faded titles. Collected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson. Ha, ha! That's good. Collected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson! Its top edge was black with dust. Dust thou art, to dust returnest. Gordon kicked Stevenson's buckram backside. Art there, old false-penny? You're cold meat, if ever Scotchman was.

Ping! The shop bell. Gordon turned round. Two customers, for the library.

A dejected, round-shouldered, lower-class woman, looking like a draggled duck nosing among garbage, seeped in, fumbling with a rush basket. In her wake hopped a plump little sparrow of a woman, red-cheeked, middle-middle class, carrying under her arm a copy of The Forsyte Saga — title outwards, so that passers-by could spot her for a high-brow.

Gordon had taken off his sour expression. He greeted them with the homey, family-doctor geniality reserved for library-subscribers.

'Good afternoon, Mrs Weaver. Good afternoon, Mrs Penn. What terrible weather!'

‘Shocking!’ said Mrs Penn.

He stood aside to let them pass. Mrs Weaver upset her rush basket and spilled on to the floor a much-thumbed copy of Ethel M. Dell’s Silver Wedding. Mrs Penn’s bright bird-eye lighted upon it. Behind Mrs Weaver’s back she smiled up to Gordon, archly, as highbrow to highbrow. Dell! The lowness of it! The books these lower classes read! Understandingly, he smiled back. They passed into the library, highbrow to highbrow smiling.

Mrs Penn laid The Forsyte Saga on the table and turned her sparrow-bosom upon Gordon. She was always very affable to Gordon. She addressed him as Mister Comstock, shopwalker though he was, and held literary conversations with him. There was the free-masonry of highbrows between them.

‘I hope you enjoyed The Forsyte Saga, Mrs Penn?’

‘What a perfectly MARVELLOUS achievement that book is, Mr Comstock! Do you know that that makes the fourth time I’ve read it? An epic, a real epic!’

Mrs Weaver nosed among the books, too dim-witted to grasp that they were in alphabetical order.

‘I don’t know what to ‘ave this week, that I don’t,’ she mumbled through untidy lips. ‘My daughter she keeps on at me to ‘ave a try at Deeping. She’s great on Deeping, my daughter is. But my son-in-law, now, ‘e’s more for Burroughs. I don’t know, I’m sure.’

A spasm passed over Mrs Penn’s face at the mention of Burroughs. She turned her back markedly on Mrs Weaver.

‘What I feel, Mr Comstock, is that there’s something so BIG about Galsworthy. He’s so broad, so universal, and yet at the same time so thoroughly English in spirit, so HUMAN. His books are real HUMAN documents.’

‘And Priestley, too,’ said Gordon. ‘I think Priestley’s such an awfully fine writer, don’t you?’

‘Oh, he is! So big, so broad, so human! And so essentially English!’

Mrs Weaver pursed her lips. Behind them were three isolated yellow teeth.

‘I think p’raps I can do better’n ‘ave another Dell,’ she said. ‘You ‘ave got some more Dells, ‘aven’t you? I DO enjoy a good read of

Dell, I must say. I says to my daughter, I says, "You can keep your Deepings and your Burroughses. Give me Dell," I says.'

Ding Dong Dell! Dukes and dogwhips! Mrs Penn's eye signalled highbrow irony. Gordon returned her signal. Keep in with Mrs Penn! A good, steady customer.

'Oh, certainly, Mrs Weaver. We've got a whole shelf by Ethel M. Dell. Would you like The Desire of his Life? Or perhaps you've read that. Then what about The Alter of Honour?'

'I wonder whether you have Hugh Walpole's latest book?' said Mrs Penn. 'I feel in the mood this week for something epic, something BIG. Now Walpole, you know, I consider a really GREAT writer, I put him second only to Galsworthy. There's something so BIG about him. And yet he's so human with it.'

'And so essentially English,' said Gordon.

'Oh, of course! So essentially English!'

'I b'lieve I'll jest 'ave The Way of an Eagle over again,' said Mrs Weaver finally. 'You don't never seem to get tired of The Way of an Eagle, do you, now?'

'It's certainly astonishingly popular,' said Gordon, diplomatically, his eye on Mrs Penn.

'Oh, asTONishingly!' echoed Mrs Penn, ironically, her eye on Gordon.

He took their twopences and sent them happy away, Mrs Penn with Walpole's Rogue Herries and Mrs Weaver with The Way of an Eagle.

Soon he had wandered back to the other room and towards the shelves of poetry. A melancholy fascination, those shelves had for him. His own wretched book was there — skied, of course, high up among the unsaleable. Mice, by Gordon Comstock; a sneaky little foolscap octavo, price three and sixpence but now reduced to a bob. Of the thirteen B.F.s who had reviewed it (and The Times Lit. Supp. had declared that it showed 'exceptional promise') not one had seen the none too subtle joke of that title. And in the two years he had been at McKechnie's bookshop, not a single customer, not a single one, had ever taken Mice out of its shelf.

There were fifteen or twenty shelves of poetry. Gordon regarded them sourly. Dud stuff, for the most part. A little above eye-level,

already on their way to heaven and oblivion, were the poets of yesteryear, the stars of his earlier youth. Yeats, Davies, Housman, Thomas, De la Mare, Hardy. Dead stars. Below them, exactly at eye-level, were the squibs of the passing minute. Eliot, Pound, Auden, Campbell, Day Lewis, Spender. Very damp squibs, that lot. Dead stars above, damp squibs below. Shall we ever again get a writer worth reading? But Lawrence was all right, and Joyce even better before he went off his coconut. And if we did get a writer worth reading, should we know him when we saw him, so choked as we are with trash?

Ping! Shop bell. Gordon turned. Another customer.

A youth of twenty, cherry-lipped, with gilded hair, tripped Nancifully in. Moneyed, obviously. He had the golden aura of money. He had been in the shop before. Gordon assumed the gentlemanly-servile mien reserved for new customers. He repeated the usual formula:

'Good afternoon. Can I do anything for you? Are you looking for any particular book?'

'Oh, no, not weally.' An R-less Nancy voice. 'May I just BWOWSE? I simply couldn't wesist your fwont window. I have such a tewwible weakness for bookshops! So I just floated in — tee-hee!'

Float out again, then, Nancy. Gordon smiled a cultured smile, as booklover to booklover.

'Oh, please do. We like people to look round. Are you interested in poetry, by any chance?'

'Oh, of course! I ADORE poetwy!'

Of course! Mangy little snob. There was a sub-artistic look about his clothes. Gordon slid a 'slim' red volume from the poetry shelves.

'These are just out. They might interest you, perhaps. They're translations — something rather out of the common. Translations from the Bulgarian.'

Very subtle, that. Now leave him to himself. That's the proper way with customers. Don't hustle them; let them browse for twenty minutes or so; then they get ashamed and buy something. Gordon moved to the door, discreetly, keeping out of Nancy's way; yet casually, one hand in his pocket, with the insouciant air proper to a

gentleman.

Outside, the slimy street looked grey and drear. From somewhere round the corner came the clatter of hooves, a cold hollow sound. Caught by the wind, the dark columns of smoke from the chimneys veered over and rolled flatly down the sloping roofs. Ah!

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare, And the dark ribbons of the chimneys Veer downward tumty tumty (something like 'murky') air.

Good. But the impulse faded. His eye fell again upon the ad-posters across the street.

He almost wanted to laugh at them, they were so feeble, so dead-alive, so unappetizing. As though anybody could be tempted by THOSE! Like succubi with pimply backsides. But they depressed him all the same. The money-stink, everywhere the money-stink. He stole a glance at the Nancy, who had drifted away from the poetry shelves and taken out a large expensive book on the Russian ballet. He was holding it delicately between his pink non-prehensile paws, as a squirrel holds a nut, studying the photographs. Gordon knew his type. The moneyed 'artistic' young man. Not an artist himself, exactly, but a hanger-on of the arts; frequenter of studios, retailer of scandal. A nice-looking boy, though, for all his Nancitude. The skin at the back of his neck was as silky-smooth as the inside of a shell. You can't have a skin like that under five hundred a year. A sort of charm he had, a glamour, like all moneyed people. Money and charm; who shall separate them?

Gordon thought of Ravelston, his charming, rich friend, editor of Antichrist, of whom he was extravagantly fond, and whom he did not see so often as once in a fortnight; and of Rosemary, his girl, who loved him — adored him, so she said — and who, all the same, had never slept with him. Money, once again; all is money. All human relationships must be purchased with money. If you have no money, men won't care for you, women won't love you; won't, that is, care for you or love you the last little bit that matters. And how right they are, after all! For, moneyless, you are unlovable. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels. But then, if I haven't money, I DON'T speak with the tongues of men and of angels.

He looked again at the ad-posters. He really hated them this time.

That Vitamalt one, for instance! 'Hike all day on a slab of Vitamalt!' A youthful couple, boy and girl, in clean-minded hiking kit, their hair picturesquely tousled by the wind, climbing a stile against a Sussex landscape. That girl's face! The awful bright tomboy cheeriness of it! The kind of girl who goes in for Plenty of Clean Fun. Windswept. Tight khaki shorts but that doesn't mean you can pinch her backside. And next to them — Corner Table. 'Corner Table enjoys his meal with Bovex'. Gordon examined the thing with the intimacy of hatred. The idiotic grinning face, like the face of a self-satisfied rat, the slick black hair, the silly spectacles. Corner Table, heir of the ages; victor of Waterloo, Corner Table, Modern man as his master want him to be. A docile little porker, sitting in the money-sty, drinking Bovex.

Faces passed, wind-yellowed. A tram boomed across the square, and the clock over the Prince of Wales struck three. A couple of old creatures, a tramp or a beggar and his wife, in long greasy overcoats that reached almost to the ground, were shuffling towards the shop. Book-pinchers, by the look of them. Better keep an eye on the boxes outside. The old man halted on the kerb a few yards away while his wife came to the door. She pushed it open and looked up at Gordon, between grey strings of hair, with a sort of hopeful malevolence.

'Ju buy books?' she demanded hoarsely.

'Sometimes. It depends what books they are.'

'I gossome LOVELY books 'ere.'

She came in, shutting the door with a clang. The Nancy glanced over his shoulder distastefully and moved a step or two away, into the corner. The old woman had produced a greasy little sack from under her overcoat. She moved confidentially nearer to Gordon. She smelt of very, very old breadcrusts.

'Will you 'ave 'em?' she said, clasping the neck of the sack. 'Only 'alf a crown the lot.'

'What are they? Let me see them, please.'

'LOVELY books, they are,' she breathed, bending over to open the sack and emitting a sudden very powerful whiff of breadcrusts.

''Ere!' she said, and thrust an armful of filthy-looking books almost into Gordon's face.

They were an 1884 edition of Charlotte M. Yonge's novels, and had the appearance of having been slept on for many years. Gordon

stepped back, suddenly revolted.

'We can't possibly buy those,' he said shortly.

'Can't buy 'em? WHY can't yer buy 'em?'

'Because they're no use to us. We can't sell that kind of thing.'

'Wotcher make me take 'em out o' me bag for, then?' demanded the old woman ferociously.

Gordon made a detour round her, to avoid the smell, and held the door open, silently. No use arguing. You had people of this type coming into the shop all day long. The old woman made off, mumbling, with malevolence in the hump of her shoulders, and joined her husband. He paused on the kerb to cough, so fruitily that you could hear him through the door. A clot of phlegm, like a little white tongue, came slowly out between his lips and was ejected into the gutter. Then the two old creatures shuffled away, beetle-like in the long greasy overcoats that hid everything except their feet.

Gordon watched them go. They were just by-products. The throw-outs of the money-god. All over London, by tens of thousands, draggled old beasts of that description; creeping like unclean beetles to the grave.

He gazed out at the graceless street. At this moment it seemed to him that in a street like this, in a town like this, every life that is lived must be meaningless and intolerable. The sense of disintegration, of decay, that is endemic in our time, was strong upon him. Somehow it was mixed up with the ad-posters opposite. He looked now with more seeing eyes at those grinning yard-wide faces. After all, there was more there than mere silliness, greed, and vulgarity. Corner Table grins at you, seemingly optimistic, with a flash of false teeth. But what is behind the grin? Desolation, emptiness, prophecies of doom. For can you not see, if you know how to look, that behind that slick self-satisfaction, that tittering fat-bellied triviality, there is nothing but a frightful emptiness, a secret despair? The great death-wish of the modern world. Suicide pacts. Heads stuck in gas-ovens in lonely maisonettes. French letters and Amen Pills. And the reverberations of future wars. Enemy aeroplanes flying over London; the deep threatening hum of the propellers, the shattering thunder of the bombs. It is all written in Corner Table's face.

More customers coming. Gordon stood back, gentlemanly-servile.

The door-bell clanged. Two upper-middle-class ladies sailed noisily in. One pink and fruity, thirty-fivish, with voluptuous bosom burgeoning from her coat of squirrel-skin, emitting a super-feminine scent of Parma violets: the other middle-aged, tough, and curried — India, presumably. Close behind them a dark, grubby, shy young man slipped through the doorway as apologetically as a cat. He was one of the shop's best customers — a flitting, solitary creature who was almost too shy to speak and who by some strange manipulation kept himself always a day away from a shave.

Gordon repeated his formula:

'Good afternoon. Can I do anything for you? Are you looking for any particular book?'

Fruity-face overwhelmed him with a smile, but curry-face decided to treat the question as an impertinence. Ignoring Gordon, she drew fruity-face across to the shelves next to the new books where the dog-books and cat-books were kept. The two of them immediately began taking books out of the shelves and talking loudly. Curry-face had the voice of a drill-sergeant. She was no doubt a colonel's wife, or widow. The Nancy, still deep in the big book on the Russian ballet, edged delicately away. His face said that he would leave the shop if his privacy were disturbed again. The shy young man had already found his way to the poetry shelves. The two ladies were fairly frequent visitors to the shop. They always wanted to see books about cats and dogs, but never actually bought anything. There were two whole shelves of dog-books and cat-books. 'Ladies' Corner,' old McKechnie called it.

Another customer arrived, for the library. An ugly girl of twenty, hatless, in a white overall, with a sallow, blithering, honest face and powerful spectacles that distorted her eyes. She was an assistant at a chemist's shop. Gordon put on his homey library manner. She smiled at him, and with a gait as clumsy as a bear's followed him into the library.

'What kind of book would you like this time, Miss Weeks?'

'Well' — she clutched the front of her overall. Her distorted, black-treacle eyes beamed trustfully into his. 'Well, what I'd REALLY like's a good hot-stuff love story. You know — something MODERN.'

‘Something modern? Something by Barbara Bedworthy for instance? Have you read Almost a Virgin?’

‘Oh no, not her. She’s too Deep. I can’t bear Deep books. But I want something — well, YOU know — MODERN. Sex-problems and divorce and all that. YOU know.’

‘Modern, but not Deep,’ said Gordon, as lowbrow to lowbrow.

He ranged among the hot-stuff modern love-stories. There were not less than three hundred of them in the library. From the front room came the voices of the two upper-middle-class ladies, the one fruity, the other curried, disputing about dogs. They had taken out one of the dog-books and were examining the photographs. Fruity-voice enthused over the photograph of a Peke, the ickle angel pet, wiv his gweat big Soulful eyes and his ickle black nosie — oh, so ducky-duck! But curry-voice — yes, undoubtedly a colonel’s widow — said Pekes were soppy. Give her dogs with guts — dogs that would fight, she said; she hated these soppy lapdogs, she said. ‘You have no Soul, Bedelia, no Soul,’ said fruity-voice plaintively. The door-bell pinged again. Gordon handed the chemist’s girl Seven Scarlet Nights and booked it on her ticket. She took a shabby leather purse out of her overall pocket and paid him twopence.

He went back to the front room. The Nancy had put his book back in the wrong shelf and vanished. A lean, straight-nosed, brisk woman, with sensible clothes and gold-rimmed pince-nez — schoolmarm possibly, feminist certainly — came in and demanded Mrs Wharton-Beverley’s history of the suffrage movement. With secret joy Gordon told her that they hadn’t got it. She stabbed his male incompetence with gimlet eyes and went out again. The thin young man stood apologetically in the corner, his face buried in D. H. Lawrence’s Collected Poems, like some long-legged bird with its head buried under its wing.

Gordon waited by the door. Outside, a shabby-genteel old man with a strawberry nose and a khaki muffler round his throat was picking over the books in the sixpenny box. The two upper-middle-class ladies suddenly departed, leaving a litter of open books on the table. Fruity-face cast reluctant backward glances at the dog-books, but curry-face drew her away, resolute not to buy anything. Gordon held the door open. The two ladies sailed noisily out, ignoring him.

He watched their fur-coated upper-middle-class backs go down the street. The old strawberry-nosed man was talking to himself as he pawed over the books. A bit wrong in the head, presumably. He would pinch something if he wasn't watched. The wind blew colder, drying the slime of the street. Time to light up presently. Caught by a swirl of air, the torn strip of paper on the Q. T. Sauce advertisement fluttered sharply, like a piece of washing on the line. Ah!

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare, And the dark ribbons of the chimneys Veer downward; flicked by whips of air Torn posters flutter.

Not bad, not bad at all. But he had no wish to go on — could not go on, indeed. He fingered the money in his pocket, not chinking it, lest the shy young man should hear. Twopence-halfpenny. No tobacco all tomorrow. His bones ached.

A light sprang up in the Prince of Wales. They would be swabbing out the bar. The old strawberry-nosed man was reading an Edgar Wallace out of the twopenny box. A tram boomed in the distance. In the room upstairs Mr McKechnie, who seldom came down to the shop, drowsed by the gas-fire, white-haired and white-bearded, with snuff-box handy, over his calf-bound folio of Middleton's Travels in the Levant.

The thin young man suddenly realized that he was alone and looked up guiltily. He was a habitue of bookshops, yet never stayed longer than ten minutes in any one shop. A passionate hunger for books, and the fear of being a nuisance, were constantly at war in him. After ten minutes in any shop he would grow uneasy, feel himself de trop, and take to flight, having bought something out of sheer nervousness. Without speaking he held out the copy of Lawrence's poems and awkwardly extracted three florins from his pocket. In handing them to Gordon he dropped one. Both dived for it simultaneously; their heads bumped against one another. The young man stood back, blushing sallowly.

'I'll wrap it up for you,' said Gordon.

But the shy young man shook his head — he stammered so badly that he never spoke when it was avoidable. He clutched his book to him and slipped out with the air of having committed some disgraceful action.

Gordon was alone. He wandered back to the door. The strawberry-nosed man glanced over his shoulder, caught Gordon's eye, and moved off, foiled. He had been on the point of slipping Edgar Wallace into his pocket. The clock over the Prince of Wales struck a quarter past three.

Ding Dong! A quarter past three. Light up at half past. Four and three-quarter hours till closing time. Five and a quarter hours till supper. Twopence halfpenny in pocket. No tobacco tomorrow.

Suddenly a ravishing, irresistible desire to smoke came over Gordon. He had made up his mind not to smoke this afternoon. He had only four cigarettes left. They must be saved for tonight, when he intended to 'write'; for he could no more 'write' without tobacco than without air. Nevertheless, he had got to have a smoke. He took out his packet of Player's Weights and extracted one of the dwarfish cigarettes. It was sheer stupid indulgence; it meant half an hour off tonight's 'writing' time. But there was no resisting it. With a sort of shameful joy he sucked the soothing smoke into his lungs.

The reflection of his own face looked back at him from the greyish pane. Gordon Comstock, author of MICE; en l'an trentiesme de son eage, and moth-eaten already. Only twenty-six teeth left. However, Villon at the same age was poxed on his own showing. Let's be thankful for small mercies.

He watched the ribbon of torn paper whirling, fluttering on the Q. T. Sauce advertisement. Our civilization is dying. It MUST be dying. But it isn't going to die in its bed. Presently the aeroplanes are coming. Zoom — whizz — crash! The whole western world going up in a roar of high explosives.

He looked at the darkening street, at the greyish reflection of his face in the pane, at the shabby figures shuffling past. Almost involuntarily he repeated:

'C'est l'Ennui — l'oeil charge d'un pleur involontaire, Il reve d'echafauds en fumant son houka!'

Money, money! Corner Table! The humming of the aeroplanes and the crash of the bombs.

Gordon squinted up at the leaden sky. Those aeroplanes are coming. In imagination he saw them coming now; squadron after squadron, innumerable, darkening the sky like clouds of gnats. With

his tongue not quite against his teeth he made a buzzing, bluebottle-on-the-window-pane sound to represent the humming of the aeroplanes. It was a sound which, at that moment, he ardently desired to hear.

Chapter 2

Gordon walked homeward against the rattling wind, which blew his hair backward and gave him more of a 'good' forehead than ever. His manner conveyed to the passers-by — at least, he hoped it did — that if he wore no overcoat it was from pure caprice. His overcoat was up the spout for fifteen shillings, as a matter of fact.

Willowbed Road, NW, was not definitely slummy, only dingy and depressing. There were real slums hardly five minutes' walk away. Tenement houses where families slept five in a bed, and, when one of them died, slept every night with the corpse until it was buried; alleyways where girls of fifteen were deflowered by boys of sixteen against leprous plaster walls. But Willowbed Road itself contrived to keep up a kind of mingy, lower-middle-class decency. There was even a dentist's brass plate on one of the houses. In quite two-thirds of them, amid the lace curtains of the parlour window, there was a green card with 'Apartments' on it in silver lettering, above the peeping foliage of an aspidistra.

Mrs Wisbeach, Gordon's landlady, specialized in 'single gentlemen'. Bed-sitting-rooms, with gaslight laid on and find your own heating, baths extra (there was a geyser), and meals in the tomb-dark dining-room with the phalanx of clotted sauce-bottles in the middle of the table. Gordon, who came home for his midday dinner, paid twenty-seven and six a week.

The gaslight shone yellow through the frosted transom above the door of Number 31. Gordon took out his key and fished about in the keyhole — in that kind of house the key never quite fits the lock. The darkish little hallway — in reality it was only a passage — smelt of dishwater, cabbage, rag mats, and bedroom slops. Gordon glanced at the japanned tray on the hall-stand. No letters, of course. He had told himself not to hope for a letter, and nevertheless had continued to hope. A stale feeling, not quite a pain, settled upon his breast. Rosemary might have written! It was four days now since she had written. Moreover, there were a couple of poems that he had sent out to magazines and had not yet had returned to him. The one thing that made the evening bearable was to find a letter waiting for him when

he got home. But he received very few letters — four or five in a week at the very most.

On the left of the hall was the never-used parlour, then came the staircase, and beyond that the passage ran down to the kitchen and to the unapproachable lair inhabited by Mrs Wisbeach herself. As Gordon came in, the door at the end of the passage opened a foot or so. Mrs Wisbeach's face emerged, inspected him briefly but suspiciously, and disappeared again. It was quite impossible to get in or out of the house, at any time before eleven at night, without being scrutinized in this manner. Just what Mrs Wisbeach suspected you of it was hard to say; smuggling women into the house, possibly. She was one of those malignant respectable women who keep lodging-houses. Age about forty-five, stout but active, with a pink, fine-featured, horribly observant face, beautifully grey hair, and a permanent grievance.

Gordon halted at the foot of the narrow stairs. Above, a coarse rich voice was singing, 'Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' A very fat man of thirty-eight or nine came round the angle of the stairs, with the light dancing step peculiar to fat men, dressed in a smart grey suit, yellow shoes, a rakish trilby hat, and a belted blue overcoat of startling vulgarity. This was Flaxman, the first-floor lodger and travelling representative of the Queen of Sheba Toilet Requisites Co. He saluted Gordon with a lemon-coloured glove as he came down.

'Hullo, chappie!' he said blithely. (Flaxman called everyone 'chappie'.) 'How's life with you?'

'Bloody,' said Gordon shortly.

Flaxman had reached the bottom of the stairs. He threw a roly-poly arm affectionately round Gordon's shoulders.

'Cheer up, old man, cheer up! You look like a bloody funeral. I'm off down to the Crichton. Come on down and have a quick one.'

'I can't. I've got to work.'

'Oh, hell! Be matey, can't you? What's the good of mooning about up here? Come on down to the Cri and we'll pinch the barmaid's bum.'

Gordon wriggled free of Flaxman' s arm. Like all small frail people, he hated being touched. Flaxman merely grinned, with the typical fat man's good humour. He was really horribly fat. He filled

his trousers as though he had been melted and then poured into them. But of course, like other fat people, he never admitted to being fat. No fat person ever uses the word 'fat' if there is any way of avoiding it. 'Stout' is the word they use — or, better still, 'robust'. A fat man is never so happy as when he is describing himself as 'robust'. Flaxman, at his first meeting with Gordon, had been on the point of calling himself 'robust', but something in Gordon's greenish eye had deterred him. He compromised on 'stout' instead.

'I do admit, chappie,' he said, 'to being — well, just a wee bit on the stout side. Nothing unwholesome, you know.' He patted the vague frontier between his belly and his chest. 'Good firm flesh. I'm pretty nippy on my feet, as a matter of fact. But — well, I suppose you might call me STOUT.'

'Like Cortez,' Gordon suggested.

'Cortez? Cortez? Was that the chappie who was always wandering about in the mountains in Mexico?'

'That's the fellow. He was stout, but he had eagle eyes.'

'Ah? Now that's funny. Because the wife said something rather like that to me once. "George," she said, "you've got the most wonderful eyes in the world. You've got eyes just like an eagle," she said. That would be before she married me, you'll understand.'

Flaxman was living apart from his wife at the moment. A little while back the Queen of Sheba Toilet Requisites Co. had unexpectedly paid out a bonus of thirty pounds to all its travellers, and at the same time Flaxman and two others had been sent across to Paris to press the new Sexapeal Naturetint lipstick on various French firms. Flaxman had not thought it necessary to mention the thirty pounds to his wife. He had had the time of his life on that Paris trip, of course. Even now, three months afterwards, his mouth watered when he spoke of it. He used to entertain Gordon with luscious descriptions. Ten days in Paris with thirty quid that wifie hadn't heard about! Oh boy! But unfortunately there had been a leakage somewhere; Flaxman had got home to find retribution awaiting him. His wife had broken his head with a cut-glass whisky decanter, a wedding present which they had had for fourteen years, and then fled to her mother's house, taking the children with her. Hence Flaxman's exile in Willowbed Road. But he wasn't letting it worry him. It

would blow over, no doubt; it had happened several times before.

Gordon made another attempt to get past Flaxman and escape up the stairs. The dreadful thing was that in his heart he was pining to go with him. He needed a drink so badly — the mere mention of the Crichton Arms had made him feel thirsty. But it was impossible, of course; he had no money. Flaxman put an arm across the stairs, barring his way. He was genuinely fond of Gordon. He considered him 'clever'— 'cleverness', to him, being a kind of amiable lunacy. Moreover, he detested being alone, even for so short a time as it would take him to walk to the pub.

'Come on, chappie!' he urged. 'You want a Guinness to buck you up, that's what you want. You haven't seen the new girl they've got in the saloon bar yet. Oh, boy! There's a peach for you!'

'So that's why you're all dolled up, is it?' said Gordon, looking coldly at Flaxman's yellow gloves.

'You bet it is, chappie! Coo, what a peach! Ash blonde she is. And she knows a thing or two, that girlie does. I gave her a stick of our Sexapeal Naturetint last night. You ought to have seen her wag her little bottom at me as she went past my table. Does she give me the palpitations? Does she? Oh, boy!'

Flaxman wriggled lascivously. His tongue appeared between his lips. Then, suddenly pretending that Gordon was the ash-blonde barmaid, he seized him by the waist and gave him a tender squeeze. Gordon shoved him away. For a moment the desire to go down to the Crichton Arms was so ravishing that it almost overcame him. Oh, for a pint of beer! He seemed almost to feel it going down his throat. If only he had had any money! Even sevenpence for a pint. But what was the use? Twopence halfpenny in pocket. You can't let other people buy your drinks for you.

'Oh, leave me alone, for God's sake!' he said irritably, stepping out of Flaxman's reach, and went up the stairs without looking back.

Flaxman settled his hat on his head and made for the front door, mildly offended. Gordon reflected dully that it was always like this nowadays. He was for ever snubbing friendly advances. Of course it was money that was at the bottom of it, always money. You can't be friendly, you can't even be civil, when you have no money in your pocket. A spasm of self-pity went through him. His heart yearned for

the saloon bar at the Crichton; the lovely smell of beer, the warmth and bright lights, the cheery voices, the clatter of glasses on the beer-wet bar. Money, money! He went on, up the dark evil-smelling stairs. The thought of his cold lonely bedroom at the top of the house was like a doom before him.

On the second floor lived Lorenheim, a dark, meagre, lizard-like creature of uncertain age and race, who made about thirty-five shillings a week by touting vacuum-cleaners. Gordon always went very hurriedly past Lorenheim's door. Lorenheim was one of those people who have not a single friend in the world and who are devoured by a lust for company. His loneliness was so deadly that if you so much as slowed your pace outside his door he was liable to pounce out upon you and half drag, half wheedle you in to listen to interminable paranoiac tales of girls he had seduced and employers he had scored off. And his room was more cold and squalid than even a lodging-house bedroom has any right to be. There were always half-eaten bits of bread and margarine lying about everywhere. The only other lodger in the house was an engineer of some kind, employed on nightwork. Gordon only saw him occasionally — a massive man with a grim, discoloured face, who wore a bowler hat indoors and out.

In the familiar darkness of his room, Gordon felt for the gas-jet and lighted it. The room was medium-sized, not big enough to be curtained into two, but too big to be sufficiently warmed by one defective oil lamp. It had the sort of furniture you expect in a top floor back. White-quilted single-bed; brown lino floor-covering; wash-hand-stand with jug and basin of that cheap white ware which you can never see without thinking of chamberpots. On the window-sill there was a sickly aspidistra in a green-glazed pot.

Up against this, under the window, there was a kitchen table with an inkstained green cloth. This was Gordon's 'writing' table. It was only after a bitter struggle that he had induced Mrs Wisbeach to give him a kitchen table instead of the bamboo 'occasional' table — a mere stand for the aspidistra — which she considered proper for a top floor back. And even now there was endless nagging because Gordon would never allow his table to be 'tidied up'. The table was in a permanent mess. It was almost covered with a muddle of papers,

perhaps two hundred sheets of sermon paper, grimy and dog-eared, and all written on and crossed out and written on again — a sort of sordid labyrinth of papers to which only Gordon possessed the key. There was a film of dust over everything, and there were several foul little trays containing tobacco ash and the twisted stubs of cigarettes. Except for a few books on the mantelpiece, this table, with its mess of papers, was the sole mark Gordon's personality had left on the room.

It was beastly cold. Gordon thought he would light the oil lamp. He lifted it — it felt very light; the spare oil can also was empty — no oil till Friday. He applied a match; a dull yellow flame crept unwillingly round the wick. It might burn for a couple of hours, with any luck. As Gordon threw away the match his eye fell upon the aspidistra in its grass-green pot. It was a peculiarly mangy specimen. It had only seven leaves and never seemed to put forth any new ones. Gordon had a sort of secret feud with the aspidistra. Many a time he had furtively attempted to kill it — starving it of water, grinding hot cigarette-ends against its stem, even mixing salt with its earth. But the beastly things are practically immortal. In almost any circumstances they can preserve a wilting, diseased existence. Gordon stood up and deliberately wiped his kerosiny fingers on the aspidistra leaves.

At this moment Mrs Wisbeach's voice rang shrewishly up the stairs:

'Mister Com-stock!'

Gordon went to the door. 'Yes?' he called down.

'Your supper's been waiting for you this ten minutes. Why can't you come down and have it, 'stead of keeping me waiting for the washing up?'

Gordon went down. The dining-room was on the first floor, at the back, opposite Flaxman's room. It was a cold, close-smelling room, twilit even at midday. There were more aspidistras in it than Gordon had ever accurately counted. They were all over the place — on the sideboard, on the floor, on 'occasional' tables; in the window there was a sort of florist's stand of them, blocking out the light. In the half-darkness, with aspidistras all about you, you had the feeling of being in some sunless aquarium amid the dreary foliage of water-

flowers. Gordon's supper was set out, waiting for him, in the circle of white light that the cracked gas-jet cast upon the table cloth. He sat down with his back to the fireplace (there was an aspidistra in the grate instead of a fire) and ate his plate of cold beef and his two slices of crumbly white bread, with Canadian butter, mousetrap cheese and Pan Yan pickle, and drank a glass of cold but musty water.

When he went back to his room the oil lamp had got going, more or less. It was hot enough to boil a kettle by, he thought. And now for the great event of the evening — his illicit cup of tea. He made himself a cup of tea almost every night, in the deadliest secrecy. Mrs Wisbeach refused to give her lodgers tea with their supper, because she 'couldn't be bothered with hotting up extra water', but at the same time making tea in your bedroom was strictly forbidden. Gordon looked with disgust at the muddled papers on the table. He told himself defiantly that he wasn't going to do any work tonight. He would have a cup of tea and smoke up his remaining cigarettes, and read King Lear or Sherlock Holmes. His books were on the mantelpiece beside the alarm clock — Shakespeare in the Everyman edition, Sherlock Holmes, Villon's poems, Roderick Random, Les Fleurs du Mal, a pile of French novels. But he read nothing nowadays, except Shakespeare and Sherlock Holmes. Meanwhile, that cup of tea.

Gordon went to the door, pushed it ajar, and listened. No sound of Mrs Wisbeach. You had to be very careful; she was quite capable of sneaking upstairs and catching you in the act. This tea-making was the major household offence, next to bringing a woman in. Quietly he bolted the door, dragged his cheap suitcase from under the bed, and unlocked it. From it he extracted a sixpenny Woolworth's kettle, a packet of Lyons' tea, a tin of condensed milk, a tea-pot, and a cup. They were all packed in newspaper to prevent them from chinking.

He had his regular procedure for making tea. First he half filled the kettle with water from the jug and set it on the oil stove. Then he knelt down and spread out a piece of newspaper. Yesterday's tea-leaves were still in the pot, of course. He shook them out on to the newspaper, cleaned out the pot with his thumb and folded the leaves into a bundle. Presently he would smuggle them downstairs. That was always the most risky part — getting rid of the used tea-leaves.

It was like the difficulty murderers have in disposing of the body. As for the cup, he always washed it in his hand basin in the morning. A squalid business. It sickened him, sometimes. It was queer how furtively you had to live in Mrs Wisbeach's house. You had the feeling that she was always watching you; and indeed, she was given to tiptoeing up and downstairs at all hours, in hope of catching the lodgers up to mischief. It was one of those houses where you cannot even go to the W.C. in peace because of the feeling that somebody is listening to you.

Gordon unbolted the door again and listened intently. No one stirring. Ah! A clatter of crockery far below. Mrs Wisbeach was washing up the supper things. Probably safe to go down, then.

He tiptoed down, clutching the damp bundle of tea-leaves against his breast. The W.C. was on the second floor. At the angle of the stairs he halted, listened a moment longer. Ah! Another clatter of crockery.

All clear! Gordon Comstock, poet ('of exceptional promise', The Times Lit. Supp. had said), hurriedly slipped into the W.C., flung his tea-leaves down the waste-pipe, and pulled the plug. Then he hurried back to his room, rebolted the door, and, with precautions against noise, brewed himself a fresh pot of tea.

The room was passably warm by now. The tea and a cigarette worked their short-lived magic. He began to feel a little less bored and angry. Should he do a spot of work after all? He ought to work, of course. He always hated himself afterwards when he had wasted a whole evening. Half unwillingly, he shoved his chair up to the table. It needed an effort even to disturb that frightful jungle of papers. He pulled a few grimy sheets towards him, spread them out, and looked at them. God, what a mess! Written on, scored out, written over, scored out again, till they were like poor old hacked cancer-patients after twenty operations. But the handwriting, where it was not crossed out, was delicate and 'scholarly'. With pain and trouble Gordon had acquired that 'scholarly' hand, so different from the beastly copper-plate they had taught him at school.

Perhaps he WOULD work; for a little while, anyway. He rummaged in the litter of papers. Where was that passage he had been working on yesterday? The poem was an immensely long one

— that is, it was going to be immensely long when it was finished — two thousand lines or so, in rhyme royal, describing a day in London. London Pleasures, its name was. It was a huge, ambitious project — the kind of thing that should only be undertaken by people with endless leisure. Gordon had not grasped that fact when he began the poem; he grasped it now, however. How light-heartedly he had begun it, two years ago! When he had chucked up everything and descended into the slime of poverty, the conception of this poem had been at least a part of his motive. He had felt so certain, then, that he was equal to it. But somehow, almost from the start, London Pleasures had gone wrong. It was too big for him, that was the truth. It had never really progressed, it had simply fallen apart into a series of fragments. And out of two years' work that was all that he had to show — just fragments, incomplete in themselves and impossible to join together. On every one of those sheets of paper there was some hacked scrap of verse which had been written and rewritten and rewritten over intervals of months. There were not five hundred lines that you could say were definitely finished. And he had lost the power to add to it any longer; he could only tinker with this passage or that, groping now here, now there, in its confusion. It was no longer a thing that he created, it was merely a nightmare with which he struggled.

For the rest, in two whole years he had produced nothing except a handful of short poems — perhaps a score in all. It was so rarely that he could attain the peace of mind in which poetry, or prose for that matter, has got to be written. The times when he 'could not' work grew commoner and commoner. Of all types of human being, only the artist takes it upon him to say that he 'cannot' work. But it is quite true; there ARE times when one cannot work. Money again, always money! Lack of money means discomfort, means squalid worries, means shortage of tobacco, means ever-present consciousness of failure — above all, it means loneliness. How can you be anything but lonely on two quid a week? And in loneliness no decent book was ever written. It was quite certain that London Pleasures would never be the poem he had conceived — it was quite certain, indeed, that it would never even be finished. And in the moments when he faced facts Gordon himself was aware of this.

Yet all the same, and all the more for that very reason, he went on with it. It was something to cling to. It was a way of hitting back at his poverty and his loneliness. And after all, there were times when the mood of creation returned, or seemed to return. It returned tonight, for just a little while — just as long as it takes to smoke two cigarettes. With smoke tickling his lungs, he abstracted himself from the mean and actual world. He drove his mind into the abyss where poetry is written. The gas-jet sang soothing overhead. Words became vivid and momentous things. A couplet, written a year ago and left as unfinished, caught his eye with a note of doubt. He repeated it to himself, over and over. It was wrong, somehow. It had seemed all right, a year ago; now, on the other hand, it seemed subtly vulgar. He rummaged among the sheets of foolscap till he found one that had nothing written on the back, turned it over, wrote the couplet out anew, wrote a dozen different versions of it, repeated each of them over and over to himself. Finally there was none that satisfied him. The couplet would have to go. It was cheap and vulgar. He found the original sheet of paper and scored the couplet out with thick lines. And in doing this there was a sense of achievement, of time not wasted, as though the destruction of much labour were in some way an act of creation.

Suddenly a double knock deep below made the whole house rattle. Gordon started. His mind fled upwards from the abyss. The post! London Pleasures was forgotten.

His heart fluttered. Perhaps Rosemary HAD written. Besides, there were those two poems he had sent to the magazines. One of them, indeed, he had almost given up as lost; he had sent it to an American paper, the Californian Review, months ago. Probably they wouldn't even bother to send it back. But the other was with an English paper, the Primrose Quarterly. He had wild hopes of that one. The Primrose Quarterly was one of those poisonous literary papers in which the fashionable Nancy Boy and the professional Roman Catholic walk bras dessus, bras dessous. It was also by a long way the most influential literary paper in England. You were a made man once you had had a poem in it. In his heart Gordon knew that the Primrose Quarterly would never print his poems. He wasn't up to their standard. Still, miracles sometimes happen; or, if not miracles,

accidents. After all, they'd had his poem six weeks. Would they keep it six weeks if they didn't mean to accept it? He tried to quell the insane hope. But at the worst there was a chance that Rosemary had written. It was four whole days since she had written. She wouldn't do it, perhaps, if she knew how it disappointed him. Her letters — long, ill-spelt letters, full of absurd jokes and protestations of love for him — meant far more to him than she could ever understand. They were a reminder that there was still somebody in the world who cared for him. They even made up for the times when some beast had sent back one of his poems; and, as a matter of fact, the magazines always did send back his poems, except Antichrist, whose editor, Ravelston, was his personal friend.

There was a shuffling below. It was always some minutes before Mrs Wisbeach brought the letters upstairs. She liked to paw them about, feel them to see how thick they were, read their postmarks, hold them up to the light and speculate on their contents, before yielding them to their rightful owners. She exercised a sort of droit du seigneur over letters. Coming to her house, they were, she felt, at least partially hers. If you had gone to the front door and collected your own letters she would have resented it bitterly. On the other hand, she also resented the labour of carrying them upstairs. You would hear her footsteps very slowly ascending, and then, if there was a letter for you, there would be loud aggrieved breathing on the landing — this to let you know that you had put Mrs Wisbeach out of breath by dragging her up all those stairs. Finally, with a little impatient grunt, the letters would be shoved under your door.

Mrs Wisbeach was coming up the stairs. Gordon listened. The footsteps paused on the first floor. A letter for Flaxman. They ascended, paused again on the second floor. A letter for the engineer. Gordon's heart beat painfully. A letter, please God, a letter! More footsteps. Ascending or descending? They were coming nearer, surely! Ah, no, no! The sound grew fainter. She was going down again. The footsteps died away. No letters.

He took up his pen again. It was a quite futile gesture. She hadn't written after all! The little beast! He had not the smallest intention of doing any more work. Indeed, he could not. The disappointment had taken all the heart out of him. Only five minutes ago his poem had

still seemed to him a living thing; now he knew it unmistakably for the worthless tripe that it was. With a kind of nervous disgust he bundled the scattered sheets together, stacked them in an untidy heap, and dumped them on the other side of the table, under the aspidistra. He could not even bear to look at them any longer.

He got up. It was too early to go to bed; at least, he was not in the mood for it. He pined for a bit of amusement — something cheap and easy. A seat in the pictures, cigarettes, beer. Useless! No money to pay for any of them. He would read King Lear and forget this filthy century. Finally, however, it was The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes that he took from the mantelpiece. Sherlock Holmes was his favourite of all books, because he knew it by heart. The oil in the lamp was giving out and it was getting beastly cold. Gordon dragged the quilt from his bed, wrapped it round his legs, and sat down to read. His right elbow on the table, his hands under his coat to keep them warm, he read through 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band.' The little gas-mantle sighed above, the circular flame of the oil lamp burned low, a thin bracket of fire, giving out no more heat than a candle.

Down in Mrs Wisbeach's lair the clock struck half past ten. You could always hear it striking at night. Ping-ping, ping-ping — a note of doom! The ticking of the alarm clock on the mantelpiece became audible to Gordon again, bringing with it the consciousness of the sinister passage of time. He looked about him. Another evening wasted. Hours, days, years slipping by. Night after night, always the same. The lonely room, the womanless bed; dust, cigarette ash, the aspidistra leaves. And he was thirty, nearly. In sheer self-punishment he dragged forth a wad of London Pleasures, spread out the grimy sheets, and looked at them as one looks at a skull for a memento mori. London Pleasures, by Gordon Comstock, author of Mice. His magnum opus. The fruit (fruit, indeed!) of two years' work — that labyrinthine mess of words! And tonight's achievement — two lines crossed out; two lines backward instead of forward.

The lamp made a sound like a tiny hiccup and went out. With an effort Gordon stood up and flung the quilt back on to his bed. Better get to bed, perhaps, before it got any colder. He wandered over towards the bed. But wait. Work tomorrow. Wind the clock, set the

alarm. Nothing accomplished, nothing done, has earned a night's repose.

It was some time before he could find the energy to undress. For a quarter of an hour, perhaps, he lay on the bed fully dressed, his hands under his head. There was a crack on the ceiling that resembled the map of Australia. Gordon contrived to work off his shoes and socks without sitting up. He held up one foot and looked at it. A smallish, delicate foot. Ineffectual, like his hands. Also, it was very dirty. It was nearly ten days since he had a bath. Becoming ashamed of the dirtiness of his feet, he sagged into a sitting position and undressed himself, throwing his clothes on to the floor. Then he turned out the gas and slid between the sheets, shuddering, for he was naked. He always slept naked. His last suit of pyjamas had gone west more than a year ago.

The clock downstairs struck eleven. As the first coldness of the sheets wore off, Gordon's mind went back to the poem he had begun that afternoon. He repeated in a whisper the single stanza that was finished:

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare, And dark ribbons of the chimneys Veer downward; flicked by whips of air, Torn posters flutter.

The octosyllables flicked to and fro. Click-click, click-click! The awful, mechanical emptiness of it appalled him. It was like some futile little machine ticking over. Rhyme to rhyme, click-click, click-click. Like the nodding of a clock-work doll. Poetry! The last futility. He lay awake, aware of his own futility, of his thirty years, of the blind alley into which he had led his life.

The clock struck twelve. Gordon had stretched his legs out straight. The bed had grown warm and comfortable. The upturned beam of a car, somewhere in the street parallel to Willowbed Road, penetrated the blind and threw into silhouette a leaf of the aspidistra, shaped like Agamemnon's sword.

Chapter 3

'Gordon Comstock' was a pretty bloody name, but then Gordon came from a pretty bloody family. The 'Gordon' part of it was Scotch, of course. The prevalence of such names nowadays is merely a part of the Scotchification of England that has been going on these last fifty years. 'Gordon', 'Colin', 'Malcolm', 'Donald' — these are the gifts of Scotland to the world, along with golf, whisky, porridge, and the works of Barrie and Stevenson.

The Comstocks belonged to the most dismal of all classes, the middle-middle class, the landless gentry. In their miserable poverty they had not even the snobbish consolation of regarding themselves as an 'old' family fallen on evil days, for they were not an 'old' family at all, merely one of those families which rose on the wave of Victorian prosperity and then sank again faster than the wave itself. They had had at most fifty years of comparative wealth, corresponding with the lifetime of Gordon's grandfather, Samuel Comstock — Gran'pa Comstock, as Gordon was taught to call him, though the old man died four years before he was born.

Gran'pa Comstock was one of those people who even from the grave exert a powerful influence. In life he was a tough old scoundrel. He plundered the proletariat and the foreigner of fifty thousand pounds, he built himself a red brick mansion as durable as a pyramid, and he begot twelve children, of whom eleven survived. Finally he died quite suddenly, of a cerebral haemorrhage. In Kensal Green his children placed over him a monolith with the following inscription:

IN EVER LOVING MEMORY OF
SAMUEL EZEKIEL COMSTOCK,
A FAITHFUL HUSBAND, A TENDER FATHER AND
AN UPRIGHT AND GODLY MAN,
WHO WAS BORN ON 9 JULY 1828, AND
DEPARTED THIS LIFE 5 SEPTEMBER 1901,
THIS STONE IS ERECTED BY
HIS SORROWING CHILDREN.
HE SLEEPS IN THE ARMS OF JESUS.

No need to repeat the blasphemous comments which everyone who had known Gran'pa Comstock made on that last sentence. But it is worth pointing out that the chunk of granite on which it was inscribed weighed close on five tons and was quite certainly put there with the intention, though not the conscious intention, of making sure that Gran'pa Comstock shouldn't get up from underneath it. If you want to know what a dead man's relatives really think of him, a good rough test is the weight of his tombstone.

The Comstocks, as Gordon knew them, were a peculiarly dull, shabby, dead-alive, ineffectual family. They lacked vitality to an extent that was surprising. That was Gran'pa Comstock's doing, of course. By the time when he died all his children were grown up and some of them were middle-aged, and he had long ago succeeded in crushing out of them any spirit they might ever have possessed. He had lain upon them as a garden roller lies upon daisies, and there was no chance of their flattened personalities ever expanding again. One and all they turned out listless, gutless, unsuccessful sort of people. None of the boys had proper professions, because Gran'pa Comstock had been at the greatest pains to drive all of them into professions for which they were totally unsuited. Only one of them — John, Gordon's father — had even braved Gran'pa Comstock to the extent of getting married during the latter's lifetime. It was impossible to imagine any of them making any sort of mark in the world, or creating anything, or destroying anything, or being happy, or vividly unhappy, or fully alive, or even earning a decent income. They just drifted along in an atmosphere of semi-genteel failure. They were one of those depressing families, so common among the middle-middle classes, in which NOTHING EVER HAPPENS.

From his earliest childhood Gordon's relatives had depressed him horribly. When he was a little boy he still had great numbers of uncles and aunts living. They were all more or less alike — grey, shabby, joyless people, all rather sickly in health and all perpetually harassed by money-worries which fizzled along without ever reaching the sensational explosion of bankruptcy. It was noticeable even then that they had lost all impulse to reproduce themselves. Really vital people, whether they have money or whether they haven't, multiply almost as automatically as animals. Gran'pa

Comstock, for instance, himself one of a litter of twelve, had produced eleven progeny. Yet all those eleven produced only two progeny between them, and those two — Gordon and his sister Julia — had produced, by 1934, not even one. Gordon, last of the Comstocks, was born in 1905, an unintended child; and thereafter, in thirty long, long years, there was not a single birth in the family, only deaths. And not only in the matter of marrying and begetting, but in every possible way, NOTHING EVER HAPPENED in the Comstock family. Every one of them seemed doomed, as though by a curse, to a dismal, shabby, hole-and-corner existence. None of them ever DID anything. They were the kind of people who in every conceivable activity, even if it is only getting on to a bus, are automatically elbowed away from the heart of things. All of them, of course, were hopeless fools about money. Gran'pa Comstock had finally divided his money among them more or less equally, so that each received, after the sale of the red-brick mansion, round about five thousand pounds. And no sooner was Gran'pa Comstock underground than they began to fritter their money away. None of them had the guts to lose it in sensational ways such as squandering it on women or at the races; they simply dribbled it away and dribbled it away, the women in silly investments and the men in futile little business ventures that petered out after a year or two, leaving a net loss. More than half of them went unmarried to their graves. Some of the women did make rather undesirable middle-aged marriages after their father was dead, but the men, because of their incapacity to earn a proper living, were the kind who 'can't afford' to marry. None of them, except Gordon's Aunt Angela, ever had so much as a home to call their own; they were the kind of people who live in godless 'rooms' and tomb-like boarding-houses. And year after year they died off and died off, of dingy but expensive little diseases that swallowed up the last penny of their capital. One of the women, Gordon's Aunt Charlotte, wandered off into the Mental Home at Clapham in 1916. The Mental Homes of England, how chock-a-block they stand! And it is above all derelict spinsters of the middle-classes who keep them going. By 1934 only three of that generation survived; Aunt Charlotte already mentioned, and Aunt Angela, who by some happy chance had been induced to buy a house

and a tiny annuity in 1912, and Uncle Walter, who dingily existed on the few hundred pounds that were left out of his five thousand and by running short-lived 'agencies' for this and that.

Gordon grew up in the atmosphere of cut-down clothes and stewed neck of mutton. His father, like the other Comstocks, was a depressed and therefore depressing person, but he had some brains and a slight literary turn. And seeing that his mind was of the literary type and he had a shrinking horror of anything to do with figures, it had seemed only natural to Gran'pa Comstock to make him into a chartered accountant. So he practised, ineffectually, as a chartered accountant, and was always buying his way into partnerships which were dissolved after a year or two, and his income fluctuated, sometimes rising to five hundred a year and sometimes falling to two hundred, but always with a tendency to decrease. He died in 1922, aged only fifty-six, but worn out — he had suffered from a kidney disease for a long time past.

Since the Comstocks were genteel as well as shabby, it was considered necessary to waste huge sums on Gordon's 'education'. What a fearful thing it is, this incubus of 'education'! It means that in order to send his son to the right kind of school (that is, a public school or an imitation of one) a middle-class man is obliged to live for years on end in a style that would be scorned by a jobbing plumber. Gordon was sent to wretched, pretentious schools whose fees were round about 120 pounds a year. Even these fees, of course, meant fearful sacrifices at home. Meanwhile Julia, who was five years older than he, received as nearly as possible no education at all. She was, indeed, sent to one or two poor, dingy little boarding schools, but she was 'taken away' for good when she was sixteen. Gordon was 'the boy' and Julia was 'the girl', and it seemed natural to everyone that 'the girl' should be sacrificed to 'the boy'. Moreover, it had early been decided in the family that Gordon was 'clever'. Gordon, with his wonderful 'cleverness', was to win scholarships, make a brilliant success in life, and retrieve the family fortunes — that was the theory, and no one believed in it more firmly than Julia. Julia was a tall, ungainly girl, much taller than Gordon, with a thin face and a neck just a little too long — one of those girls who even at their most youthful remind one irresistibly of a goose.

But her nature was simple and affectionate. She was a self-effacing, home-keeping, ironing, darning, and mending kind of girl, a natural spinster-soul. Even at sixteen she had 'old maid' written all over her. She idolized Gordon. All through his childhood she watched over him, nursed him, spoiled him, went in rags so that he might have the right clothes to go to school in, saved up her wretched pocket-money to buy him Christmas presents and birthday presents. And of course he repaid her, as soon as he was old enough, by despising her because she was not pretty and not 'clever'.

Even at the third-rate schools to which Gordon was sent nearly all the boys were richer than himself. They soon found out his poverty, of course, and gave him hell because of it. Probably the greatest cruelty one can inflict on a child is to send it to school among children richer than itself. A child conscious of poverty will suffer snobbish agonies such as a grown-up person can scarcely imagine. In those days, especially at his preparatory school, Gordon's life had been one long conspiracy to keep his end up and pretend that his parents were richer than they were. Ah, the humiliations of those days! That awful business, for instance, at the beginning of each term, when you had to 'give in' to the headmaster, publicly, the money you had brought back with you; and the contemptuous, cruel sniggers from the other boys when you didn't 'give in' ten bob or more. And the time when the others found out that Gordon was wearing a ready-made suit which had cost thirty-five shillings! The times that Gordon dreaded most of all were when his parents came down to see him. Gordon, in those days still a believer, used actually to pray that his parents wouldn't come down to school. His father, especially, was the kind of father you couldn't help being ashamed of; a cadaverous, despondent man, with a bad stoop, his clothes dismally shabby and hopelessly out of date. He carried about with him an atmosphere of failure, worry, and boredom. And he had such a dreadful habit, when he was saying good-bye, of tipping Gordon half a crown right in front of the other boys, so that everyone could see that it was only half a crown and not, as it ought to have been, ten bob! Even twenty years afterwards the memory of that school made Gordon shudder.

The first effect of all this was to give him a crawling reverence for

money. In those days he actually hated his poverty-stricken relatives — his father and mother, Julia, everybody. He hated them for their dingy homes, their dowdiness, their joyless attitude to life, their endless worrying and groaning over threepences and sixpences. By far the commonest phrase in the Comstock household was, 'We can't afford it.' In those days he longed for money as only a child can long. Why SHOULDN'T one have decent clothes and plenty of sweets and go to the pictures as often as one wanted to? He blamed his parents for their poverty as though they had been poor on purpose. Why couldn't they be like other boys' parents? They PREFERRED being poor, it seemed to him. That is how a child's mind works.

But as he grew older he grew — not less unreasonable, exactly, but unreasonable in a different way. By this time he had found his feet at school and was less violently oppressed. He never was very successful at school — he did no work and won no scholarships — but he managed to develop his brain along the lines that suited it. He read the books which the headmaster denounced from the pulpit, and developed unorthodox opinions about the C. of E., patriotism, and the Old Boys' tie. Also he began writing poetry. He even, after a year or two, began to send poems to the Athenaeum, the New Age, and the Weekly Westminster; but they were invariably rejected. Of course there were other boys of similar type with whom he associated. Every public school has its small self-conscious intelligentsia. And at that moment, in the years just after the War, England was so full of revolutionary opinion that even the public schools were infected by it. The young, even those who had been too young to fight, were in a bad temper with their elders, as well they might be; practically everyone with any brains at all was for the moment a revolutionary. Meanwhile the old — those over sixty, say — were running in circles like hens, squawking about 'subversive ideas'. Gordon and his friends had quite an exciting time with their 'subversive ideas'. For a whole year they ran an unofficial monthly paper called the Bolshevik, duplicated with a jellygraph. It advocated Socialism, free love, the dismemberment of the British Empire, the abolition of the Army and Navy, and so on and so forth. It was great fun. Every intelligent boy of sixteen is a Socialist. At that age one does not see the hook sticking out of the rather stodgy bait.

In a crude, boyish way, he had begun to get the hang of this money-business. At an earlier age than most people he grasped that ALL modern commerce is a swindle. Curiously enough, it was the advertisements in the Underground stations that first brought it home to him. He little knew, as the biographers say, that he himself would one day have a job in an advertising firm. But there was more to it than the mere fact that business is a swindle. What he realized, and more clearly as time went on, was that money-worship has been elevated into a religion. Perhaps it is the only real religion — the only really FELT religion — that is left to us. Money is what God used to be. Good and evil have no meaning any longer except failure and success. Hence the profoundly significant phrase, to MAKE GOOD. The decalogue has been reduced to two commandments. One for the employers — the elect, the money-priesthood as it were — 'Thou shalt make money'; the other for the employed — the slaves and underlings— 'Thou shalt not lose thy job.' It was about this time that he came across The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists and read about the starving carpenter who pawns everything but sticks to his aspidistra. The aspidistra became a sort of symbol for Gordon after that. The aspidistra, flower of England! It ought to be on our coat of arms instead of the lion and the unicorn. There will be no revolution in England while there are aspidistras in the windows.

He did not hate and despise his relatives now — or not so much, at any rate. They still depressed him greatly — those poor old withering aunts and uncles, of whom two or three had already died, his father, worn out and spiritless, his mother, faded, nervy, and 'delicate' (her lungs were none too strong), Julia, already, at one-and-twenty, a dutiful, resigned drudge who worked twelve hours a day and never had a decent frock. But he grasped now what was the matter with them. It was not MERELY the lack of money. It was rather that, having no money, they still lived mentally in the money-world — the world in which money is virtue and poverty is crime. It was not poverty but the down-dragging of RESPECTABLE poverty that had done for them. They had accepted the money-code, and by that code they were failures. They had never had the sense to lash out and just LIVE, money or no money, as the lower classes do. How right the lower classes are! Hats off to the factory lad who with

fourpence in the world puts his girl in the family way! At least he's got blood and not money in his veins.

Gordon thought it all out, in the naive selfish manner of a boy. There are two ways to live, he decided. You can be rich, or you can deliberately refuse to be rich. You can possess money, or you can despise money; the one fatal thing is to worship money and fail to get it. He took it for granted that he himself would never be able to make money. It hardly even occurred to him that he might have talents which could be turned to account. That was what his schoolmasters had done for him; they had rubbed it into him that he was a seditious little nuisance and not likely to 'succeed' in life. He accepted this. Very well, then, he would refuse the whole business of 'succeeding'; he would make it his especial purpose NOT to 'succeed'. Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven; better to serve in hell than serve in heaven, for that matter. Already, at sixteen, he knew which side he was on. He was AGAINST the money-god and all his swinish priesthood. He had declared war on money; but secretly, of course.

It was when he was seventeen that his father died, leaving about two hundred pounds. Julia had been at work for some years now. During 1918 and 1919 she had worked in a Government office, and after that she took a course of cookery and got a job in a nasty, ladylike little teashop near Earl's Court Underground Station. She worked a seventy-two hour week and was given her lunch and tea and twenty-five shillings; out of this she contributed twelve shillings a week, often more, to the household expenses. Obviously the best thing to do, now that Mr Comstock was dead, would have been to take Gordon away from school, find him a job, and let Julia have the two hundred pounds to set up a teashop of her own. But here the habitual Comstock folly about money stepped in. Neither Julia nor her mother would hear of Gordon leaving school. With the strange idealistic snobbishness of the middle classes, they were willing to go to the workhouse sooner than let Gordon leave school before the statutory age of eighteen. The two hundred pounds, or more than half of it, must be used in completing Gordon's 'education'. Gordon let them do it. He had declared war on money but that did not prevent him from being damnably selfish. Of course he dreaded this business

of going to work. What boy wouldn't dread it? Pen-pushing in some filthy office — God! His uncles and aunts were already talking dismally about 'getting Gordon settled in life'. They saw everything in terms of 'good' jobs. Young Smith had got such a 'good' job in a bank, and young Jones had got such a 'good' job in an insurance office. It made him sick to hear them. They seemed to want to see every young man in England nailed down in the coffin of a 'good' job.

Meanwhile, money had got to be earned. Before her marriage Gordon's mother had been a music teacher, and even since then she had taken pupils, sporadically, when the family were in lower water than usual. She now decided that she would start giving lessons again. It was fairly easy to get pupils in the suburbs — they were living in Acton — and with the music fees and Julia's contribution they could probably 'manage' for the next year or two. But the state of Mrs Comstock's lungs was now something more than 'delicate'. The doctor who had attended her husband before his death had put his stethoscope to her chest and looked serious. He had told her to take care of herself, keep warm, eat nourishing food, and, above all, avoid fatigue. The fidgeting, tiring job of giving piano lessons was, of course, the worst possible thing for her. Gordon knew nothing of this. Julia knew, however. It was a secret between the two women, carefully kept from Gordon.

A year went by. Gordon spent it rather miserably, more and more embarrassed by his shabby clothes and lack of pocket-money, which made girls an object of terror to him. However, the New Age accepted one of his poems that year. Meanwhile, his mother sat on comfortless piano stools in draughty drawing-rooms, giving lessons at two shillings an hour. And then Gordon left school, and fat interfering Uncle Walter, who had business connexions in a small way, came forward and said that a friend of a friend of his could get Gordon ever such a 'good' job in the accounts department of a red lead firm. It was really a splendid job — a wonderful opening for a young man. If Gordon buckled to work in the right spirit he might be a Big Pot one of these days. Gordon's soul squirmed. Suddenly, as weak people do, he stiffened, and, to the horror of the whole family, refused even to try for the job.

There were fearful rows, of course. They could not understand him. It seemed to them a kind of blasphemy to refuse such a 'good' job when you got the chance of it. He kept reiterating that he didn't want THAT KIND of job. Then what DID he want? they all demanded. He wanted to 'write', he told them sullenly. But how could he possibly make a living by 'writing'? they demanded again. And of course he couldn't answer. At the back of his mind was the idea that he could somehow live by writing poetry; but that was too absurd even to be mentioned. But at any rate, he wasn't going into business, into the money-world. He would have a job, but not a 'good' job. None of them had the vaguest idea what he meant. His mother wept, even Julia 'went for' him, and all round him there were uncles and aunts (he still had six or seven of them left) feebly volleying and incompetently thundering. And after three days a dreadful thing happened. In the middle of supper his mother was seized by a violent fit of coughing, put her hand to her breast, fell forward, and began bleeding at the mouth.

Gordon was terrified. His mother did not die, as it happened, but she looked deathly as they carried her upstairs. Gordon rushed for the doctor. For several days his mother lay at death's door. It was the draughty drawing-rooms and the trudging to and fro in all weathers that had done it. Gordon hung helplessly about the house, a dreadful feeling of guilt mingling with his misery. He did not exactly know but he half divined, that his mother had killed herself in order to pay his school fees. After this he could not go on opposing her any longer. He went to Uncle Walter and told him that he would take that job in the red lead firm, if they would give it him. So Uncle Walter spoke to his friend, and the friend spoke to his friend, and Gordon was sent for and interviewed by an old gentleman with badly fitting false teeth, and finally was given a job, on probation. He started on twenty-five bob a week. And with this firm he remained six years.

They moved away from Acton and took a flat in a desolate red block of flats somewhere in the Paddington district. Mrs Comstock had brought her piano, and when she had got some of her strength back she gave occasional lessons. Gordon's wages were gradually raised, and the three of them 'managed', more or less. It was Julia and Mrs Comstock who did most of the 'managing'. Gordon still had

a boy's selfishness about money. At the office he got on not absolutely badly. It was said of him that he was worth his wages but wasn't the type that Makes Good. In a way the utter contempt that he had for his work made things easier for him. He could put up with this meaningless office-life, because he never for an instant thought of it as permanent. Somehow, sometime, God knew how or when, he was going to break free of it. After all, there was always his 'writing'. Some day, perhaps, he might be able to make a living of sorts by 'writing'; and you'd feel you were free of the money-stink if you were a 'writer', would you not? The types he saw all round him, especially the older men, made him squirm. That was what it meant to worship the money-god! To settle down, to Make Good, to sell your soul for a villa and an aspidistra! To turn into the typical little bowler-hatted sneak — Strube's 'little man' — the little docile cit who slips home by the six-fifteen to a supper of cottage pie and stewed tinned pears, half an hour's listening-in to the B. B. C. Symphony Concert, and then perhaps a spot of licit sexual intercourse if his wife 'feels in the mood'! What a fate! No, it isn't like that that one was meant to live. One's got to get right out of it, out of the money-stink. It was a kind of plot that he was nursing. He was as though dedicated to this war against money. But it was still a secret. The people at the office never suspected him of unorthodox ideas. They never even found out that he wrote poetry — not that there was much to find out, for in six years he had less than twenty poems printed in the magazines. To look at, he was just the same as any other City clerk — just a soldier in the strap-hanging army that sways eastward at morning, westward at night in the carriages of the Underground.

He was twenty-four when his mother died. The family was breaking up. Only four of the older generation of Comstocks were left now — Aunt Angela, Aunt Charlotte, Uncle Walter, and another uncle who died a year later. Gordon and Julia gave up the flat. Gordon took a furnished room in Doughty Street (he felt vaguely literary, living in Bloomsbury), and Julia moved to Earl's Court, to be near the shop. Julia was nearly thirty now, and looked much older. She was thinner than ever, though healthy enough, and there was grey in her hair. She still worked twelve hours a day, and in six years

her wages had only risen by ten shillings a week. The horribly ladylike lady who kept the teashop was a semi-friend as well as an employer, and thus could sweat and bully Julia to the tune of 'dearest' and 'darling'. Four months after his mother's death Gordon suddenly walked out of his job. He gave the firm no reasons. They imagined that he was going to 'better himself', and — luckily, as it turned out — gave him quite good references. He had not even thought of looking for another job. He wanted to burn his boats. From now on he would breathe free air, free of the money-stink. He had not consciously waited for his mother to die before doing this; still, it was his mother's death that had nerved him to it.

Of course there was another and more desolating row in what was left of the family. They thought Gordon must have gone mad. Over and over again he tried, quite vainly, to explain to them why he would not yield himself to the servitude of a 'good' job. 'But what are you going to live on? What are you going to live on?' was what they all wailed at him. He refused to think seriously about it. Of course, he still harboured the notion that he could make a living of sorts by 'writing'. By this time he had got to know Ravelston, editor of Antichrist, and Ravelston, besides printing his poems, managed to get him books to review occasionally. His literary prospects were not so bleak as they had been six years ago. But still, it was not the desire to 'write' that was his real motive. To get out of the money-world — that was what he wanted. Vaguely he looked forward to some kind of moneyless, anchorite existence. He had a feeling that if you genuinely despise money you can keep going somehow, like the birds of the air. He forgot that the birds of the air don't pay room-rent. The poet starving in a garret — but starving, somehow, not uncomfortably — that was his vision of himself.

The next seven months were devastating. They scared him and almost broke his spirit. He learned what it means to live for weeks on end on bread and margarine, to try to 'write' when you are half starved, to pawn your clothes, to sneak trembling up the stairs when you owe three weeks' rent and your landlady is listening for you. Moreover, in those seven months he wrote practically nothing. The first effect of poverty is that it kills thought. He grasped, as though it were a new discovery, that you do not escape from money merely by

being moneyless. On the contrary, you are the hopeless slave of money until you have enough of it to live on — a 'competence', as the beastly middle-class phrase goes. Finally he was turned out of his room, after a vulgar row. He was three days and four nights in the street. It was bloody. Three mornings, on the advice of another man he met on the Embankment, he spent in Billingsgate, helping to shove fish-barrows up the twisty little hills from Billingsgate into Eastcheap. 'Twopence an up' was what you got, and the work knocked hell out of your thigh muscles. There were crowds of people on the same job, and you had to wait your turn; you were lucky if you made eighteen-pence between four in the morning and nine. After three days of it Gordon gave up. What was the use? He was beaten. There was nothing for it but to go back to his family, borrow some money, and find another job.

But now, of course, there was no job to be had. For months he lived by cadging on the family. Julia kept him going till the last penny of her tiny savings was gone. It was abominable. Here was the outcome of all his fine attitudes! He had renounced ambition, made war on money, and all it led to was cadging from his sister! And Julia, he knew, felt his failure far more than she felt the loss of her savings. She had had such hopes of Gordon. He alone of all the Comstocks had had it in him to 'succeed'. Even now she believed that somehow, some day, he was going to retrieve the family fortunes. He was so 'clever' — surely he could make money if he tried! For two whole months Gordon stayed with Aunt Angela in her little house at Highgate — poor, faded, mummified Aunt Angela, who even for herself had barely enough to eat. All this time he searched desperately for work. Uncle Walter could not help him. His influence in the business world, never large, was now practically nil. At last, however, in a quite unexpected way, the luck turned. A friend of a friend of Julia's employer's brother managed to get Gordon a job in the accounts department of the New Albion Publicity Company.

The New Albion was one of those publicity firms which have sprung up everywhere since the War — the fungi, as you might say, that sprout from a decaying capitalism. It was a smallish rising firm and took every class of publicity it could get. It designed a certain

number of large-scale posters for oatmeal stout, self-raising flour, and so forth, but its main line was millinery and cosmetic advertisements in the women's illustrated papers, besides minor ads in twopenny weeklies, such as Whiterose Pills for Female Disorders, Your Horoscope Cast by Professor Raratongo, The Seven Secrets of Venus, New Hope for the Ruptured, Earn Five Pounds a Week in your Spare Time, and Cyprolax Hair Lotion Banishes all Unpleasant Intruders. There was a large staff of commercial artists, of course. It was here that Gordon first made the acquaintance of Rosemary. She was in the 'studio' and helped to design fashion plates. It was a long time before he actually spoke to her. At first he knew her merely as a remote personage, small, dark, with swift movements, distinctly attractive but rather intimidating. When they passed one another in the corridors she eyed him ironically, as though she knew all about him and considered him a bit of a joke; nevertheless she seemed to look at him a little oftener than was necessary. He had nothing to do with her side of the business. He was in the accounts department, a mere clerk on three quid a week.

The interesting thing about the New Albion was that it was so completely modern in spirit. There was hardly a soul in the firm who was not perfectly well aware that publicity — advertising — is the dirtiest ramp that capitalism has yet produced. In the red lead firm there had still lingered certain notions of commercial honour and usefulness. But such things would have been laughed at in the New Albion. Most of the employees were the hard-boiled, Americanized, go-getting type to whom nothing in the world is sacred, except money. They had their cynical code worked out. The public are swine; advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill-bucket. And yet beneath their cynicism there was the final naivete, the blind worship of the money-god. Gordon studied them unobtrusively. As before, he did his work passably well and his fellow-employees looked down on him. Nothing had changed in his inner mind. He still despised and repudiated the money-code. Somehow, sooner or later, he was going to escape from it; even now, after his first fiasco, he still plotted to escape. He was IN the money world, but not OF it. As for the types about him, the little bowler-hatted worms who never turned, and the go-getters, the American business-college gutter-

crawlers, they rather amused him than not. He liked studying their slavish keep-your-job mentality. He was the chiel amang them takin' notes.

One day a curious thing happened. Somebody chanced to see a poem of Gordon's in a magazine, and put it about that they 'had a poet in the office'. Of course Gordon was laughed at, not ill-naturedly, by the other clerks. They nicknamed him 'the bard' from that day forth. But though amused, they were also faintly contemptuous. It confirmed all their ideas about Gordon. A fellow who wrote poetry wasn't exactly the type to Make Good. But the thing had an unexpected sequel. About the time when the clerks grew tired of chaffing Gordon, Mr Erskine, the managing director, who had hitherto taken only the minimum notice of him, sent for him and interviewed him.

Mr Erskine was a large, slow-moving man with a broad, healthy, expressionless face. From his appearance and the slowness of his speech you would have guessed with confidence that he had something to do with either agriculture or cattle-breeding. His wits were as slow as his movements, and he was the kind of man who never hears of anything until everybody else has stopped talking about it. How such a man came to be in charge of an advertising agency, only the strange gods of capitalism know. But he was quite a likeable person. He had not that sniffish, buttoned-up spirit that usually goes with an ability to make money. And in a way his fat-wittedness stood him in good stead. Being insensible to popular prejudice, he could assess people on their merits; consequently, he was rather good at choosing talented employees. The news that Gordon had written poems, so far from shocking him, vaguely impressed him. They wanted literary talents in the New Albion. Having sent for Gordon, he studied him in a somnolent, sidelong way and asked him a number of inconclusive questions. He never listened to Gordon's answers, but punctuated his questions with a noise that sounded like 'Hm, hm, hm.' Wrote poetry, did he? Oh yes? Hm. And had it printed in the papers? Hm, hm. Suppose they paid you for that kind of thing? Not much, eh? No, suppose not. Hm, hm. Poetry? Hm. A bit difficult, that must be. Getting the lines the same length, and all that. Hm, hm. Write anything else? Stories, and

so forth? Hm. Oh yes? Very interesting. Hm!

Then, without further questions, he promoted Gordon to a special post as secretary — in effect, apprentice — to Mr Clew, the New Albion's head copywriter. Like every other advertising agency, the New Albion was constantly in search of copywriters with a touch of imagination. It is a curious fact, but it is much easier to find competent draughtsmen than to find people who can think of slogans like 'Q. T. Sauce keeps Hubby Smiling' and 'Kiddies clamour for their Breakfast Crisps'. Gordon's wages were not raised for the moment, but the firm had their eye on him. With luck he might be a full-fledged copywriter in a year's time. It was an unmistakable chance to Make Good.

For six months he was working with Mr Clew. Mr Clew was a harassed man of about forty, with wiry hair into which he often plunged his fingers. He worked in a stuffy little office whose walls were entirely papered with his past triumphs in the form of posters. He took Gordon under his wing in a friendly way, showed him the ropes, and was even ready to listen to his suggestions. At that time they were working on a line of magazine ads for April Dew, the great new deodorant which the Queen of Sheba Toilet Requisites Co. (this was Flaxman's firm, curiously enough) were putting on the market. Gordon started on the job with secret loathing. But now there was a quite unexpected development. It was that Gordon showed, almost from the start, a remarkable talent for copywriting. He could compose an ad as though he had been born to it. The vivid phrase that sticks and rankles, the neat little para. that packs a world of lies into a hundred words — they came to him almost unsought. He had always had a gift for words, but this was the first time he had used it successfully. Mr Clew thought him very promising. Gordon watched his own development, first with surprise, then with amusement, and finally with a kind of horror. THIS, then, was what he was coming to! Writing lies to tickle the money out of fools' pockets! There was a beastly irony, too, in the fact that he, who wanted to be a 'writer', should score his sole success in writing ads for deodorants. However, that was less unusual than he imagined. Most copywriters, they say, are novelists manques; or is it the other way about?

The Queen of Sheba were very pleased with their ads. Mr Erskine

also was pleased. Gordon's wages were raised by ten shillings a week. And it was now that Gordon grew frightened. Money was getting him after all. He was sliding down, down, into the money-sty. A little more and he would be stuck in it for life. It is queer how these things happen. You set your face against success, you swear never to Make Good — you honestly believe that you couldn't Make Good even if you wanted to; and then something happens along, some mere chance, and you find yourself Making Good almost automatically. He saw that now or never was the time to escape. He had got to get out of it — out of the money-world, irrevocably, before he was too far involved.

But this time he wasn't going to be starved into submission. He went to Ravelston and asked his help. He told him that he wanted some kind of job; not a 'good' job, but a job that would keep his body without wholly buying his soul. Ravelston understood perfectly. The distinction between a job and a 'good' job did not have to be explained to him; nor did he point out to Gordon the folly of what he was doing. That was the great thing about Ravelston. He could always see another person's point of view. It was having money that did it, no doubt; for the rich can afford to be intelligent. Moreover, being rich himself, he could find jobs for other people. After only a fortnight he told Gordon of something that might suit him. A Mr McKechnie, a rather dilapidated second-hand bookseller with whom Ravelston dealt occasionally, was looking for an assistant. He did not want a trained assistant who would expect full wages; he wanted somebody who looked like a gentleman and could talk about books — somebody to impress the more bookish customers. It was the very reverse of a 'good' job. The hours were long, the pay was wretched — two pounds a week — and there was no chance of advancement. It was a blind-alley job. And, of course, a blind-alley job was the very thing Gordon was looking for. He went and saw Mr McKechnie, a sleepy, benign old Scotchman with a red nose and a white beard stained by snuff, and was taken on without demur. At this time, too, his volume of poems, Mice, was going to press. The seventh publisher to whom he had sent it had accepted it. Gordon did not know that this was Ravelston's doing. Ravelston was a personal friend of the publisher. He was always arranging this kind

of thing, stealthily, for obscure poets. Gordon thought the future was opening before him. He was a made man — or, by Smilesian, aspidistral standards, UNmade.

He gave a month's notice at the office. It was a painful business altogether. Julia, of course, was more distressed than ever at this second abandonment of a 'good' job. By this time Gordon had got to know Rosemary. She did not try to prevent him from throwing up his job. It was against her code to interfere— 'You've got to live your own life,' was always her attitude. But she did not in the least understand why he was doing it. The thing that most upset him, curiously enough, was his interview with Mr Erskine. Mr Erskine was genuinely kind. He did not want Gordon to leave the firm, and said so frankly. With a sort of elephantine politeness he refrained from calling Gordon a young fool. He did, however, ask him why he was leaving. Somehow, Gordon could not bring himself to avoid answering or to say — the only thing Mr Erskine would have understood — that he was going after a better-paid job. He blurted out shamefacedly that he 'didn't think business suited him' and that he 'wanted to go in for writing'. Mr Erskine was noncommittal. Writing, eh? Hm. Much money in that sort of thing nowadays? Not much, eh? Hm. No, suppose not. Hm. Gordon, feeling and looking ridiculous, mumbled that he had 'got a book just coming out'. A book of poems, he added with difficulty in pronouncing the word. Mr Erskine regarded him sidelong before remarking:

'Poetry, eh? Hm. Poetry? Make a living out of that sort of thing, do you think?'

'Well — not a living, exactly. But it would help.'

'Hm — well! You know best, I expect. If you want a job any time, come back to us. I dare say we could find room for you. We can do with your sort here. Don't forget.'

Gordon left with a hateful feeling of having behaved perversely and ungratefully. But he had got to do it; he had got to get out of the money-world. It was queer. All over England young men were eating their hearts out for lack of jobs, and here was he, Gordon, to whom the very word 'job' was faintly nauseous, having jobs thrust unwanted upon him. It was an example of the fact that you can get anything in this world if you genuinely don't want it. Moreover, Mr

Erskine's words stuck in his mind. Probably he had meant what he said. Probably there WOULD be a job waiting for Gordon if he chose to go back. So his boats were only half burned. The New Albion was a doom before him as well as behind.

But how happy had he been, just at first, in Mr McKechnie's bookshop! For a little while — a very little while — he had the illusion of being really out of the money-world. Of course the book-trade was a swindle, like all other trades; but how different a swindle! Here was no hustling and Making Good, no gutter-crawling. No go-getter could put up for ten minutes with the stagnant air of the book-trade. As for the work, it was very simple. It was mainly a question of being in the shop ten hours a day. Mr McKechnie wasn't a bad old stick. He was a Scotchman, of course, but Scottish is as Scottish does. At any rate he was reasonably free from avarice — his most distinctive trait seemed to be laziness. He was also a teetotaller and belonged to some Nonconformist sect or other, but this did not affect Gordon. Gordon had been at the shop about a month when Mice was published. No less than thirteen papers reviewed it! And The Times Lit. Supp. said that it showed 'exceptional promise'. It was not till months later that he realized what a hopeless failure Mice had really been.

And it was only now, when he was down to two quid a week and had practically cut himself off from the prospect of earning more, that he grasped the real nature of the battle he was fighting. The devil of it is that the glow of renunciation never lasts. Life on two quid a week ceases to be a heroic gesture and becomes a dingy habit. Failure is as great a swindle as success. He had thrown up his 'good' job and renounced 'good' jobs for ever. Well, that was necessary. He did not want to go back on it. But it was no use pretending that because his poverty was self-imposed he had escaped the ills that poverty drags in its train. It was not a question of hardship. You don't suffer real physical hardship on two quid a week, and if you did it wouldn't matter. It is in the brain and the soul that lack of money damages you. Mental deadness, spiritual squalor — they seem to descend upon you inescapably when your income drops below a certain point. Faith, hope, money — only a saint could have the first two without having the third.

He was growing more mature. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine. He had reached the age when the future ceases to be a rosy blur and becomes actual and menacing. The spectacle of his surviving relatives depressed him more and more. As he grew older he felt himself more akin to them. That was the way he was going! A few years more, and he would be like that, just like that! He felt this even with Julia, whom he saw oftener than his uncle and aunt. In spite of various resolves never to do it again, he still borrowed money off Julia periodically. Julia's hair was greying fast; there was a deep line scored down each of her thin red cheeks. She had settled her life into a routine in which she was not unhappy. There was her work at the shop, her 'sewing' at nights in her Earl's Court bed-sitting-room (second floor, back, nine bob a week unfurnished), her occasional forgatherings with spinster friends as lonely as herself. It was the typical submerged life of the penniless unmarried woman; she accepted it, hardly realizing that her destiny could ever have been different. Yet in her way she suffered, more for Gordon than for herself. The gradual decay of the family, the way they had died off and died off and left nothing behind, was a sort of tragedy in her mind. Money, money! 'None of us ever seems to make any money!' was her perpetual lament. And of them all, Gordon alone had had the chance to make money; and Gordon had chosen not to. He was sinking effortless into the same rut of poverty as the others. After the first row was over, she was too decent to 'go for' him again because he had thrown up his job at the New Albion. But his motives were quite meaningless to her. In her wordless feminine way she knew that the sin against money is the ultimate sin.

And as for Aunt Angela and Uncle Walter — oh dear, oh dear! What a couple! It made Gordon feel ten years older every time he looked at them.

Uncle Walter, for example. Uncle Walter was very depressing. He was sixty-seven, and what with his various 'agencies' and the dwindling remnants of his patrimony his income might have been nearly three pounds a week. He had a tiny little cabin of an office off Cursitor Street, and he lived in a very cheap boarding-house in Holland Park. That was quite according to precedent; all the Comstock men drifted naturally into boarding-houses. When you

looked at poor old uncle, with his large tremulous belly, his bronchitic voice, his broad, pale, timidly pompous face, rather like Sargent' s portrait of Henry James, his entirely hairless head, his pale, pouchy eyes, and his ever-drooping moustache, to which he tried vainly to give an upward twirl — when you looked at him, you found it totally impossible to believe that he had ever been young. Was it conceivable that such a being had ever felt life tingle in his veins? Had he ever climbed a tree, taken a header off a springboard, or been in love? Had he ever had a brain in working order? Even back in the early nineties, when he was arithmetically young, had he ever made any kind of stab at life? A few furtive half-hearted frolics, perhaps. A few whiskies in dull bars, a visit or two to the Empire promenade, a little whoring on the Q. T.; the sort of dingy, drabby fornications that you can imagine happening between Egyptian mummies after the museum is closed for the night. And after that the long, long quiet years of business failure, loneliness, and stagnation in godless boarding-houses.

And yet uncle in his old age was probably not unhappy. He had one hobby of never-failing interest, and that was his diseases. He suffered, by his own account, from every disease in the medical dictionary, and was never weary of talking about them. Indeed, it seemed to Gordon that none of the people in his uncle's boarding-house — he had been there occasionally — ever did talk about anything except their diseases. All over the darkish drawing-room, ageing, discoloured people sat about in couples, discussing symptoms. Their conversation was like the dripping of stalactite to stalagmite. Drip, drip. 'How is your lumbago?' says stalactite to stalagmite. 'I find my Kruschen Salts are doing me good,' says stalagmite to stalactite. Drip, drip, drip.

And then there was Aunt Angela, aged sixty-nine. Gordon tried not even to think of Aunt Angela oftener than he could help.

Poor, dear, good, kind, depressing Aunt Angela!

Poor, shrivelled, parchment-yellow, skin-and-bone Aunt Angela! There in her miserable little semi-detached house in Highgate — Briarbrae, its name was — there in her palace in the northern mountains, there dwelleth she, Angela the Ever-virgin, of whom no man either living or among the shades can say truly that upon her

lips he hath pressed the dear caresses of a lover. All alone she dwelleth, and all day long she fareth to and fro, and in her hand is the feather-mop fashioned from the tail feathers of the contumacious turkey, and with it she polisheth the dark-leaved aspidistras and flicketh the hated dust from the resplendent never-to-be-used Crown Derby china tea-service. And ever and anon she comforteth her dear heart with draughts of the dark brown tea, both Flowery Orange and Pekoe Points, which the small-bearded sons of Coromandel have ferried to her across the wine-dark sea. Poor, dear, good, kind, but on the whole unloveable Aunt Angela! Her annuity was ninety-eight pounds a year (thirty-eight bob a week, but she retained a middle-class habit of thinking of her income as a yearly and not weekly thing), and out of that, twelve and sixpence a week went on house rates. She would probably have starved occasionally if Julia had not smuggled her packets of cakes and bread and butter from the shop — always, of course, presented as 'Just a few little things that it seemed a pity to throw away', with the solemn pretence that Aunt Angela didn't really need them.

Yet she too had her pleasures, poor old aunty. She had become a great novel-reader in her old age, the public library being only ten minutes' walk from Briarbrae. During his lifetime, on some whim or other, Gran'pa Comstock had forbidden his daughters to read novels. Consequently, having only begun to read novels in 1902, Aunt Angela was always a couple of decades behind the current mode in fiction. But she plodded along in the rear, faint yet pursuing. In the nineteen-hundreds she was still reading Rhoda Broughton and Mrs Henry Wood. In the War years she discovered Hall Caine and Mrs Humphry Ward. In the nineteen-twenties she was reading Silas Hocking and H. Seton Merriman, and by the nineteen-thirties she had almost, but not quite, caught up with W. B. Maxwell and William J. Locke. Further she would never get. As for the post-War novelists, she had heard of them afar off, with their immorality and their blasphemies and their devastating 'cleverness'. But she would never live to read them. Walpole we know, and Hichens we read, but Hemingway, who are you?

Well, this was 1934, and that was what was left of the Comstock family. Uncle Walter, with his 'agencies' and his diseases. Aunt

Angela, dusting the Crown Derby china tea-service in Briarbrae. Aunt Charlotte, still preserving a vague vegetable existence in the Mental Home. Julia, working a seventy-two-hour week and doing her 'sewing' at nights by the tiny gas-fire in her bedsitting-room. Gordon, nearly thirty, earning two quid a week in a fool's job, and struggling, as the sole demonstrable object of his existence, with a dreadful book that never got any further.

Possibly there were some other, more distantly related Comstocks, for Gran'pa Comstock had been one of a family of twelve. But if any survived they had grown rich and lost touch with their poor relations; for money is thicker than blood. As for Gordon's branch of the family, the combined income of the five of them, allowing for the lump sum that had been paid down when Aunt Charlotte entered the Mental Home, might have been six hundred a year. Their combined ages were two hundred and sixty-three years. None of them had ever been out of England, fought in a war, been in prison, ridden a horse, travelled in an aeroplane, got married, or given birth to a child. There seemed no reason why they should not continue in the same style until they died. Year in, year out, NOTHING EVER HAPPENED in the Comstock family.

Chapter 4

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare.

As a matter of fact, though, there was not a breath of wind that afternoon. It was almost as mild as spring. Gordon repeated to himself the poem he had begun yesterday, in a cadenced whisper, simply for the pleasure of the sound of it. He was pleased with the poem at this moment. It was a good poem — or would be when it was finished, anyway. He had forgotten that last night it had almost made him sick.

The plane trees brooded motionless, dimmed by faint wreaths of mist. A tram boomed in the valley far below. Gordon walked up Malkin Hill, rustling instep-deep through the dry, drifted leaves. All down the pavement they were strewn, crinkly and golden, like the rustling flakes of some American breakfast cereal; as though the queen of Brobdingnag had upset her packet of Truweet Breakfast Crisps down the hillside.

Jolly, the windless winter days! Best time of all the year — or so Gordon thought at this moment. He was as happy as you can be when you haven't smoked all day and have only three-halfpence and a Joey in the world. This was Thursday, early-closing day and Gordon's afternoon off. He was going to the house of Paul Doring, the critic, who lived in Coleridge Grove and gave literary tea-parties.

It had taken him an hour or more to get himself ready. Social life is so complicated when your income is two quid a week. He had had a painful shave in cold water immediately after dinner. He had put on his best suit — three years old but just passable when he remembered to press the trousers under his mattress. He had turned his collar inside out and tied his tie so that the torn place didn't show. With the point of a match he had scraped enough blacking from the tin to polish his shoes. He had even borrowed a needle from Lorenheim and darned his socks — a tedious job, but better than inking the places where your ankle shows through. Also he had procured an empty Gold Flake packet and put into it a single cigarette extracted from the penny-in-the-slot-machine. That was just for the look of the

thing. You can't, of course, go to other people's houses with NO cigarettes. But if you have even one it's all right, because when people see one cigarette in a packet they assume that the packet has been full. It is fairly easy to pass the thing off as an accident.

'Have a cigarette?' you say casually to someone.

'Oh — thanks.'

You push the packet open and then register surprise. 'Hell! I'm down to my last. And I could have sworn I had a full packet.'

'Oh, I won't take your last. Have one of MINE,' says the other.

'Oh — thanks.'

And after that, of course, your host and hostess press cigarettes upon you. But you must have ONE cigarette, just for honour's sake.

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over. He would finish that poem presently. He could finish it whenever he chose. It was queer, how the mere prospect of going to a literary tea-party bucked him up. When your income is two quid a week you at least aren't jaded by too much human contact. Even to see the inside of somebody else's house is a kind of treat. A padded armchair under your bum, and tea and cigarettes and the smell of women — you learn to appreciate such things when you are starved of them. In practice, though, Doring's parties never in the least resembled what Gordon looked forward to. Those wonderful, witty, erudite conversations that he imagined beforehand — they never happened or began to happen. Indeed there was never anything that could properly be called conversation at all; only the stupid clacking that goes on at parties everywhere, in Hampstead or Hong Kong. No one really worth meeting ever came to Doring's parties. Doring was such a very mangy lion himself that his followers were hardly even worthy to be called jackals. Quite half of them were those hen-witted middle-aged women who have lately escaped from good Christian homes and are trying to be literary. The star exhibits were troops of bright young things who dropped in for half an hour, formed circles of their own, and talked sniggeringly about the other bright young things to whom they referred by nicknames. For the most part Gordon found himself hanging about on the edges of conversations. Doring was kind in a slapdash way and introduced him to everybody as 'Gordon Comstock — YOU know; the poet. He wrote that dashed clever book

of poems called Mice. YOU know.' But Gordon had never yet encountered anybody who DID know. The bright young things summed him up at a glance and ignored him. He was thirtyish, moth-eaten, and obviously penniless. And yet, in spite of the invariable disappointment, how eagerly he looked forward to those literary tea-parties! They were a break in his loneliness, anyway. That is the devilish thing about poverty, the ever-recurrent thing — loneliness. Day after day with never an intelligent person to talk to; night after night back to your godless room, always alone. Perhaps it sounds rather fun if you are rich and sought-after; but how different it is when you do it from necessity!

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over. A stream of cars hummed easily up the hill. Gordon eyed them without envy. Who wants a car, anyway? The pink doll-faces of upper-class women gazed at him through the car window. Bloody nit-witted lapdogs. Pampered bitches dozing on their chains. Better the lone wolf than the cringing dogs. He thought of the Tube stations at early morning. The black hordes of clerks scurrying underground like ants into a hole; swarms of little ant-like men, each with dispatch-case in right hand, newspaper in left hand, and the fear of the sack like a maggot in his heart. How it eats at them, that secret fear! Especially on winter days, when they hear the menace of the wind. Winter, the sack, the workhouse, the Embankment benches! Ah!

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare, And the dark ribbons of the chimneys Veer downward; flicked by whips of air, Torn posters flutter; Coldly sound The boom of trains and the rattle of hooves, And the clerks who hurry to the station Look, shuddering, over the eastern rooves, Thinking —

What do they think? Winter's coming. Is my job safe? The sack means the workhouse. Circumcise ye your foreskins, saith the Lord. Suck the blacking off the boss's boots. Yes!

Thinking each one, 'Here comes the winter! Please God I keep my job this year!' And bleakly, as the cold strikes through Their entrails like an icy spear, They think —

'Think' again. No matter. What do they think? Money, money! Rent, rates, taxes, school bills, season tickets, boots for the children. And the life insurance policy and the skivvy's wages. And, my God,

suppose the wife gets in the family way again! And did I laugh loud enough when the boss made that joke yesterday? And the next instalment on the vacuum cleaner.

Neatly, taking a pleasure in his neatness, with the sensation of dropping piece after piece of a jigsaw puzzle into place, he fashioned another stanza:

They think of rent, rates, season tickets, Insurance, coal, the skivvy's wages, Boots, school bills, and the next instalment Upon the two twin beds from Drage's.

Not bad, not bad at all. Finish it presently. Four or five more stanzas. Ravelston would print it.

A starling sat in the naked boughs of a plane tree, crooning self-pitifully as starlings do on warm winter days when they believe spring is in the air. At the foot of the tree a huge sandy cat sat motionless, mouth open, gazing upwards with rapt desire, plainly expecting that the starling would drop into its mouth. Gordon repeated to himself the four finished stanzas of his poem. It was GOOD. Why had he thought last night that it was mechanical, weak, and empty? He was a poet. He walked more upright, arrogantly almost, with the pride of a poet. Gordon Comstock, author of Mice. 'Of exceptional promise,' The Times Lit. Supp. had said. Author also of London Pleasures. For that too would be finished quite soon. He knew now that he could finish it when he chose. Why had he ever despaired of it? Three months it might take; soon enough to come out in the summer. In his mind's eye he saw the 'slim' white buckram shape of London Pleasures; the excellent paper, the wide margins, the good Caslon type, the refined dust-jacket, and the reviews in all the best papers. 'An outstanding achievement' — The Times Lit. Supp. 'A welcome relief from the Sitwell school' — Scrutiny.

Coleridge Grove was a damp, shadowy, secluded road, a blind alley and therefore void of traffic. Literary associations of the wrong kind (Coleridge was rumoured to have lived there for six weeks in the summer of 1821) hung heavy upon it. You could not look at its antique decaying houses, standing back from the road in dank gardens under heavy trees, without feeling an atmosphere of outmoded 'culture' envelop you. In some of those houses, undoubtedly, Browning Societies still flourished, and ladies in art

serge sat at the feet of extinct poets talking about Swinburne and Walter Pater. In spring the gardens were sprinkled with purple and yellow crocuses, and later with harebells, springing up in little Wendy rings among the anaemic grass; and even the trees, it seemed to Gordon, played up to their environment and twisted themselves into whimsy Rackhamesque attitudes. It was queer that a prosperous hack critic like Paul Doring should live in such a place. For Doring was an astonishingly bad critic. He reviewed novels for the Sunday Post and discovered the great English novel with Walpolean regularity once a fortnight. You would have expected him to live in a flat on Hyde Park Corner. Perhaps it was a kind of penance that he had imposed upon himself, as though by living in the refined discomfort of Coleridge Grove he propitiated the injured gods of literature.

Gordon came round the corner, turning over in his mind a line from London Pleasures. And then suddenly he stopped short. There was something wrong about the look of the Dorings' gate. What was it? Ah, of course! There were no cars waiting outside.

He paused, walked on a step or two, and stopped again, like a dog that smells danger. It was all wrong. There OUGHT to be some cars. There were always quite a lot of people at the Dorings' parties, and half of them came in cars. Why had nobody else arrived? Could he be too early? But no! They had said half past three and it was at least twenty to four.

He hastened towards the gate. Already he felt practically sure that the party HAD been put off. A chill like the shadow of a cloud had fallen across him. Suppose the Dorings weren't at home! Suppose the party had been put off! And this thought, though it dismayed him, did not strike him as in the least improbable. It was his special bugbear, the especial childish dread he carried about with him, to be invited to people's houses and then find them not at home. Even when there was no doubt about the invitation he always half expected that there would be some hitch or other. He was never quite certain of his welcome. He took it for granted that people would snub him and forget about him. Why not, indeed? He had no money. When you have no money your life is one long series of snubs.

He swung the iron gate open. It creaked with a lonely sound. The

dank mossy path was bordered with chunks of some Rackhamesque pinkish stone. Gordon inspected the house-front narrowly. He was so used to this kind of thing. He had developed a sort of Sherlock Holmes technique for finding out whether a house was inhabited or not. Ah! Not much doubt about it this time. The house had a deserted look. No smoke coming from the chimneys, no windows lighted. It must be getting darkish indoors — surely they would have lighted the lamps? And there was not a single footmark on the steps; that settled it. Nevertheless with a sort of desperate hope he tugged at the bell. An old-fashioned wire bell, of course. In Coleridge Grove it would have been considered low and unliterary to have an electric bell.

Clang, clang, clang! went the bell.

Gordon's last hope vanished. No mistaking the hollow clangour of a bell echoing through an empty house. He seized the handle again and gave it a wrench that almost broke the wire. A frightful, clamorous peal answered him. But it was useless, quite useless. Not a foot stirred within. Even the servants were out. At this moment he became aware of a lace cap, some dark hair, and a pair of youthful eyes regarding him furtively from the basement of the house next door. It was a servant-girl who had come out to see what all the noise was about. She caught his eye and gazed into the middle distance. He looked a fool and knew it. One always does look a fool when one rings the bell of an empty house. And suddenly it came to him that that girl knew all about him — knew that the party had been put off and that everyone except Gordon had been told of it — knew that it was because he had no money that he wasn't worth the trouble of telling. SHE knew. Servants always know.

He turned and made for the gate. Under the servant's eye he had to stroll casually away, as though this were a small disappointment that scarcely mattered. But he was trembling so with anger that it was difficult to control his movements. The sods! The bloody sods! To have played a trick like that on him! To have invited him, and then changed the day and not even bothered to tell him! There might be other explanations — he just refused to think of them. The sods, the bloody sods! His eye fell upon one of the Rackhamesque chunks of stone. How he'd love to pick that thing up and bash it through the

window! He grasped the rusty gate-bar so hard that he hurt his hand and almost tore it. The physical pain did him good. It counteracted the agony at his heart. It was not merely that he had been cheated of an evening spent in human company, though that was much. It was the feeling of helplessness, of insignificance, of being set aside, ignored — a creature not worth worrying about. They'd changed the day and hadn't even bothered to tell him. Told everybody else, but not him. That's how people treat you when you've no money! Just wantonly, cold-bloodedly insult you. It was likely enough, indeed, that the Dorings' had honestly forgotten, meaning no harm; it was even possible that he himself had mistaken the date. But no! He wouldn't think of it. The Dorings' had done it on purpose. Of COURSE they had done it on purpose! Just hadn't troubled to tell him, because he had no money and consequently didn't matter. The sods!

He walked rapidly away. There was a sharp pain in his breast. Human contact, human voices! But what was the good of wishing? He'd have to spend the evening alone, as usual. His friends were so few and lived so far away. Rosemary would still be at work; besides, she lived at the back of beyond, in West Kensington, in a women's hostel guarded by female dragons. Ravelston lived nearer, in the Regent's Park district. But Ravelston was a rich man and had many engagements; the chances were always against his being at home. Gordon could not even ring him up, because he hadn't the necessary two pennies; only three halfpence and the Joey. Besides, how could he go and see Ravelston when he had no money? Ravelston would be sure to say 'Let's go to a pub,' or something! He couldn't let Ravelston pay for his drinks. His friendship with Ravelston was only possible on the understanding that he paid his share of everything.

He took out his single cigarette and lighted it. It gave him no pleasure to smoke, walking fast; it was a mere reckless gesture. He did not take much notice of where he was going. All he wanted was to tire himself, to walk and walk till the stupid physical fatigue had obliterated the Dorings' snub. He moved roughly southward — through the wastes of Camden Town, down Tottenham Court Road. It had been dark for some time now. He crossed Oxford Street, threaded through Covent Garden, found himself in the Strand, and

crossed the river by Waterloo Bridge. With night the cold had descended. As he walked his anger grew less violent, but his mood could not fundamentally improve. There was a thought that kept haunting him — a thought from which he fled, but which was not to be escaped. It was the thought of his poems. His empty, silly, futile poems! How could he ever have believed in them? To think that actually he had imagined, so short a time ago, that even London Pleasures might one day come to something! It made him sick to think of his poems now. It was like remembering last night's debauch. He knew in his bones that he was no good and his poems were no good. London Pleasures would never be finished. If he lived to be a thousand he would never write a line worth reading. Over and over, in self-hatred, he repeated those four stanzas of the poem he had been making up. Christ, what tripe! Rhyme to rhyme — tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! Hollow as an empty biscuit tin. THAT was the kind of muck he had wasted his life on.

He had walked a long way, five or seven miles perhaps. His feet were hot and swollen from the pavements. He was somewhere in Lambeth, in a slummy quarter where the narrow, puddled street plunged into blackness at fifty yards' distance. The few lamps, mist-ringed, hung like isolated stars, illumining nothing save themselves. He was getting devilishly hungry. The coffee-shops tempted him with their steamy windows and their chalked signs: 'Good Cup of Tea, 2d. No Urns Used.' But it was no use, he couldn't spend his Joey. He went under some echoing railway arches and up the alley on to Hungerford Bridge. On the miry water, lit by the glare of skysigns, the muck of East London was racing inland. Corks, lemons, barrel-staves, a dead dog, hunks of bread. Gordon walked along the Embankment to Westminster. The wind made the plane trees rattle. Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over. He winced. That tripe again! Even now, though it was December, a few poor draggled old wrecks were settling down on the benches, tucking themselves up in sort of parcels of newspaper. Gordon looked at them callously. On the bum, they called it. He would come to it himself some day. Better so, perhaps? He never felt any pity for the genuine poor. It is the black-coated poor, the middle-middle class, who need pitying.

He walked up to Trafalgar Square. Hours and hours to kill. The National Gallery? Ah, shut long ago, of course. It would be. It was a quarter past seven. Three, four, five hours before he could sleep. He walked seven times round the square, slowly. Four times clockwise, three times widdershins. His feet were sore and most of the benches were empty, but he would not sit down. If he halted for an instant the longing for tobacco would come upon him. In the Charing Cross Road the teashops called like sirens. Once the glass door of a Lyons swung open, letting out a wave of hot cake-scented air. It almost overcame him. After all, why NOT go in? You could sit there for nearly an hour. A cup of tea twopence, two buns a penny each. He had fourpence halfpenny, counting the Joey. But no! That bloody Joey! The girl at the cash desk would titter. In a vivid vision he saw the girl at the cash desk, as she handled his threepenny-bit, grin sidelong at the girl behind the cake-counter. They'd KNOW it was your last threepence. No use. Shove on. Keep moving.

In the deadly glare of the Neon lights the pavements were densely crowded. Gordon threaded his way, a small shabby figure, with pale face and unkempt hair. The crowd slid past him; he avoided and was avoided. There is something horrible about London at night; the coldness, the anonymity, the aloofness. Seven million people, sliding to and fro, avoiding contact, barely aware of one another's existence, like fish in an aquarium tank. The street swarmed with pretty girls. By scores they streamed past him, their faces averted or unseeing; cold nymph-creatures, dreading the eyes of the male. It was queer how many of them seemed to be alone, or with another girl. Far more women alone than women with men, he noted. That too was money. How many girls alive wouldn't be manless sooner than take a man who's moneyless?

The pubs were open, oozing sour whiffs of beer. People were trickling by ones and twos into the picture-houses. Gordon halted outside a great garish picture-house, under the weary eye of the commissionaire, to examine the photographs. Greta Garbo in The Painted Veil. He yearned to go inside, not for Greta's sake, but just for the warmth and the softness of the velvet seat. He hated the pictures, of course, seldom went there even when he could afford it. Why encourage the art that is destined to replace literature? But still,

there is a kind of soggy attraction about it. To sit on the padded seat in the warm smoke-scented darkness, letting the flickering drivel on the screen gradually overwhelm you — feeling the waves of its silliness lap you round till you seem to drown, intoxicated, in a viscous sea — after all, it's the kind of drug we need. The right drug for friendless people. As he approached the Palace Theatre a tart on sentry-go under the porch marked him down, stepped forward, and stood in his path. A short, stocky Italian girl, very young, with big black eyes. She looked agreeable, and, what tarts so seldom are, merry. For a moment he checked his step, even allowing himself to catch her eye. She looked up at him, ready to break out into a broad-lipped smile. Why not stop and talk to her? She looked as though she might understand him. But no! No money! He looked away and side-stepped her with the cold haste of a man whom poverty makes virtuous. How furious she'd be if he stopped and then she found he had no money! He pressed on. Even to talk costs money.

Up Tottenham Court Road and Camden Road it was a dreary drudge. He walked slower, dragging his feet a little. He had done ten miles over pavements. More girls streamed past, unseeing. Girls alone, girls with youths, girls with other girls, girls alone. Their cruel youthful eyes went over him and through him as though he had not existed. He was too tired to resent it. His shoulders surrendered to their weariness; he slouched, not trying any longer to preserve his upright carriage and his you-be-damned air. They flee from me that someone did me seek. How could you blame them? He was thirty, moth-eaten, and without charm. Why should any girl ever look at him again?

He reflected that he must go home at once if he wanted any food — for Ma Wisbeach refused to serve meals after nine o'clock. But the thought of his cold womanless bedroom sickened him. To climb the stairs, light the gas, flop down at the table with hours to kill and nothing to do, nothing to read, nothing to smoke — no, NOT endurable. In Camden Town the pubs were full and noisy, though this was only Thursday. Three women, red-armed, squat as the beer mugs in their hands, stood outside a pub door, talking. From within came hoarse voices, fag-smoke, the fume of beer. Gordon thought of the Crichton Arms. Flaxman might be there. Why not risk it? A half

of bitter, threepence halfpenny. He had fourpence halfpenny counting the Joey. After all, a Joey IS legal tender.

He felt dreadfully thirsty already. It had been a mistake to let himself think of beer. As he approached the Crichton, he heard voices singing. The great garish pub seemed to be more brightly lighted than usual. There was a concert of something going on inside. Twenty ripe male voices were chanting in unison:

'Fo — or REE'S a jorrigoo' fellow, For REE'S a jorrigoo' fellow, For REE'S a jorrigoo' fe — ELL — OW — And toori oori us!'

At least, that was what it sounded like. Gordon drew nearer, pierced by a ravishing thirst. The voices were so soggy, so infinitely beery. When you heard them you saw the scarlet faces of prosperous plumbers. There was a private room behind the bar where the Buffaloes held their secret conclaves. Doubtless it was they who were singing. They were giving some kind of commemorative booze to their president, secretary, Grand Herbivore, or whatever he is called. Gordon hesitated outside the Saloon bar. Better to go to the public bar, perhaps. Draught beer in the public, bottled beer in the saloon. He went round to the other side of the pub. The beer-choked voices followed him:

'With a toori oori ay. An' a toori oori ay!

'Fo — or REE'S a jorrigoo' fellow, For REE'S a jorrigoo' fellow — '

He felt quite faint for a moment. But it was fatigue and hunger as well as thirst. He could picture the cosy room where those Buffaloes were singing; the roaring fire, the big shiny table, the bovine photographs on the wall. Could picture also, as the singing ceased, twenty scarlet faces disappearing into pots of beer. He put his hand into his pocket and made sure that the threepenny-bit was still there. After all, why not? In the public bar, who would comment? Slap the Joey down on the bar and pass it off as a joke. 'Been saving that up from the Christmas pudding — ha, ha!' Laughter all round. Already he seemed to have the metallic taste of draught beer on his tongue.

He fingered the tiny disc, irresolute. The Buffaloes had tuned up again:

'With a toori oori ay, An' a toori oori ay!

'Fo — or REE'S a jorrigoo' fellow— '

Gordon moved back to the saloon bar. The window was frosted, and also steamy from the heat inside. Still, there were chinks where you could see through. He peeped in. Yes, Flaxman was there.

The saloon bar was crowded. Like all rooms seen from the outside, it looked ineffably cosy. The fire that blazed in the grate danced, mirrored, in the brass spittoons. Gordon thought he could almost smell the beer through the glass. Flaxman was propping up the bar with two fish-faced pals who looked like insurance-touts of the better type. One elbow on the bar, his foot on the rail, a beer-streaked glass in the other hand, he was swapping backchat with the blonde cutie barmaid. She was standing on a chair behind the bar, ranging the bottled beer and talking saucily over her shoulder. You couldn't hear what they were saying, but you could guess. Flaxman let fall some memorable witticism. The fish-faced men bellowed with obscene laughter. And the blonde cutie, tittering down at him, half shocked and half delighted, wriggled her neat little bum.

Gordon's heart sickened. To be in there, just to be in there! In the warmth and light, with people to talk to, with beer and cigarettes and a girl to flirt with! After all, why NOT go in? You could borrow a bob off Flaxman. Flaxman would lend it to you all right. He pictured Flaxman's careless assent— 'What ho, chappie! How's life? What? A bob? Sure! Take two. Catch, chappie!' — and the florin flicked along the beer-wet bar. Flaxman was a decent sort, in his way.

Gordon put his hand against the swing door. He even pushed it open a few inches. The warm fog of smoke and beer slipped through the crack. A familiar, reviving smell; nevertheless as he smelled it his nerve failed him. No! Impossible to go in. He turned away. He couldn't go shoving in that saloon bar with only fourpence halfpenny in his pocket. Never let other people buy your drinks for you! The first commandment of the moneyless. He made off, down the dark pavement.

'For REE'S a jorrigoo' fe — ELL — OW — And toori oori us!

'With a toori oori, ay! An' a-'

The voices, diminishing with distance, rolled after him, bearing faint tidings of beer. Gordon took the threepenny-bit from his pocket and sent it skimming away into the darkness.

He was going home, if you could call it 'going'. At any rate he

was gravitating in that direction. He did not want to go home, but he had got to sit down. His legs ached and his feet were bruised, and that vile bedroom was the sole place in London where he had purchased the right to sit down. He slipped in quietly, but, as usual, not quite so quietly that Mrs Wisbeach failed to hear him. She gave him a brief nosy glance round the corner of her door. It would be a little after nine. She might get him a meal if he asked her. But she would grizzle and make a favour of it, and he would go to bed hungry sooner than face that.

He started up the stairs. He was half way up the first flight when a double knock behind made him jump. The post! Perhaps a letter from Rosemary!

Forced from outside, the letter flap lifted, and with an effort, like a heron regurgitating a flatfish, vomited a bunch of letters on to the mat. Gordon's heart bounded. There were six or seven of them. Surely among all that lot there must be one for himself! Mrs Wisbeach, as usual, had darted from her lair at the sound of the postman's knock. As a matter of fact, in two years Gordon had never once succeeded in getting hold of a letter before Mrs Wisbeach laid hands on it. She gathered the letters jealously to her breast, and then, holding them up one at a time, scanned their addresses. From her manner you could gather that she suspected each one of them of containing a writ, an improper love letter, or an ad for Amen Pills.

'One for you, Mr Comstock,' she said sourly, handing him a letter.

His heart shrank and paused in its beat. A long-shaped envelope. Not from Rosemary, therefore. Ah! It was addressed in his own handwriting. From the editor of a paper, then. He had two poems 'out' at present. One with the Californian Review, the other with the Primrose Quarterly. But this wasn't an American stamp. And the Primrose had had his poem at least six weeks! Good God, supposing they'd accepted it!

He had forgotten Rosemary's existence. He said 'Thanks!', stuck the letter in his pocket, and started up the stairs with outward calm, but no sooner was he out of Mrs Wisbeach's sight that he bounded up three steps at a time. He had got to be alone to open that letter. Even before he reached the door he was feeling for his matchbox, but

his fingers were trembling so that in lighting the gas he chipped the mantle. He sat down, took the letter from his pocket, and then quailed. For a moment he could not nerve himself to open it. He held it up to the light and felt it to see how thick it was. His poem had been two sheets. Then, calling himself a fool, he ripped the envelope open. Out tumbled his own poem, and with it a neat — oh, so neat! — little printed slip of imitation parchment:

The Editor regrets that he is unable to make use of the enclosed contribution.

The slip was decorated with a design of funereal laurel leaves.

Gordon gazed at the thing with wordless hatred. Perhaps no snub in the world is so deadly as this, because none is so unanswerable. Suddenly he loathed his own poem and was acutely ashamed of it. He felt it the weakest, silliest poem ever written. Without looking at it again he tore it into small bits and flung them into the wastepaper basket. He would put that poem out of his mind for ever. The rejection slip, however, he did not tear up yet. He fingered it, feeling its loathly sleekness. Such an elegant little thing, printed in admirable type. You could tell at a glance that it came from a 'good' magazine — a snooty highbrow magazine with the money of a publishing house behind it. Money, money! Money and culture! It was a stupid thing that he had done. Fancy sending a poem to a paper like the Primrose! As though they'd accept poems from people like HIM. The mere fact that the poem wasn't typed would tell them what kind of person he was. He might as well have dropped a card on Buckingham Palace. He thought of the people who wrote for the Primrose; a coterie of moneyed highbrows — those sleek, refined young animals who suck in money and culture with their mother's milk. The idea of trying to horn in among that pansy crowd! But he cursed them all the same. The sods! The bloody sods! 'The Editor regrets!' Why be so bloody mealy-mouthed about it? Why not say outright, 'We don't want your bloody poems. We only take poems from chaps we were at Cambridge with. You proletarians keep your distance'? The bloody, hypocritical sods!

At last he crumpled up the rejection slip, threw it away, and stood up. Better get to bed while he had the energy to undress. Bed was the only place that was warm. But wait. Wind the clock, set the alarm.

He went through the familiar action with a sense of deadly staleness. His eye fell upon the aspidistra. Two years he had inhabited this vile room; two mortal years in which nothing had been accomplished. Seven hundred wasted days, all ending in the lonely bed. Snubs, failures, insults, all of them unavenged. Money, money, all is money! Because he had no money the Dorings' snubbed him, because he had no money the Primrose had turned down his poem, because he had no money Rosemary wouldn't sleep with him. Social failure, artistic failure, sexual failure — they are all the same. And lack of money is at the bottom of them all.

He must hit back at somebody or something. He could not go to bed with that rejection slip as the last thing in his mind. He thought of Rosemary. It was five days now since she had written. If there had been a letter from her this evening even that rap over the knuckles from the Primrose Quarterly would have mattered less. She declared that she loved him, and she wouldn't sleep with him, wouldn't even write to him! She was the same as all the others. She despised him and forgot about him because he had no money and therefore didn't matter. He would write her an enormous letter, telling her what it felt like to be ignored and insulted, making her see how cruelly she had treated him.

He found a clean sheet of paper and wrote in the top right-hand corner:

'31 Willowbed Road, NW, 1 December, 9.30 p.m.'

But having written that much, he found that he could write no more. He was in the defeated mood when even the writing of a letter is too great an effort. Besides, what was the use? She would never understand. No woman ever understands. But he must write something. Something to wound her — that was what he most wanted, at this moment. He meditated for a long time, and at last wrote, exactly in the middle of the sheet:

You have broken my heart.

No address, no signature. Rather neat it looked, all by itself, there in the middle of the sheet, in his small 'scholarly' handwriting. Almost like a little poem in itself. This thought cheered him up a little.

He stuck the letter in an envelope and went out and posted it at the

post office on the corner, spending his last three halfpence on a penny stamp and a halfpenny stamp out of the slot machine.

Chapter 5

'We're printing that poem of yours in next month's Antichrist,' said Ravelston from his first-floor window.

Gordon, on the pavement below, affected to have forgotten the poem Ravelston was speaking about; he remembered it intimately, of course, as he remembered all his poems.

'Which poem?' he said.

'The one about the dying prostitute. We thought it was rather successful.' Gordon laughed a laugh of gratified conceit, and managed to pass it off as a laugh of sardonic amusement.

'Aha! A dying prostitute! That's rather what you might call one of my subjects. I'll do you one about an aspidistra next time.'

Ravelston's over-sensitive, boyish face, framed by nice dark-brown hair, drew back a little from the window.

'It's intolerably cold,' he said. 'You'd better come up and have some food, or something.'

'No, you come down. I've had dinner. Let's go to a pub and have some beer.'

'All right then. Half a minute while I get my shoes on.'

They had been talking for some minutes, Gordon on the pavement, Ravelston leaning out of the window above. Gordon had announced his arrival not by knocking at the door but by throwing a pebble against the window pane. He never, if he could help it, set foot inside Ravelston's flat. There was something in the atmosphere of the flat that upset him and made him feel mean, dirty, and out of place. It was so overwhelmingly, though unconsciously, upper-class. Only in the street or in a pub could he feel himself approximately Ravelston's equal. It would have astonished Ravelston to learn that his four-roomed flat, which he thought of as a poky little place, had this effect upon Gordon. To Ravelston, living in the wilds of Regent's Park was practically the same thing as living in the slums; he had chosen to live there, en bon socialiste, precisely as your social snob will live in a mews in Mayfair for the sake of the 'WI' on his notepaper. It was part of a lifelong attempt to escape from his own class and become, as it were, an honorary member of the proletariat.

Like all such attempts, it was foredoomed to failure. No rich man ever succeeds in disguising himself as a poor man; for money, like murder, will out.

On the street door there was a brass plate inscribed:

P. W. H. RAVELSTON

ANTICHRIST

Ravelston lived on the first floor, and the editorial offices of Antichrist were downstairs. Antichrist was a middle — to high-brow monthly, Socialist in a vehement but ill-defined way. In general, it gave the impression of being edited by an ardent Nonconformist who had transferred his allegiance from God to Marx, and in doing so had got mixed up with a gang of vers libre poets. This was not really Ravelston's character; merely he was softer-hearted than an editor ought to be, and consequently was at the mercy of his contributors. Practically anything got printed in Antichrist if Ravelston suspected that its author was starving.

Ravelston appeared a moment later, hatless and pulling on a pair of gauntlet gloves. You could tell him at a glance for a rich young man. He wore the uniform of the moneyed intelligentsia; an old tweed coat — but it was one of those coats which have been made by a good tailor and grow more aristocratic as they grow older — very loose grey flannel bags, a grey pullover, much-worn brown shoes. He made a point of going everywhere, even to fashionable houses and expensive restaurants, in these clothes, just to show his contempt for upper-class conventions; he did not fully realize that it is only the upper classes who can do these things. Though he was a year older than Gordon he looked much younger. He was very tall, with a lean, wide-shouldered body and the typical lounging grace of the upper-class youth. But there was something curiously apologetic in his movements and in the expression of his face. He seemed always in the act of stepping out of somebody else's way. When expressing an opinion he would rub his nose with the back of his left forefinger. The truth was that in every moment of his life he was apologizing, tacitly, for the largeness of his income. You could make him uncomfortable as easily by reminding him that he was rich as you could make Gordon by reminding him that he was poor.

'You've had dinner, I gather?' said Ravelston, in his rather

Bloomsbury voice.

'Yes, ages ago. Haven't you?'

'Oh, yes, certainly. Oh, quite!'

It was twenty past eight and Gordon had had no food since midday. Neither had Ravelston. Gordon did not know that Ravelston was hungry, but Ravelston knew that Gordon was hungry, and Gordon knew that Ravelston knew it. Nevertheless, each saw good reason for pretending not to be hungry. They seldom or never had meals together. Gordon would not let Ravelston buy his meals for him, and for himself he could not afford to go to restaurants, not even to a Lyons or an A.B.C. This was Monday and he had five and ninepence left. He might afford a couple of pints at a pub, but not a proper meal. When he and Ravelston met it was always agreed, with silent manoeuvrings, that they should do nothing that involved spending money, beyond the shilling or so one spends in a pub. In this way the fiction was kept up that there was no serious difference in their incomes.

Gordon sidled closer to Ravelston as they started down the pavement. He would have taken his arm, only of course one can't do that kind of thing. Beside Ravelston's taller, comelier figure he looked frail, fretful, and miserably shabby. He adored Ravelston and was never quite at ease in his presence. Ravelston had not merely a charm of manner, but also a kind of fundamental decency, a graceful attitude to life, which Gordon scarcely encountered elsewhere. Undoubtedly it was bound up with the fact that Ravelston was rich. For money buys all virtues. Money suffereth long and is kind, is not puffed up, doth not behave unseemly, seeketh not her own. But in some ways Ravelston was not even like a moneyed person. The fatty degeneration of the spirit which goes with wealth had missed him, or he had escaped it by a conscious effort. Indeed his whole life was a struggle to escape it. It was for this reason that he gave up his time and a large part of his income to editing an unpopular Socialist monthly. And apart from Antichrist, money flowed from him in all directions. A tribe of cadgers ranging from poets to pavement-artists browsed upon him unceasingly. For himself he lived upon eight hundred a year or thereabouts. Even of this income he was acutely ashamed. It was not, he realized, exactly a proletarian income; but he

had never learned to get along on less. Eight hundred a year was a minimum living wage to him, as two pounds a week was to Gordon.

'How is your work getting on?' said Ravelston presently.

'Oh, as usual. It's a drowsy kind of job. Swapping back-chat with old hens about Hugh Walpole. I don't object to it.'

'I meant your own work — your writing. Is London Pleasures getting on all right?'

'Oh, Christ! Don't speak of it. It's turning my hair grey.'

'Isn't it going forward at all?'

'My books don't go forward. They go backward.'

Ravelston sighed. As editor of Antichrist, he was used to encouraging despondent poets that it had become a second nature to him. He did not need telling why Gordon 'couldn't' write, and why all poets nowadays 'can't' write, and why when they do write it is something as arid as the rattling of a pea inside a big drum. He said with sympathetic gloom:

'Of course I admit this isn't a hopeful age to write poetry in.'

'You bet it isn't.'

Gordon kicked his heel against the pavement. He wished that London Pleasures had not been mentioned. It brought back to him the memory of his mean, cold bedroom and the grimy papers littered under the aspidistra. He said abruptly:

'This writing business! What b — s it all is! Sitting in a corner torturing a nerve which won't even respond any longer. And who wants poetry nowadays? Training performing fleas would be more useful by comparison.'

'Still, you oughtn't to let yourself be discouraged. After all, you do produce something, which is more than one can say for a lot of poets nowadays. There was Mice, for instance.'

'Oh, Mice! It makes me spew to think of it.'

He thought with loathing of that sneaky little foolscap octavo. Those forty or fifty drab, dead little poems, each like a little abortion in its labelled jar. 'Exceptional promise', The Times Lit. Supp. had said. A hundred and fifty-three copies sold and the rest remaindered. He had one of those movements of contempt and even horror which every artist has at times when he thinks of his own work.

'It's dead,' he said. 'Dead as a blasted foetus in a bottle.'

‘Oh, well, I suppose that happens to most books. You can’t expect an enormous sale for poetry nowadays. There’s too much competition.’

‘I didn’t mean that. I meant the poems themselves are dead. There’s no life in them. Everything I write is like that. Lifeless, gutless. Not necessarily ugly or vulgar; but dead — just dead.’ The word ‘dead’ re-echoed in his mind, setting up its own train of thought. He added: ‘My poems are dead because I’m dead. You’re dead. We’re all dead. Dead people in a dead world.’

Ravelston murmured agreement, with a curious air of guilt. And now they were off upon their favourite subject — Gordon’s favourite subject, anyway; the futility, the bloodiness, the deathliness of modern life. They never met without talking for at least half an hour in this vein. But it always made Ravelston feel rather uncomfortable. In a way, of course, he knew — it was precisely this that Antichrist existed to point out — that life under a decaying capitalism is deathly and meaningless. But this knowledge was only theoretical. You can’t really feel that kind of thing when your income is eight hundred a year. Most of the time, when he wasn’t thinking of coal-miners, Chinese junk-coolies, and the unemployed in Middlesbrough, he felt that life was pretty good fun. Moreover, he had the naive belief that in a little while Socialism is going to put things right. Gordon always seemed to him to exaggerate. So there was subtle disagreement between them, which Ravelston was too good-mannered to press home.

But with Gordon it was different. Gordon’s income was two pounds a week. Therefore the hatred of modern life, the desire to see our money-civilization blown to hell by bombs, was a thing he genuinely felt. They were walking southward, down a darkish, meanly decent residential street with a few shuttered shops. From a hoarding on the blank end of a house the yard-wide face of Corner Table simpered, pallid in the lamplight. Gordon caught a glimpse of a withering aspidistra in a lower window. London! Mile after mile of mean lonely houses, let off in flats and single rooms; not homes, not communities, just clusters of meaningless lives drifting in a sort of drowsy chaos to the grave! He saw men as corpses walking. The thought that he was merely objectifying his own inner misery hardly

troubled him. His mind went back to Wednesday afternoon, when he had desired to hear the enemy aeroplanes zooming over London. He caught Ravelston's arm and paused to gesticulate at the Corner Table poster.

'Look at that bloody thing up there! Look at it, just look at it! Doesn't it make you spew?'

'It's aesthetically offensive, I grant. But I don't see that it matters very greatly.'

'Of course it matters — having the town plastered with things like that.'

'Oh, well, it's merely a temporary phenomenon. Capitalism in its last phase. I doubt whether it's worth worrying about.'

'But there's more in it than that. Just look at that fellow's face gaping down at us! You can see our whole civilization written there. The imbecility, the emptiness, the desolation! You can't look at it without thinking of French letters and machine guns. Do you know that the other day I was actually wishing war would break out? I was longing for it — praying for it, almost.'

'Of course, the trouble is, you see, that about half the young men in Europe are wishing the same thing.'

'Let's hope they are. Then perhaps it'll happen.'

'My dear old chap, no! Once is enough, surely.'

Gordon walked on, fretfully. 'This life we live nowadays! It's not life, it's stagnation, death-in-life. Look at all these bloody houses, and the meaningless people inside them! Sometimes I think we're all corpses. Just rotting upright.'

'But where you make your mistake, don't you see, is in talking as if all this was incurable. This is only something that's got to happen before the proletariat take over.'

'Oh, Socialism! Don't talk to me about Socialism.'

'You ought to read Marx, Gordon, you really ought. Then you'd realize that this is only a phase. It can't go on for ever.'

'Can't it? It FEELS as if it was going on for ever.'

'It's merely that we're at a bad moment. We've got to die before we can be reborn, if you take my meaning.'

'We're dying right enough. I don't see much signs of our being reborn.'

Ravelston rubbed his nose. ‘Oh, well, we must have faith, I suppose. And hope.’

‘We must have money you mean,’ said Gordon gloomily.

‘Money?’

‘It’s the price of optimism. Give me five quid a week and I’D be a Socialist, I dare say.’

Ravelston looked away, discomforted. This money-business! Everywhere it came up against you! Gordon wished he had not said it. Money is the one thing you must never mention when you are with people richer than yourself. Or if you do, then it must be money in the abstract, money with a big ‘M’, not the actual concrete money that’s in your pocket and isn’t in mine. But the accursed subject drew him like a magnet. Sooner or later, especially when he had a few drinks inside him, he invariably began talking with self-pitiful detail about the bloodiness of life on two quid a week. Sometimes, from sheer nervous impulse to say the wrong thing, he would come out with some squalid confession — as, for instance, that he had been without tobacco for two days, or that his underclothes were in holes and his overcoat up the spout. But nothing of that sort should happen tonight, he resolved. They veered swiftly away from the subject of money and began talking in a more general way about Socialism. Ravelston had been trying for years to convert Gordon to Socialism, without even succeeding in interesting him in it. Presently they passed a low-looking pub on a corner in a side-street. A sour cloud of beer seemed to hang about it. The smell revolted Ravelston. He would have quickened his pace to get away from it. But Gordon paused, his nostrils tickled.

‘Christ! I could do with a drink,’ he said.

‘So could I,’ said Ravelston gallantly.

Gordon shoved open the door of the public bar, Ravelston following. Ravelston persuaded himself that he was fond of pubs, especially low-class pubs. Pubs are genuinely proletarian. In a pub you can meet the working class on equal terms — or that’s the theory, anyway. But in practice Ravelston never went into a pub unless he was with somebody like Gordon, and he always felt like a fish out of water when he got there. A foul yet coldish air enveloped them. It was a filthy, smoky room, low-ceilinged, with a sawdusted

floor and plain deal tables ringed by generations of beer-pots. In one corner four monstrous women with breasts the size of melons were sitting drinking porter and talking with bitter intensity about someone called Mrs Croop. The landlady, a tall grim woman with a black fringe, looking like the madame of a brothel, stood behind the bar, her powerful forearms folded, watching a game of darts which was going on between four labourers and a postman. You had to duck under the darts as you crossed the room, there was a moment's hush and people glanced inquisitively at Ravelston. He was so obviously a gentleman. They didn't see his type very often in the public bar.

Ravelston pretended not to notice that they were staring at him. He lounged towards the bar, pulling off a glove to feel for the money in his pocket. 'What's yours?' he said casually.

But Gordon had already shoved his way ahead and was tapping a shilling on the bar. Always pay for the first round of drinks! It was his point of honour. Ravelston made for the only vacant table. A navvy leaning on the bar turned on his elbow and gave him a long, insolent stare 'A —— toff!' he was thinking. Gordon came back balancing two pint glasses of the dark common ale. They were thick cheap glasses, thick as jam jars almost, and dim and greasy. A thin yellow froth was subsiding on the beer. The air was thick with gunpowdery tobacco-smoke. Ravelston caught sight of a well-filled spittoon near the bar and averted his eyes. It crossed his mind that this beer had been sucked up from some beetle-ridden cellar through yards of slimy tube, and that the glasses had never been washed in their lives, only rinsed in beery water. Gordon was very hungry. He could have done with some bread and cheese, but to order any would have been to betray the fact that he had had no dinner. He took a deep pull at his beer and lighted a cigarette, which made him forget his hunger a little. Ravelston also swallowed a mouthful or so and set his glass gingerly down. It was typical London beer, sickly and yet leaving a chemical after-taste. Ravelston thought of the wines of Burgundy. They went on arguing about Socialism.

'You know, Gordon, it's really time you started reading Marx,' said Ravelston, less apologetically than usual, because the vile taste of the beer had annoyed him.

‘I’d sooner read Mrs Humphry Ward,’ said Gordon.

‘But don’t you see, your attitude is so unreasonable. You’re always tirading against Capitalism, and yet you won’t accept the only possible alternative. One can’t put things right in a hole-and-corner way. One’s got to accept either Capitalism or Socialism. There’s no way out of it.’

‘I tell you I can’t be bothered with Socialism. The very thought of it makes me yawn.’

‘But what’s your objection to Socialism, anyway?’

‘There’s only one objection to Socialism, and that is that nobody wants it.’

‘Oh, surely it’s rather absurd to say that!’

‘That’s to say, nobody who could see what Socialism would really mean.’

‘But what WOULD Socialism mean, according to your idea of it?’

‘Oh! Some kind of Aldous Huxley Brave New World: only not so amusing. Four hours a day in a model factory, tightening up bolt number 6003. Rations served out in grease-proof paper at the communal kitchen. Community-hikes from Marx Hostel to Lenin Hostel and back. Free abortion-clinics on all the corners. All very well in its way, of course. Only we don’ t want it.’

Ravelston sighed. Once a month, in Antichrist, he repudiated this version of Socialism. ‘Well, what DO we want, then?’

‘God knows. All we know is what we don’t want. That’s what’s wrong with us nowadays. We’re stuck, like Buridan’s donkey. Only there are three alternatives instead of two, and all three of them make us spew. Socialism’s only one of them.’

‘And what are the other two?’

‘Oh, I suppose suicide and the Catholic Church.’

Ravelston smiled, anticlerically shocked. ‘The Catholic Church! Do you consider that an alternative?’

‘Well, it’s a standing temptation to the intelligentsia, isn’t it?’

‘Not what *I* should call the intelligentsia. Though there was Eliot, of course,’ Ravelston admitted.

‘And there’ll be plenty more, you bet. I dare say it’s fairly cosy under Mother Church’s wing. A bit insanitary, of course — but

you'd feel safe there, anyway.'

Ravelston rubbed his nose reflectively. 'It seems to me that's only another form of suicide.'

'In a way. But so's Socialism. At least it's a counsel of despair. But I couldn't commit suicide, real suicide. It's too meek and mild. I'm not going to give up my share of earth to anyone else. I'd want to do in a few of my enemies first.'

Ravelston smiled again. 'And who are your enemies?'

'Oh, anyone with over five hundred a year.'

A momentary uncomfortable silence fell. Ravelston's income, after payment of income tax, was probably two thousand a year. This was the kind of thing Gordon was always saying. To cover the awkwardness of the moment, Ravelston took up his glass, steeled himself against the nauseous taste, and swallowed about two-thirds of his beer — enough at any rate, to give the impression that he had finished it.

'Drink up!' he said with would-be heartiness. 'It's time we had the other half of that.'

Gordon emptied his glass and let Ravelston take it. He did not mind letting Ravelston pay for the drinks now. He had paid the first round and honour was satisfied. Ravelston walked self-consciously to the bar. People began staring at him again as soon as he stood up. The navvy, still leaning against the bar over his untouched pot of beer, gazed at him with quiet insolence. Ravelston resolved that he would drink no more of this filthy common ale.

'Two double whiskies, would you, please?' he said apologetically.

The grim landlady stared. 'What?' she said.

'Two double whiskies, please.'

'No whisky 'ere. We don't sell spirits. Beer 'ouse, we are.'

The navvy smiled flickering under his moustache. ' —— ignorant toff!' he was thinking. 'Asking for a whisky in a —— beer 'ouse!' Ravelston's pale face flushed slightly. He had not known till this moment that some of the poorer pubs cannot afford a spirit licence.

'Bass, then, would you? Two pint bottles of Bass.'

There were no pint bottles, they had to have four half pints. It was a very poor house. Gordon took a deep, satisfying swallow of Bass. More alcoholic than the draught beer, it fizzed and prickled in his

throat, and because he was hungry it went a little to his head. He felt at once more philosophic and more self-pitiful. He had made up his mind not to begin belly-aching about his poverty; but now he was going to begin after all. He said abruptly:

'This is all b — s that we've been talking.'

'What's all b — s?'

'All this about Socialism and Capitalism and the state of the modern world and God knows what. I don't give a —— for the state of the modern world. If the whole of England was starving except myself and the people I care about, I wouldn't give a damn.'

'Don't you exaggerate just a little?'

'No. All this talk we make — we're only objectifying our own feelings. It's all dictated by what we've got in our pockets. I go up and down London saying it's a city of the dead, and our civilization's dying, and I wish war would break out, and God knows what; and all it means is that my wages are two quid a week and I wish they were five.'

Ravelston, once again reminded obliquely of his income, stroked his nose slowly with the knuckle of his left forefinger.

'Of course, I'm with you up to a point. After all, it's only what Marx said. Every ideology is a reflection of economic circumstances.'

'Ah, but you only understand it out of Marx! You don't know what it means to have to crawl along on two quid a week. It isn't a question of hardship — it's nothing so decent as hardship. It's the bloody, sneaking, squalid meaness of it. Living alone for weeks on end because when you've no money you've no friends. Calling yourself a writer and never even producing anything because you're always too washed out to write. It's a sort of filthy sub-world one lives in. A sort of spiritual sewer.'

He had started now. They were never together long without Gordon beginning to talk in this strain. It was the vilest manners. It embarrassed Ravelston horribly. And yet somehow Gordon could not help it. He had got to retail his troubles to somebody, and Ravelston was the only person who understood. Poverty, like every other dirty wound, has got to be exposed occasionally. He began to talk in obscene detail of his life in Willowbed Road. He dilated on the smell

of slops and cabbage, the clotted sauce-bottles in the dining-room, the vile food, the aspidistras. He described his furtive cups of tea and his trick of throwing used tea-leaves down the W.C. Ravelston, guilty and miserable, sat staring at his glass and revolving it slowly between his hands. Against his right breast he could feel, a square accusing shape, the pocket-book in which, as he knew, eight pound notes and two ten-bob notes nestled against his fat green cheque-book. How awful these details of poverty are! Not that what Gordon was describing was real poverty. It was at worst the fringe of poverty. But what of the real poor? What of the unemployed in Middlesbrough, seven in a room on twenty-five bob a week? When there are people living like that, how dare one walk the world with pound notes and cheque-books in one's pocket?

'It's bloody,' he murmured several times, impotently. In his heart he wondered — it was his invariable reaction — whether Gordon would accept a tenner if you offered to lend it to him.

They had another drink, which Ravelston again paid for, and went out into the street. It was almost time to part. Gordon never spent more than an hour or two with Ravelston. One's contacts with rich people, like one's visits to high altitudes, must always be brief. It was a moonless, starless night, with a damp wind blowing. The night air, the beer, and the watery radiance of the lamps induced in Gordon a sort of dismal clarity. He perceived that it is quite impossible to explain to any rich person, even to anyone so decent as Ravelston, the essential bloodiness of poverty. For this reason it became all the more important to explain it. He said suddenly:

'Have you read Chaucer's Man of Lawe's Tale?'

'The Man of Lawe's Tale? Not that I remember. What's it about?'

'I forget. I was thinking of the first six stanzas. Where he talks about poverty. The way it gives everyone the right to stamp on you! The way everyone WANTS to stamp on you! It makes people HATE you, to know that you've no money. They insult you just for the pleasure of insulting you and knowing that you can't hit back.'

Ravelston was pained. 'Oh, no, surely not! People aren't so bad as all that.'

'Ah, but you don't know the things that happen!'

Gordon did not want to be told that 'people aren't so bad'. He

clung with a sort of painful joy to the notion that because he was poor everyone must WANT to insult him. It fitted in with his philosophy of life. And suddenly, with the feeling that he could not stop himself, he was talking of the thing that had been rankling in his mind for two days past — the snub he had had from the Dorings on Thursday. He poured the whole story out quite shamelessly. Ravelston was amazed. He could not understand what Gordon was making such a fuss about. To be disappointed at missing a beastly literary tea-party seemed to him absurd. He would not have gone to a literary tea-party if you had paid him. Like all rich people, he spent far more time in avoiding human society than in seeking it. He interrupted Gordon:

'Really, you know, you ought not to take offence so easily. After all, a thing like that doesn't really matter.'

'It isn't the thing itself that matters, it's the spirit behind it. The way they snub you as a matter of course, just because you've got no money.'

'But quite possibly it was all a mistake, or something. Why should anyone want to snub you?'

'"If thou be poure, thy brother hateth thee,"' quoted Gordon perversely.

Ravelston, deferential even to the opinions of the dead, rubbed his nose. 'Does Chaucer say that? Then I'm afraid I disagree with Chaucer. People don't hate you, exactly.'

'They do. And they're quite right to hate you. You ARE hateful. It's like those ads for Listerine. "Why is he always alone? Halitosis is ruining his career." Poverty is spiritual halitosis.'

Ravelston sighed. Undoubtedly Gordon was perverse. They walked on, arguing, Gordon vehemently, Ravelston deprecatingly. Ravelston was helpless against Gordon in an argument of this kind. He felt that Gordon exaggerated, and yet he never liked to contradict him. How could he? He was rich and Gordon was poor. And how can you argue about poverty with someone who is genuinely poor?

'And then the way women treat you when you've no money!' Gordon went on. 'That's another thing about this accursed money business — women!'

Ravelston nodded rather gloomily. This sounded to him more

reasonable than what Gordon had been saying before. He thought of Hermione Slater, his own girl. They had been lovers two years but had never bothered to get married. It was 'too much fag', Hermione always said. She was rich, of course, or rather her people were. He thought of her shoulders, wide, smooth, and young, that seemed to rise out of her clothes like a mermaid rising from the sea; and her skin and hair, which were somehow warm and sleepy, like a wheatfield in the sun. Hermione always yawned at the mention of Socialism, and refused even to read Antichrist. 'Don't talk to me about the lower classes,' she used to say. 'I hate them. They SMELL.' And Ravelston adored her.

'Of course women ARE a difficulty,' he admitted.

'They're more than a difficulty, they're a bloody curse. That is, if you've got no money. A woman hates the sight of you if you've got no money.'

'I think that's putting it a little too strongly. Things aren't so crude as all that.'

Gordon did not listen. 'What rot it is to talk about Socialism or any other ism when women are what they are! The only thing a woman ever wants is money; money for a house of her own and two babies and Drage furniture and an aspidistra. The only sin they can imagine is not wanting to grab money. No woman ever judges a man by anything except his income. Of course she doesn't put it to herself like that. She says he's SUCH A NICE man — meaning that he's got plenty of money. And if you haven't got money you aren't NICE. You're dishonoured, somehow. You've sinned. Sinned against the aspidistra.'

'You talk a great deal about aspidistras,' said Ravelston.

'They're a dashed important subject,' said Gordon.

Ravelston rubbed his nose and looked away uncomfortably.

'Look here, Gordon, you don't mind my asking — have you got a girl of your own?'

'Oh, Christ! don't speak of her!'

He began, nevertheless, to talk about Rosemary. Ravelston had never met Rosemary. At this moment Gordon could not even remember what Rosemary was like. He could not remember how fond he was of her and she of him, how happy they always were

together on the rare occasions when they could meet, how patiently she put up with his almost intolerable ways. He remembered nothing save that she would not sleep with him and that it was now a week since she had even written. In the dank night air, with beer inside him, he felt himself a forlorn, neglected creature. Rosemary was 'cruel' to him — that was how he saw it. Perversely, for the mere pleasure of tormenting himself and making Ravelston uncomfortable, be began to invent an imaginary character for Rosemary. He built up a picture of her as a callous creature who was amused by him and yet half despised him, who played with him and kept him at arm's length, and who would nevertheless fall into his arms if only he had a little more money. And Ravelston, who had never met Rosemary, did not altogether disbelieve him. He broke in:

'But I say, Gordon, look here. This girl, Miss — Miss Waterlow, did you say her name was? — Rosemary; doesn't she care for you at all, really?'

Gordon's conscience pricked him, though not very deeply. He could not say that Rosemary did not care for him.

'Oh, yes, she does care for me. In her own way, I dare say she cares for me quite a lot. But not enough, don't you see. She can't, while I've got no money. It's all money.'

'But surely money isn't so important as all that? After all, there ARE other things.'

'What other things? Don't you see that a man's whole personality is bound up with his income? His personality IS his income. How can you be attractive to a girl when you've got no money? You can't wear decent clothes, you can't take her out to dinner or to the theatre or away for week-ends, you can't carry a cheery, interesting atmosphere about with you. And it's rot to say that kind of thing doesn't matter. It does. If you haven't got money there isn't even anywhere where you can meet. Rosemary and I never meet except in the streets or in picture galleries. She lives in some foul women's hostel, and my bitch of a landlady won't allow women in the house. Wandering up and down beastly wet streets — that's what Rosemary associates me with. Don't you see how it takes the gilt off everything?'

Ravelston was distressed. It must be pretty bloody when you

haven't even the money to take your girl out. He tried to nerve himself to say something, and failed. With guilt, and also with desire, he thought of Hermione's body, naked like a ripe warm fruit. With any luck she would have dropped in at the flat this evening. Probably she was waiting for him now. He thought of the unemployed in Middlesbrough. Sexual starvation is awful among the unemployed. They were nearing the flat. He glanced up at the windows. Yes, they were lighted up. Hermione must be there. She had her own latchkey.

As they approached the flat Gordon edged closer to Ravelston. Now the evening was ending, and he must part from Ravelston, whom he adored, and go back to his foul lonely bedroom. And all evenings ended in this way; the return through the dark streets to the lonely room, the womanless bed. And Ravelston would say 'Come up, won't you?' and Gordon, in duty bound, would say, 'No.' Never stay too long with those you love — another commandment of the moneyless.

They halted at the foot of the steps. Ravelston laid his gloved hand on one of the iron spearheads of the railing.

'Come up, won't you?' he said without conviction.

'No, thanks. It's time I was getting back.'

Ravelston's fingers tightened round the spearhead. He pulled as though to go up, but did not go. Uncomfortably, looking over Gordon's head into the distance, he said:

'I say, Gordon, look here. You won't be offended if I say something?'

'What?'

'I say, you know, I hate that business about you and your girl. Not being able to take her out, and all that. It's bloody, that kind of thing.'

'Oh, it's nothing really.'

As soon as he heard Ravelston say that it was 'bloody', he knew that he had been exaggerating. He wished that he had not talked in that silly self-pitiful way. One says these things, with the feeling that one cannot help saying them, and afterwards one is sorry.

'I dare say I exaggerate,' he said.

'I say, Gordon, look here. Let me lend you ten quid. Take the girl out to dinner a few times. Or away for the week-end, or something. It

might make all the difference. I hate to think— ‘

Gordon frowned bitterly, almost fiercely. He had stepped a pace back, as though from a threat or an insult. The terrible thing was that the temptation to say ‘Yes’ had almost overwhelmed him. There was so much that ten quid would do! He had a fleeting vision of Rosemary and himself at a restaurant table — a bowl of grapes and peaches, a bowing hovering waiter, a wine bottle dark and dusty in its wicker cradle.

‘No fear!’ he said.

‘I do wish you would. I tell you I’d LIKE to lend it you.’

‘Thanks. But I prefer to keep my friends.’

‘Isn’t that rather — well, rather a bourgeois kind of thing to say?’

‘Do you think it would be BORROWING if I took ten quid off you? I couldn’t pay it back in ten years.’

‘Oh, well! It wouldn’t matter so very much.’ Ravelston looked away. Out it had got to come — the disgraceful, hateful admission that he found himself forced so curiously often to make! ‘You know, I’ve got quite a lot of money.’

‘I know you have. That’s exactly why I won’t borrow off you.’

‘You know, Gordon, sometimes you’re just a little bit — well, pigheaded.’

‘I dare say. I can’t help it.’

‘Oh, well! Good night, then.’

‘Good night.’

Ten minutes later Ravelston rode southwards in a taxi, with Hermione. She had been waiting for him, asleep or half asleep in one of the monstrous armchairs in front of the sitting-room fire. Whenever there was nothing particular to do, Hermione always fell asleep as promptly as an animal, and the more she slept the healthier she became. As he came across to her she woke and stretched herself with voluptuous, sleepy writhings, half smiling, half yawning up at him, one cheek and bare arm rosy in the firelight. Presently she mastered her yawns to greet him:

‘Hullo, Philip! Where have you been all this time? I’ve been waiting ages.’

‘Oh, I’ve been out with a fellow. Gordon Comstock. I don’t expect you know him. The poet.’

‘Poet! How much did he borrow off you?’

‘Nothing. He’s not that kind of person. He’s rather a fool about money, as a matter of fact. But he’s very gifted in his way.’

‘You and your poets! You look tired, Philip. What time did you have dinner?’

‘Well — as a matter of fact I didn’t have any dinner.’

‘Didn’t have any dinner! Why?’

‘Oh, well, you see — I don’t know if you’ll understand. It was a kind of accident. It was like this.’

He explained. Hermione burst out laughing and dragged herself into a more upright position.

‘Philip! You ARE a silly old ass! Going without your dinner, just so as not to hurt that little beast’s feelings! You must have some food at once. And of course your char’s gone home. Why don’t you keep some proper servants, Philip? I hate this hole-and-corner way you live. We’ll go out and have supper at Modigliani’s.’

‘But it’s after ten. They’ll be shut.’

‘Nonsense! They’re open till two. I’ll ring up for a taxi. I’m not going to have you starving yourself.’

In the taxi she lay against him, still half asleep, her head pillowed on his breast. He thought of the unemployed in Middlesbrough, seven in a room on twenty-five bob a week. But the girl’s body was heavy against him, and Middlesbrough was very far away. Also he was damnably hungry. He thought of his favourite corner table at Modigliani’s, and of that vile pub with its hard benches, stale beer-stink, and brass spittoons. Hermione was sleepily lecturing him.

‘Philip, why do you have to live in such a dreadful way?’

‘But I don’t live in a dreadful way.’

‘Yes, you do. Pretending you’re poor when you’re not, and living in that poky flat with no servants, and going about with all these beastly people.’

‘What beastly people?’

‘Oh, people like this poet friend of yours. All those people who write for your paper. They only do it to cadge from you. Of course I know you’re a Socialist. So am I. I mean we’re all Socialists nowadays. But I don’t see why you have to give all your money away and make friends with the lower classes. You can be a Socialist

AND have a good time, that's what I say.'

'Hermione, dear, please don't call them the lower classes!'

'Why not? They ARE the lower classes, aren't they?'

'It's such a hateful expression. Call them the working class, can't you?'

'The working class, if you like, then. But they smell just the same.'

'You oughtn't to say that kind of thing,' he protested weakly.

'Do you know, Philip, sometimes I think you LIKE the lower classes.'

'Of course I like them.'

'How disgusting. How absolutely disgusting.'

She lay quiet, content to argue no longer, her arms round him, like a sleepy siren. The woman-scent breathed out of her, a powerful wordless propaganda against all altruism and all justice. Outside Modigliani's they had paid off the taxi and were moving for the door when a big, lank wreck of a man seemed to spring up from the paving-stones in front of them. He stood across their path like some fawning beast, with dreadful eagerness and yet timorously, as though afraid that Ravelston would strike him. His face came close up to Ravelston's — a dreadful face, fish-white and scrubby-bearded to the eyes. The words 'A cup of tea, guv'nor!' were breathed through carious teeth. Ravelston shrank from him in disgust. He could not help it. His hand moved automatically to his pocket. But in the same instant Hermione caught him by the arm and hauled him inside the restaurant.

'You'd give away every penny you've got if I let you,' she said.

They went to their favourite table in the corner. Hermione played with some grapes, but Ravelston was very hungry. He ordered the grilled rumpsteak he had been thinking of, and half a bottle of Beaujolais. The fat, white-haired Italian waiter, an old friend of Ravelston's, brought the smoking steak. Ravelston cut it open. Lovely, its red-blue heart! In Middlesbrough the unemployed huddle in frowzy beds, bread and marg and milkless tea in their bellies. He settled down to his steak with all the shameful joy of a dog with a stolen leg of mutton.

Gordon walked rapidly homewards. It was cold. The fifth of

December — real winter now. Circumcise ye your foreskins, saith the Lord. The damp wind blew spitefully through the naked trees. Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over. The poem he had begun on Wednesday, of which six stanzas were now finished, came back to his mind. He did not dislike it at this moment. It was queer how talking with Ravelston always bucked him up. The mere contact with Ravelston seemed to reassure him somehow. Even when their talk had been unsatisfactory, he came away with the feeling that, after all, he wasn't quite a failure. Half aloud he repeated the six finished stanzas. They were not bad, not bad at all.

But intermittently he was going over in his mind the things he had said to Ravelston. He stuck to everything he had said. The humiliation of poverty! That's what they can't understand and won't understand. Not hardship — you don't suffer hardship on two quid a week, and if you did it wouldn't matter — but just humiliation, the awful, bloody humiliation. The way it gives everyone the right to stamp on you. The way everyone WANTS to stamp on you. Ravelston wouldn't believe it. He had too much decency, that was why. He thought you could be poor and still be treated like a human being. But Gordon knew better. He went into the house repeating to himself that he knew better.

There was a letter waiting for him on the hall tray. His heart jumped. All letters excited him nowadays. He went up the stairs three at a time, shut himself in and lit the gas. The letter was from Doring.

DEAR COMSTOCK — What a pity you didn't turn up on Saturday. There were some people I wanted you to meet. We did tell you it was Saturday and not Thursday this time, didn't we? My wife says she's certain she told you. Anyway, we're having another party on the twenty-third, a sort of before-Christmas party, about the same time. Won't you come then? Don't forget the date this time.

Yours

PAUL DORING

A painful convulsion happened below Gordon's ribs. So Doring was pretending that it was all a mistake — was pretending not to have insulted him! True, he could not actually have gone there on Saturday, because on Saturday he had to be at the shop; still, it was

the intention that counted.

His heart sickened as he re-read the words ‘some people I wanted you to meet’. Just like his bloody luck! He thought of the people he might have met — editors of highbrow magazines, for instance. They might have given him books to review or asked to see his poems or Lord knew what. For a moment he was dreadfully tempted to believe that Doring had spoken the truth. Perhaps after all they HAD told him it was Saturday and not Thursday. Perhaps if he searched his memory he might remember about it — might even find the letter itself lying among his muddle of papers. But no! He wouldn’t think of it. He fought down the temptation. The Dorings HAD insulted him on purpose. He was poor, therefore they had insulted him. If you are poor, people will insult you. It was his creed. Stick to it!

He went across to the table, tearing Doring’s letter into small bits. The aspidistra stood in its pot, dull green, ailing, pathetic in its sickly ugliness. As he sat down, he pulled it towards him and looked at it meditatively. There was the intimacy of hatred between the aspidistra and him. ‘I’ll beat you yet, you b— ‘ he whispered to the dusty leaves.

Then he rummaged among his papers until he found a clean sheet, took his pen and wrote in his small, neat hand, right in the middle of the sheet:

DEAR DORING — With reference to your letter: Go and —— yourself.

Yours truly

GORDON COMSTOCK

He stuck it into an envelope, addressed it, and at once went out to get stamps from the slot machine. Post it tonight: these things look different in the morning. He dropped it into the pillar-box. So there was another friend gone west.

Chapter 6

This woman business! What a bore it is! What a pity we can't cut it right out, or at least be like the animals — minutes of ferocious lust and months of icy chastity. Take a cock pheasant, for example. He jumps up on the hens' backs without so much as a with your leave or by your leave. And no sooner it is over than the whole subject is out of his mind. He hardly even notices his hens any longer; he ignores them, or simply pecks them if they come too near his food. He is not called upon to support his offspring, either. Lucky pheasant! How different from the lord of creation, always on the hop between his memory and his conscience!

Tonight Gordon wasn't even pretending to do any work. He had gone out again immediately after supper. He walked southward, rather slowly, thinking about women. It was a mild, misty night, more like autumn than winter. This was Tuesday and he had four and fourpence left. He could go down to the Crichton if he chose. Doubtless Flaxman and his pals were already boozing there. But the Crichton, which had seemed like paradise when he had no money, bored and disgusted him when it was in his power to go there. He hated the stale, beery place, and the sights, sounds, smells, all so blatantly and offensively male. There were no women there; only the barmaid with her lewd smile which seemed to promise everything and promised nothing.

Women, women! The mist that hung motionless in the air turned the passers-by into ghosts at twenty yards' distance; but in the little pools of light about the lamp-posts there were glimpses of girls' faces. He thought of Rosemary, of women in general, and of Rosemary again. All afternoon he had been thinking of her. It was with a kind of resentment that he thought of her small, strong body, which he had never yet seen naked. How damned unfair it is that we are filled to the brim with these tormenting desires and then forbidden to satisfy them! Why should one, merely because one has no money, be deprived of THAT? It seems so natural, so necessary, so much a part of the inalienable rights of a human being. As he walked down the dark street, through the cold yet languorous air,

there was a strangely hopeful feeling in his breast. He half believed that somewhere ahead in the darkness a woman's body was waiting for him. But also he knew that no woman was waiting, not even Rosemary. It was eight days now since she had even written to him. The little beast! Eight whole days without writing! When she knew how much her letters meant to him! How manifest it was that she didn't care for him any longer, that he was merely a nuisance to her with his poverty and his shabbiness and his everlasting pestering of her to say she loved him! Very likely she would never write again. She was sick of him — sick of him because he had no money. What else could you expect? He had no hold over her. No money, therefore no hold. In the last resort, what holds a woman to any man, except money?

A girl came down the pavement alone. He passed her in the light of the lamp-post. A working-class girl, eighteen years old it might be, hatless, with wildrose face. She turned her head quickly when she saw him looking at her. She dreaded to meet his eyes. Beneath the thin silky raincoat she was wearing, belted at the waist, her youthful flanks showed supple and trim. He could have turned and followed her, almost. But what was the use? She'd run away or call a policeman. My golden locks time hath to silver turned, he thought. He was thirty and moth-eaten. What woman worth having would ever look at him again?

This woman business! Perhaps you'd feel differently about it if you were married? But he had taken an oath against marriage long ago. Marriage is only a trap set for you by the money-god. You grab the bait; snap goes the trap; and there you are, chained by the leg to some 'good' job till they cart you to Kensal Green. And what a life! Licit sexual intercourse in the shade of the aspidistra. Pram-pushing and sneaky adulteries. And the wife finding you out and breaking the cut-glass whisky decanter over your head.

Nevertheless he perceived that in a way it is necessary to marry. If marriage is bad, the alternative is worse. For a moment he wished that he were married; he pined for the difficulty of it, the reality, the pain. And marriage must be indissoluble, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, till death do you part. The old Christian ideal — marriage tempered by adultery. Commit adultery if you must, but at

any rate have the decency to CALL it adultery. None of that American soul-mate slop. Have your fun and then sneak home, juice of the forbidden fruit dripping from your whiskers, and take the consequences. Cut-glass whisky decanters broken over your head, nagging, burnt meals, children crying, clash and thunder of embattled mothers-in-law. Better that, perhaps, than horrible freedom? You'd know, at least, that it was real life that you were living.

But anyway, how can you marry on two quid a week? Money, money, always money! The devil of it is, that outside marriage, no decent relationship with a woman is possible. His mind moved backwards, over his ten years of adult life. The faces of women flowed through his memory. Ten or a dozen of them there had been. Tarts, also. Comme au long d'un cadavre un cadavre etendu. And even when they were not tarts it had been squalid, always squalid. Always it had started in a sort of cold-blooded wilfulness and ended in some mean, callous desertion. That, too, was money. Without money, you can't be straightforward in your dealings with women. For without money, you can't pick and choose, you've got to take what women you can get; and then, necessarily, you've got to break free of them. Constancy, like all other virtues, has got to be paid for in money. And the mere fact that he had rebelled against the money code and wouldn't settle down in the prison of a 'good' job — a thing no woman will ever understand — had brought a quality of impermanence, of deception, into all his affairs with women. Abjuring money, he ought to have abjured women to. Serve the money-god, or do without women — those are the only alternatives. And both were equally impossible.

From the side-street just ahead, a shade of white light cut through the mist, and there was a bellowing of street hawkers. It was Luton Road, where they have the open-air market two evenings a week. Gordon turned to his left, into the market. He often came this way. The street was so crowded that you could only with difficulty thread your way down the cabbage-littered alley between the stalls. In the glare of hanging electric bulbs, the stuff on the stalls glowed with fine lurid colours — hacked, crimson chunks of meat, piles of oranges and green and white broccoli, stiff, glassy-eyed rabbits, live eels looping in enamel troughs, plucked fowls hanging in rows,

sticking out their naked breasts like guardsmen naked on parade. Gordon's spirits revived a little. He liked the noise, the bustle, the vitality. Whenever you see a street-market you know there's hope for England yet. But even here he felt his solitude. Girls were thronging everywhere, in knots of four or five, prowling desirously about the stalls of cheap underwear and swapping backchat and screams of laughter with the youths who followed them. None had eyes for Gordon. He walked among them as though invisible, save that their bodies avoided him when he passed them. Ah, look there! Involuntarily he paused. Over a pile of art-silk undies on a stall, three girls were bending, intent, their faces close together — three youthful faces, flower-like in the harsh light, clustering side by side like a truss of blossom on a Sweet William or phlox. His heart stirred. No eyes for him, of course! One girl looked up. Ah! Hurriedly, with an offended air, she looked away again. A delicate flush like a wash of aquarelle flooded her face. The hard, sexual stare in his eyes had frightened her. They flee from me that sometime did me seek! He walked on. If only Rosemary were here! He forgave her now for not writing to him. He could forgive her anything, if only she were here. He knew how much she meant to him, because she alone of all women was willing to save him from the humiliation of his loneliness.

At this moment he looked up, and saw something that made his heart jump. He changed the focus of his eyes abruptly. For a moment he thought he was imagining it. But no! It WAS Rosemary!

She was coming down the alley between the stalls, twenty or thirty yards away. It was as though his desire had called her into being. She had not seen him yet. She came towards him, a small debonair figure, picking her way nimbly through the crowd and the muck underfoot, her face scarcely visible because of a flat black hat which she wore cocked down over her eyes like a Harrow boy's straw hat. He started towards her and called her name.

'Rosemary! Hi, Rosemary!'

A blue-aproned man thumbing codfish on a stall turned to stare at him. Rosemary did not hear him because of the din. He called again.

'Rosemary! I say, Rosemary!'

They were only a few yards apart now. She started and looked up.

‘Gordon! What are you doing here?’

‘What are YOU doing here?’

‘I was coming to see you.’

‘But how did you know I was here?’

‘I didn’t. I always come this way. I get out of the tube at Camden Town.’

Rosemary sometimes came to see Gordon at Willowbed Road. Mrs Wisbeach would inform him sourly that ‘there was a young woman to see him’, and he would come downstairs and they would go out for a walk in the streets. Rosemary was never allowed indoors, not even into the hall. That was a rule of the house. You would have thought ‘young women’ were plague-rats by the way Mrs Wisbeach spoke of them. Gordon took Rosemary by the upper arm and made to pull her against him.

‘Rosemary! Oh, what a joy to see you again! I was so vilely lonely. Why didn’t you come before?’

She shook off his hand and stepped back out of his reach. Under her slanting hat-brim she gave him a glance that was intended to be angry.

‘Let me go, now! I’m very angry with you. I very nearly didn’t come after that beastly letter you sent me.’

‘What beastly letter?’

‘You know very well.’

‘No, I don’t. Oh, well, let’s get out of this. Somewhere where we can talk. This way.’

He took her arm, but she shook him off again, continuing however, to walk at his side. Her steps were quicker and shorter than his. And walking beside him she had the appearance of something extremely small, nimble, and young, as though he had had some lively little animal, a squirrel for instance, frisking at his side. In reality she was not very much smaller than Gordon, and only a few months younger. But no one would ever have described Rosemary as a spinster of nearly thirty, which in fact she was. She was a strong, agile girl, with stiff black hair, a small triangular face, and very pronounced eyebrows. It was one of those small, peaky faces, full of character, which one sees in sixteenth-century portraits. The first time you saw her take her hat off you got a surprise, for on her crown

three white hairs glittered among the black ones like silver wires. It was typical of Rosemary that she never bothered to pull the white hairs out. She still thought of herself as a very young girl, and so did everybody else. Yet if you looked closely the marks of time were plain enough on her face.

Gordon walked more boldly with Rosemary at his side. He was proud of her. People were looking at her, and therefore at him as well. He was no longer invisible to women. As always, Rosemary was rather nicely dressed. It was a mystery how she did it on four pounds a week. He liked particularly the hat she was wearing — one of those flat felt hats which were then coming into fashion and which caricatured a clergyman's shovel hat. There was something essentially frivolous about it. In some way difficult to be described, the angle at which it was cocked forward harmonized appealingly with the curve of Rosemary's behind.

'I like your hat,' he said.

In spite of herself, a small smile flickered at the corner of her mouth.

'It IS rather nice,' she said, giving the hat a little pat with her hand.

She was still pretending to be angry, however. She took care that their bodies should not touch. As soon as they had reached the end of the stalls and were in the main street she stopped and faced him sombrely.

'What do you mean by writing me letters like that?' she said.

'Letters like what?'

'Saying I'd broken your heart.'

'So you have.'

'It looks like it, doesn't it!'

'I don't know. It certainly feels like it.'

The words were spoken half jokingly, and yet they made her look more closely at him — at his pale, wasted face, his uncut hair, his general down-at-heel, neglected appearance. Her heart softened instantly, and yet she frowned. Why WON'T he take care of himself? was the thought in her mind. They had moved closer together. He took her by the shoulders. She let him do it, and, putting her small arms round him, squeezed him very hard, partly in affection, partly in

exasperation.

'Gordon, you ARE a miserable creature!' she said.

'Why am I a miserable creature?'

'Why can't you look after yourself properly? You're a perfect scarecrow. Look at these awful old clothes you're wearing!'

'They're suited to my station. One can't dress decently on two quid a week, you know.'

'But surely there's no need to go about looking like a rag-bag? Look at this button on your coat, broken in half!'

She fingered the broken button, then suddenly lifted his discoloured Woolworth's tie aside. In some feminine way she had divined that he had no buttons on his shirt.

'Yes, AGAIN! Not a single button. You are awful, Gordon!'

'I tell you I can't be bothered with things like that. I've got a soul above buttons.'

'But why not give them to ME and let me sew them on for you? And, oh, Gordon! You haven't even shaved today. How absolutely beastly of you. You might at least take the trouble to shave every morning.'

'I can't afford to shave every morning,' he said perversely.

'What DO you mean, Gordon? It doesn't cost money to shave, does it?'

'Yes, it does. Everything costs money. Cleanness, decency, energy, self-respect — everything. It's all money. Haven't I told you that a million times?'

She squeezed his ribs again — she was surprisingly strong — and frowned up at him, studying his face as a mother looks at some peevish child of which she is unreasonably fond.

'WHAT a fool I am!' she said.

'In what way a fool?'

'Because I'm so fond of you.'

'Are you fond of me?'

'Of course I am. You know I am. I adore you. It's idiotic of me.'

'Then come somewhere where it's dark. I want to kiss you.'

'Fancy being kissed by a man who hasn't even shaved!'

'Well, that'll be a new experience for you.'

'No, it won't, Gordon. Not after knowing YOU for two years.'

‘Oh, well, come on, anyway.’

They found an almost dark alley between the backs of houses. All their lovemaking was done in such places. The only place where they could ever be private was the streets. He pressed her shoulders against the rough damp bricks of the wall. She turned her face readily up to his and clung to him with a sort of eager violent affection, like a child. And yet all the while, though they were body to body, it was as though there were a shield between them. She kissed him as a child might have done, because she knew that he expected to be kissed. It was always like this. Only at very rare moments could he awake in her the beginnings of physical desire; and these she seemed afterwards to forget, so that he always had to begin at the beginning over again. There was something defensive in the feeling of her small, shapely body. She longed to know the meaning of physical love, but also she dreaded it. It would destroy her youth, the youthful, sexless world in which she chose to live.

He parted his mouth from hers in order to speak to her.

‘Do you love me?’ he said.

‘Of course, silly. Why do you always ask me that?’

‘I like to hear you say it. Somehow I never feel sure of you till I’ve heard you say it.’

‘But why?’

‘Oh, well, you might have changed your mind. After all, I’m not exactly the answer to a maiden’s prayer. I’m thirty, and moth-eaten at that.’

‘Don’t be so absurd, Gordon! Anyone would think you were a hundred, to hear you talk. You know I’m the same age as you are.’

‘Yes, but not moth-eaten.’

She rubbed her cheek against his, feeling the roughness of his day-old beard. Their bellies were close together. He thought of the two years he had wanted her and never had her. With his lips almost against her ear he murmured:

‘Are you EVER going to sleep with me?’

‘Yes, some day I will. Not now. Some day.’

‘It’s always “some day”. It’s been “some day” for two years now.’

‘I know. But I can’t help it.’

He pressed her back against the wall, pulled off the absurd flat hat,

and buried his face in her hair. It was tormenting to be so close to her and all for nothing. He put a hand under her chin and lifted her small face up to his, trying to distinguish her features in the almost complete darkness.

'Say you will, Rosemary. There's a dear! Do!'

'You know I'm going to SOME time.'

'Yes, but not SOME time — now. I don't mean this moment, but soon. When we get an opportunity. Say you will!'

'I can't. I can't promise.'

'Say "yes," Rosemary. PLEASE do!'

'No.'

Still stroking her invisible face, he quoted:

'Veuillez le dire donc selon Que vous estes benigne et doulche, Car ce doulx mot n'est pas si long Qu'il vous face mal en la bouche.'

'What does that mean?'

He translated it.

'I can't, Gordon. I just can't.'

'Say "yes," Rosemary, there's a dear. Surely it's as easy to say "yes" as "no"?'

'No, it isn't, it's easy enough for you. You're a man. It's different for a woman.'

'Say "yes," Rosemary! "Yes" — it's such an easy word. Go on, now; say it. "Yes!"'

'Anyone would think you were teaching a parrot to talk, Gordon.'

'Oh, damn! Don't make jokes about it.'

It was not much use arguing. Presently they came out into the street and walked on, southward. Somehow, from Rosemary's swift, neat movements, from her general air of a girl who knows how to look after herself and who yet treats life mainly as a joke, you could make a good guess at her upbringing and her mental background. She was the youngest child of one of those huge hungry families which still exist here and there in the middle classes. There had been fourteen children all told — the father was a country solicitor. Some of Rosemary's sisters were married, some of them were schoolmistresses or running typing bureaux; the brothers were farming in Canada, on tea-plantations in Ceylon, in obscure regiments of the Indian Army. Like all women who have had an

eventful girlhood, Rosemary wanted to remain a girl. That was why, sexually, she was so immature. She had kept late into life the high-spirited sexless atmosphere of a big family. Also she had absorbed into her very bones the code of fair play and live-and-let-live. She was profoundly magnanimous, quite incapable of spiritual bullying. From Gordon, whom she adored, she put up with almost anything. It was the measure of her magnanimity that never once, in the two years that she had known him, had she blamed him for not attempting to earn a proper living.

Gordon was aware of all this. But at the moment he was thinking of other things. In the pallid circles of light about the lamp-posts, beside Rosemary's smaller, trimmer figure, he felt graceless, shabby, and dirty. He wished very much that he had shaved that morning. Furtively he put a hand into his pocket and felt his money, half afraid — it was a recurrent fear with him — that he might have dropped a coin. However, he could feel the milled edge of a form, his principal coin at the moment. Four and fourpence left. He couldn't possibly take her out to supper, he reflected. They'd have to trail dismally up and down the streets, as usual, or at best go to a Lyons for a coffee. Bloody! How can you have any fun when you've got no money? He said broodingly:

'Of course it all comes back to money.'

This remark came out of the blue. She looked up at him in surprise.

'What do you mean, it all comes back to money?'

'I mean the way nothing ever goes right in my life. It's always money, money, money that's at the bottom of everything. And especially between me and you. That's why you don't really love me. There's a sort of film of money between us. I can feel it every time I kiss you.'

'Money! What HAS money got to do with it, Gordon?'

'Money's got to do with everything. If I had more money you'd love me more.'

'Of course, I wouldn't! Why should I?'

'You couldn't help it. Don't you see that if I had more money I'd be more worth loving? Look at me now! Look at my face, look at these clothes I'm wearing, look at everything else about me. Do you

suppose I'd be like that if I had two thousand a year? If I had more money I should be a different person.'

'If you were a different person I shouldn't love you.'

'That's nonsense, too. But look at it like this. If we were married would you sleep with me?'

'What questions you do ask! Of course I would. Otherwise, where would be the sense of being married?'

'Well then, suppose I was decently well off, WOULD you marry me?'

'What's the good of talking about it, Gordon? You know we can't afford to marry.'

'Yes, but IF we could. Would you?'

'I don't know. Yes, I would, I dare say.'

'There you are, then! That's what I said — money!'

'No, Gordon, no! That's not fair! You're twisting my words round.'

'No, I'm not. You've got this money-business at the bottom of your heart. Every woman's got it. You wish I was in a GOOD job now, don't you?'

'Not in the way you mean it. I'd like you to be earning more money — yes.'

'And you think I ought to have stayed on at the New Albion, don't you? You'd like me to go back there now and write slogans for Q. T. Sauce and Truweet Breakfast Crisps. Wouldn't you?'

'No, I wouldn't. I NEVER said that.'

'You thought it, though. It's what any woman would think.'

He was being horribly unfair, and he knew it. The one thing Rosemary had never said, the thing she was probably quite incapable of saying, was that he ought to go back to the New Albion. But for the moment he did not even want to be fair. His sexual disappointment still pricked him. With a sort of melancholy triumph he reflected that, after all, he was right. It was money that stood between them. Money, money, all is money! He broke into a half-serious tirade:

'Women! What nonsense they make of all our ideas! Because one can't keep free of women, and every woman makes one pay the same price. "Chuck away your decency and make more money" — that's

what women say. “Chuck away your decency, suck the blacking off the boss’s boots, and buy me a better fur coat than the woman next door.” Every man you can see has got some blasted woman hanging round his neck like a mermaid, dragging him down and down — down to some beastly little semi-detached villa in Putney, with hire-purchase furniture and a portable radio and an aspidistra in the window. It’s women who make all progress impossible. Not that I believe in progress,’ he added rather unsatisfactorily.

‘What absolute NONSENSE you do talk, Gordon! As though women were to blame for everything!’

‘They are to blame, finally. Because it’s the women who really believe in the money-code. The men obey it; they have to, but they don’t believe in it. It’s the women who keep it going. The women and their Putney villas and their fur coats and their babies and their aspidistras.’

‘It is NOT the women, Gordon! Women didn’t invent money, did they?’

‘It doesn’t matter who invented it, the point is that it’s women who worship it. A woman’s got a sort of mystical feeling towards money. Good and evil in a women’s mind mean simply money and no money. Look at you and me. You won’t sleep with me, simply and solely because I’ve got no money. Yes, that IS the reason. (He squeezed her arm to silence her.) You admitted it only a minute ago. And if I had a decent income you’d go to bed with me tomorrow. It’s not because you’re mercenary. You don’t want me to PAY you for sleeping with me. It’s not so crude as that. But you’ve got that deep-down mystical feeling that somehow a man without money isn’t worthy of you. He’s a weakling, a sort of half-man — that’s how you feel. Hercules, god of strength and god of money — you’ll find that in Lempriere. It’s women who keep all mythologies going. Women!’

‘Women!’ echoed Rosemary on a different note. ‘I hate the way men are always talking about WOMEN. “Women do this,” and “WOMEN do that” — as though all women were exactly the same!’

‘Of course all women are the same! What does any woman want except a safe income and two babies and a semi-detached villa in Putney with an aspidistra in the window?’

‘Oh, you and your aspidistras!’

‘On the contrary, YOUR aspidistras. You’re the sex that cultivates them.’

She squeezed his arm and burst out laughing. She was really extraordinarily good-natured. Besides, what he was saying was such palpable nonsense that it did not even exasperate her. Gordon’s diatribes against women were in reality a kind of perverse joke; indeed, the whole sex-war is at bottom only a joke. For the same reason it is great fun to pose as a feminist or an anti-feminist according to your sex. As they walked on they began a violent argument upon the eternal and idiotic question of Man versus Woman. The moves in this argument — for they had it as often as they met — were always very much the same. Men are brutes and women are soulless, and women have always been kept in subjection and they jolly well ought to be kept in subjection, and look at Patient Griselda and look at Lady Astor, and what about polygamy and Hindu widows, and what about Mother Pankhurst’s piping days when every decent woman wore mousetraps on her garters and couldn’t look at a man without feeling her right hand itch for a castrating knife? Gordon and Rosemary never grew tired of this kind of thing. Each laughed with delight at the other’s absurdities. There was a merry war between them. Even as they disputed, arm in arm, they pressed their bodies delightedly together. They were very happy. Indeed, they adored one another. Each was to the other a standing joke and an object infinitely precious. Presently a red and blue haze of Neon lights appeared in the distance. They had reached the beginning of the Tottenham Court Road. Gordon put his arm round her waist and turned her to the right, down a darkish side-street. They were so happy together that they had got to kiss. They stood clasped together under the lamp-post, still laughing, two enemies breast to breast. She rubbed her cheek against his.

‘Gordon, you are such a dear old ass! I can’t help loving you, scrubby jaw and all.’

‘Do you really?’

‘Really and truly.’

Her arms still round him, she leaned a little backwards, pressing her belly against his with a sort of innocent voluptuousness.

‘Life IS worth living, isn’t it, Gordon?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘If only we could meet a bit oftener! Sometimes I don’t see you for weeks.’

‘I know. It’s bloody. If you knew how I hate my evenings alone!’

‘One never seems to have time for anything. I don’t even leave that beastly office till nearly seven. What do you do with yourself on Sundays, Gordon?’

‘Oh, God! Moon about and look miserable, like everyone else.’

‘Why not let’s go out for a walk in the country sometimes. Then we would have all day together. Next Sunday, for instance?’

The words chilled him. They brought back the thought of money, which he had succeeded in putting out of his mind for half an hour past. A trip into the country would cost money, far more than he could possibly afford. He said in a non-committal tone that transferred the whole thing to the realm of abstraction:

‘Of course, it’s not too bad in Richmond Park on Sundays. Or even Hampstead Heath. Especially if you go in the mornings before the crowds get there.’

‘Oh, but do let’s go right out into the country! Somewhere in Surrey, for instance, or to Burnham Beeches. It’s so lovely at this time of year, with all the dead leaves on the ground, and you can walk all day and hardly meet a soul. We’ll walk for miles and miles and have dinner at a pub. It would be such fun. Do let’s!’

Blast! The money-business was coming back. A trip even as far as Burnham Beeches would cost all of ten bob. He did some hurried arithmetic. Five bob he might manage, and Julia would ‘lend’ him five; GIVE him five, that was. At the same moment he remembered his oath, constantly renewed and always broken, not to ‘borrow’ money off Julia. He said in the same casual tone as before:

‘It WOULD be rather fun. I should think we might manage it. I’ll let you know later in the week, anyway.’

They came out of the side-street, still arm in arm. There was a pub on the corner. Rosemary stood on tiptoe, and, clinging to Gordon’s arm to support herself, managed to look over the frosted lower half of the window.

‘Look, Gordon, there’s a clock in there. It’s nearly half past nine. Aren’t you getting frightfully hungry?’

‘No,’ he said instantly and untruthfully.

‘I am. I’m simply starving. Let’s go and have something to eat somewhere.’ Money again! One moment more, and he must confess that he had only four and fourpence in the world — four and fourpence to last till Friday.

‘I couldn’t eat anything,’ he said. ‘I might manage a drink, I dare say. Let’s go and have some coffee or something. I expect we’ll find a Lyons open.’

‘Oh, don’t let’s go to a Lyons! I know such a nice little Italian restaurant, only just down the road. We’ll have Spaghetti Napolitaine and a bottle of red wine. I adore spaghetti. Do let’s!’

His heart sank. It was no good. He would have to own up. Supper at the Italian Restaurant could not possibly cost less than five bob for the two of them. He said almost sullenly:

‘It’s about time I was getting home, as a matter of fact.’

‘Oh, Gordon! Already? Why?’

‘Oh, well! If you MUST know, I’ve only got four and fourpence in the world. And it’s got to last till Friday.’

Rosemary stopped short. She was so angry that she pinched his arm with all her strength, meaning to hurt him and punish him.

‘Gordon, you ARE an ass! You’re a perfect idiot! You’re the most unspeakable idiot I’ve ever seen!’

‘Why am I an idiot?’

‘Because what does it matter whether you’ve got any money! I’m asking YOU to have supper with ME.’

He freed his arm from hers and stood away from her. He did not want to look her in the face.

‘What! Do you think I’d go to a restaurant and let you pay for my food?’

‘But why not?’

‘Because one can’t do that sort of thing. It isn’t done.’

‘It “isn’t done”! You’ll be saying it’s “not cricket” in another moment. WHAT “isn’t done”?’

‘Letting you pay for my meals. A man pays for a woman, a woman doesn’t pay for a man.’

‘Oh, Gordon! Are we living in the reign of Queen Victoria?’

‘Yes, we are, as far as that kind of thing’s concerned. Ideas don’t

change so quickly.'

'But MY ideas have changed.'

'No, they haven't. You think they have, but they haven't. You've been brought up as a woman, and you can't help behaving like a woman, however much you don't want to.'

'But what do you mean by BEHAVING LIKE A WOMAN, anyway?'

'I tell you every woman's the same when it comes to a thing like this. A woman despises a man who's dependent on her and sponges on her. She may say she doesn't, she may THINK she doesn't, but she does. She can't help it. If I let you pay for my meals YOU'D despise me.'

He had turned away. He knew how abominably he was behaving. But somehow he had got to say these things. The feeling that people — even Rosemary — MUST despise him for his poverty was too strong to be overcome. Only by rigid, jealous independence could he keep his self-respect. Rosemary was really distressed this time. She caught his arm and pulled him round, making him face her. With an insistent gesture, angrily and yet demanding to be loved, she pressed her breast against him.

'Gordon! I won't let you say such things. How can you say I'd ever despise you?'

'I tell you you couldn't help it if I let myself sponge on you.'

'Sponge on me! What expressions you do use! How is it sponging on me to let me pay for your supper just for once!'

He could feel the small breasts, firm and round, just beneath his own. She looked up at him, frowning and yet not far from tears. She thought him perverse, unreasonable, cruel. But her physical nearness distracted him. At this moment all he could remember was that in two years she had never yielded to him. She had starved him of the one thing that mattered. What was the good of pretending that she loved him when in the last essential she recoiled? He added with a kind of deadly joy:

'In a way you do despise me. Oh, yes, I know you're fond of me. But after all, you can't take me quite seriously. I'm a kind of joke to you. You're fond of me, and yet I'm not quite your equal — that's how you feel.'

It was what he had said before, but with this difference, that now he meant it, or said it as if he meant it. She cried out with tears in her voice:

'I don't, Gordon, I don't! You KNOW I don't!'

'You do. That's why you won't sleep with me. Didn't I tell you that before?'

She looked up at him an instant longer, and then buried her face in his breast as suddenly as though ducking from a blow. It was because she had burst into tears. She wept against his breast, angry with him, hating him, and yet clinging to him like a child. It was the childish way in which she clung to him, as a mere male breast to weep on, that hurt him most. With a sort of self-hatred he remembered the other women who in just the same way had cried against his breast. It seemed the only thing he could do with women, to make them cry. With his arm round her shoulders he caressed her clumsily, trying to console her.

'You've gone and made me cry!' she whimpered in self-contempt.

'I'm sorry! Rosemary, dear one! Don't cry, PLEASE don't cry.'

'Gordon, dearest! WHY do you have to be so beastly to me?'

'I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Sometimes I can't help it.'

'But why? Why?'

She had got over her crying. Rather more composed, she drew away from him and felt for something to wipe her eyes. Neither of them had a handkerchief. Impatiently, she wrung the tears out of her eyes with her knuckles.

'How silly we always are! Now, Gordon, BE nice for once. Come along to the restaurant and have some supper and let me pay for it.'

'No.'

'Just this once. Never mind about the old money-business. Do it just to please me.'

'I tell you I can't do that kind of thing. I've got to keep my end up.'

'But what do you mean, keep your end up?'

'I've made a war on money, and I've got to keep the rules. The first rule is never to take charity.'

'Charity! Oh, Gordon, I DO think you're silly!'

She squeezed his ribs again. It was a sign of peace. She did not understand him, probably never would understand him; yet she accepted him as he was, hardly even protesting against his unreasonableness. As she put her face up to be kissed he noticed that her lips were salt. A tear had trickled here. He strained her against him. The hard defensive feeling had gone out of her body. She shut her eyes and sank against him and into him as though her bones had grown weak, and her lips parted and her small tongue sought for his. It was very seldom that she did that. And suddenly, as he felt her body yielding, he seemed to know with certainty that their struggle was ended. She was his now when he chose to take her, and yet perhaps she did not fully understand what it was that she was offering; it was simply an instinctive movement of generosity, a desire to reassure him — to smooth away that hateful feeling of being unloveable and unloved. She said nothing of this in words. It was the feeling of her body that seemed to say it. But even if this had been the time and the place he could not have taken her. At this moment he loved her but did not desire her. His desire could only return at some future time when there was no quarrel fresh in his mind and no consciousness of four and fourpence in his pocket to daunt him.

Presently they separated their mouths, though still clinging closely together.

'How stupid it is, the way we quarrel, isn't it Gordon? When we meet so seldom.'

'I know. It's all my fault. I can't help it. Things rub me up. It's money at the bottom of it, always money.'

'Oh, money! You let it worry you too much, Gordon.'

'Impossible. It's the only thing worth worrying about.'

'But, anyway, we WILL go out into the country next Sunday, won't we? To Burnham Beeches or somewhere. It would be so nice if we could.'

'Yes, I'd love to. We'll go early and be out all day. I'll raise the train fares somehow.'

'But you'll let me pay my own fare, won't you?'

'No, I'd rather I paid them, but we'll go, anyway.'

'And you really won't let me pay for your supper — just this

once, just to show you trust me?'

'No, I can't. I'm sorry. I've told you why.'

'Oh, dear! I suppose we shall have to say good night. It's getting late.'

They stayed talking a long time, however, so long that Rosemary got no supper after all. She had to be back at her lodgings by eleven, or the she-dragons were angry. Gordon went to the top of the Tottenham Court Road and took the tram. It was a penny cheaper than taking the bus. On the wooden seat upstairs he was wedged against a small dirty Scotchman who read the football finals and oozed beer. Gordon was very happy. Rosemary was going to be his mistress. Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over. To the music of the tram's booming he whispered the seven completed stanzas of his poem. Nine stanzas there would be in all. It was GOOD. He believed in it and in himself. He was a poet. Gordon Comstock, author of Mice. Even in London Pleasures he once again believed.

He thought of Sunday. They were to meet at nine o'clock at Paddington Station. Ten bob or so it would cost; he would raise the money if he had to pawn his shirt. And she was going to become his mistress; this very Sunday, perhaps, if the right chance offered itself. Nothing had been said. Only, somehow, it was agreed between them.

Please God it kept fine on Sunday! It was deep winter now. What luck if it turned out one of those splendid windless days — one of those days that might almost be summer, when you can lie for hours on the dead bracken and never feel cold! But you don't get many days like that; a dozen at most in every winter. As likely as not it would rain. He wondered whether they would get a chance to do it after all. They had nowhere to go, except the open air. There are so many pairs of lovers in London with 'nowhere to go'; only the streets and the parks, where there is no privacy and it is always cold. It is not easy to make love in a cold climate when you have no money. The 'never the time and the place' motif is not made enough of in novels.

Chapter 7

The plumes of the chimneys floated perpendicular against skies of smoky rose.

Gordon caught the 27 bus at ten past eight. The streets were still locked in their Sunday sleep. On the doorsteps the milk bottles waited ungathered like little white sentinels. Gordon had fourteen shillings in his hand — thirteen and nine, rather, because the bus fare was threepence. Nine bob he had set aside from his wages — God knew what that was going to mean, later in the week! — and five he had borrowed from Julia.

He had gone round to Julia's place on Thursday night. Julia's room in Earl's Court, though only a second-floor back, was not just a vulgar bedroom like Gordon's. It was a bed-sitting with the accent on the sitting. Julia would have died of starvation sooner than put up with such squalor as Gordon lived in. Indeed every one of her scraps of furniture, collected over intervals of years, represented a period of semi-starvation. There was a divan bed that could very nearly be mistaken for a sofa, and a little round fumed oak table, and two 'antique' hardwood chairs, and an ornamental footstool and a chintz-covered armchair — Drage's: thirteen monthly payments — in front of the tiny gas-fire; and there were various brackets with framed photos of father and mother and Gordon and Aunt Angela, and a birchwood calendar — somebody's Christmas present — with 'It's a long lane that has no turning' done on it in pokerwork. Julia depressed Gordon horribly. He was always telling himself that he ought to go and see her oftener; but in practice he never went near her except to 'borrow' money.

When Gordon had given three knocks — three knocks for second floor — Julia took him up to her room and knelt down in front of the gas-fire.

'I'll light the fire again,' she said. 'You'd like a cup of tea, wouldn't you?'

He noted the 'again'. The room was beastly cold — no fire had been lighted in it this evening. Julia always 'saved gas' when she was alone. He looked at her long narrow back as she knelt down.

How grey her hair was getting! Whole locks of it were quite grey. A little more, and it would be 'grey hair' tout court.

'You like your tea strong, don't you?' breathed Julia, hovering over the tea-caddy with tender, goose-like movements.

Gordon drank his cup of tea standing up, his eye on the birchwood calendar. Out with it! Get it over! Yet his heart almost failed him. The meanness of this hateful cadging! What would it all tot up to, the money he had 'borrowed' from her in all these years?

'I say, Julia, I'm damned sorry — I hate asking you; but look here — '

'Yes, Gordon?' she said quietly. She knew what was coming.

'Look here, Julia, I'm damned sorry, but could you lend me five bob?'

'Yes, Gordon, I expect so.'

She sought out the small, worn black leather purse that was hidden at the bottom of her linen drawer. He knew what she was thinking. It meant less for Christmas presents. That was the great event of her life nowadays — Christmas and the giving of presents: hunting through the glittering streets, late at night after the teashop was shut, from one bargain counter to another, picking out the trash that women are so curiously fond of. Handkerchief sachets, letter racks, teapots, manicure sets, birchwood calendars with mottoes in pokerwork. All through the year she was scraping from her wretched wages for 'So-and-so's Christmas present', or 'So-and-so's birthday present'. And had she not, last Christmas, because Gordon was 'fond of poetry', given him the Selected Poems of John Drinkwater in green morocco, which he had sold for half a crown? Poor Julia! Gordon made off with his five bob as soon as he decently could. Why is it that one can't borrow from a rich friend and can from a half-starved relative? But one's family, of course, 'don't count'.

On the top of the bus he did mental arithmetic. Thirteen and nine in hand. Two day-returns to Slough, five bob. Bus fares, say two bob more, seven bob. Bread and cheese and beer at a pub, say a bob each, nine bob. Tea, eightpence each, twelve bob. A bob for cigarettes, thirteen bob. That left ninepence for emergencies. They would manage all right. And how about the rest of the week? Not a penny for tobacco! But he refused to let it worry him. Today would be

worth it, anyway.

Rosemary met him on time. It was one of her virtues that she was never late, and even at this hour of the morning she was bright and debonair. She was rather nicely dressed, as usual. She was wearing her mock-shovel hat again, because he had said he liked it. They had the station practically to themselves. The huge grey place, littered and deserted, had a blowsy, unwashed air, as though it were still sleeping off a Saturday night debauch. A yawning porter in need of a shave told them the best way to get to Burnham Beeches, and presently they were in a third-class smoker, rolling westward, and the mean wilderness of London was opening out and giving way to narrow sooty fields dotted with ads for Carter's Little Liver Pills. The day was very still and warm. Gordon's prayer had come true. It was one of those windless days which you can hardly tell from summer. You could feel the sun behind the mist; it would break through presently, with any luck. Gordon and Rosemary were profoundly and rather absurdly happy. There was a sense of wild adventure in getting out of London, with the long day in 'the country' stretching out ahead of them. It was months since Rosemary and a year since Gordon had set foot in 'the country'. They sat close together with the Sunday Times open across their knees; they did not read it, however, but watched the fields and cows and houses and the empty goods trucks and great sleeping factories rolling past. Both of them enjoyed the railway journey so much that they wished it had been longer.

At Slough they got out and travelled to Farnham Common in an absurd chocolate-coloured bus with no top. Slough was still half asleep. Rosemary remembered the way now that they had got to Farnham Common. You walked down a rutted road and came out on to stretches of fine, wet, tussocky grass dotted with little naked birches. The beech woods were beyond. Not a bough or a blade was stirring. The trees stood like ghosts in the still, misty air. Both Rosemary and Gordon exclaimed at the loveliness of everything. The dew, the stillness, the satiny stems of the birches, the softness of the turf under your feet! Nevertheless, at first they felt shrunken and out of place, as Londoners do when they get outside London. Gordon felt as though he had been living underground for a long time past. He felt etiolated and unkempt. He slipped behind Rosemary as they

walked, so that she should not see his lined, colourless face. Also, they were out of breath before they had walked far, because they were only used to London walking, and for the first half hour they scarcely talked. They plunged into the woods and started westward, with not much idea of where they were making for — anywhere, so long as it was away from London. All round them the beech-trees soared, curiously phallic with their smooth skin-like bark and their flutings at the base. Nothing grew at their roots, but the dried leaves were strewn so thickly that in the distance the slopes looked like folds of copper-coloured silk. Not a soul seemed to be awake. Presently Gordon came level with Rosemary. They walked on hand in hand, swishing through the dry coppery leaves that had drifted into the ruts. Sometimes they came out on to stretches of road where they passed huge desolate houses — opulent country houses, once, in the carriage days, but now deserted and unsaleable. Down the road the mist-dimmed hedges wore that strange purplish brown, the colour of brown madder, that naked brushwood takes on in winter. There were a few birds about — jays, sometimes, passing between the trees with dipping flight, and pheasants that loitered across the road with long tails trailing, almost as tame as hens, as though knowing they were safe on Sunday. But in half an hour Gordon and Rosemary had not passed a human being. Sleep lay upon the countryside. It was hard to believe that they were only twenty miles out of London.

Presently they had walked themselves into trim. They had got their second wind and the blood glowed in their veins. It was one of those days when you feel you could walk a hundred miles if necessary. Suddenly, as they came out on to the road again, the dew all down the hedge glittered with a diamond flash. The sun had pierced the clouds. The light came slanting and yellow across the fields, and delicate unexpected colours sprang out in everything, as though some giant's child had been let loose with a new paintbox. Rosemary caught Gordon's arm and pulled him against her.

'Oh, Gordon, what a LOVELY day!'

'Lovely.'

'And, oh, look, look! Look at all the rabbits in that field!'

Sure enough, at the other end of the field, innumerable rabbits were browsing, almost like a flock of sheep. Suddenly there was a

flurry under the hedge. A rabbit had been lying there. It leapt from its nest in the grass with a flirt of dew and dashed away down the field, its white tail lifted. Rosemary threw herself into Gordon's arms. It was astonishingly warm, as warm as summer. They pressed their bodies together in a sort of sexless rapture, like children. Here in the open air he could see the marks of time quite clearly upon her face. She was nearly thirty, and looked it, and he was nearly thirty, and looked more; and it mattered nothing. He pulled off the absurd flat hat. The three white hairs gleamed on her crown. At the moment he did not wish them away. They were part of her and therefore lovable.

'What fun to be here alone with you! I'm so glad we came!'

'And, oh, Gordon, to think we've got all day together! And it might so easily have rained. How lucky we are!'

'Yes. We'll burn a sacrifice to the immortal gods, presently.'

They were extravagantly happy. As they walked on they fell into absurd enthusiasms over everything they saw: over a jay's feather that they picked up, blue as lapis lazuli; over a stagnant pool like a jet mirror, with boughs reflected deep down in it; over the fungi that sprouted from the trees like monstrous horizontal ears. They discussed for a long time what would be the best epithet to describe a beech-tree. Both agreed that beeches look more like sentient creatures than other trees. It is because of the smoothness of their bark, probably, and the curious limb-like way in which the boughs sprout from the trunk. Gordon said that the little knobs on the bark were like the nipples of breasts and that the sinuous upper boughs, with their smooth sooty skin, were like the writhing trunks of elephants. They argued about similes and metaphors. From time to time they quarrelled vigorously, according to their custom. Gordon began to tease her by finding ugly similes for everything they passed. He said that the russet foliage of the hornbeams was like the hair of Burne-Jones maidens, and that the smooth tentacles of the ivy that wound about the trees were like the clinging arms of Dickens heroines. Once he insisted upon destroying some mauve toadstools because he said they reminded him of a Rackham illustration and he suspected fairies of dancing round them. Rosemary called him a soulless pig. She waded through a bed of drifted beech leaves that rustled about her, knee-deep, like a weightless red-gold sea.

‘Oh, Gordon, these leaves! Look at them with the sun on them! They’re like gold. They really are like gold.’

‘Fairy gold. You’ll be going all Barrie in another moment. As a matter of fact, if you want an exact simile, they’re just the colour of tomato soup.’

‘Don’t be a pig, Gordon! Listen how they rustle. “Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vallombrosa.”’

‘Or like one of those American breakfast cereals. Truweet Breakfast Crisps. “Kiddies clamour for their Breakfast Crisps.”’

‘You are a beast!’

She laughed. They walked on hand in hand, swishing ankle-deep through the leaves and declaiming:

‘Thick as the Breakfast Crisps that strow the plates
In Welwyn Garden City!’

It was great fun. Presently they came out of the wooded area. There were plenty of people abroad now, but not many cars if you kept away from the main roads. Sometimes they heard church bells ringing and made detours to avoid the churchgoers. They began to pass through straggling villages on whose outskirts pseudo-Tudor villas stood sniffishly apart, amid their garages, their laurel shrubberies and their raw-looking lawns. And Gordon had some fun railing against the villas and the godless civilization of which they were part — a civilization of stockbrokers and their lip-sticked wives, of golf, whisky, ouija-boards, and Aberdeen terriers called Jock. So they walked another four miles or so, talking and frequently quarrelling. A few gauzy clouds were drifting across the sky, but there was hardly a breath of wind.

They were growing rather footsore and more and more hungry. Of its own accord the conversation began to turn upon food. Neither of them had a watch, but when they passed through a village they saw that the pubs were open, so that it must be after twelve o’clock. They hesitated outside a rather low-looking pub called the Bird in Hand. Gordon was for going in; privately he reflected that in a pub like that your bread and cheese and beer would cost you a bob at the very most. But Rosemary said that it was a nasty-looking place, which

indeed it was, and they went on, hoping to find a pleasanter pub at the other end of the village. They had visions of a cosy bar-parlour, with an oak settle and perhaps a stuffed pike in a glass case on the wall.

But there were no more pubs in the village, and presently they were in open country again, with no houses in sight and not even any signposts. Gordon and Rosemary began to be alarmed. At two the pubs would shut, and then there would be no food to be had, except perhaps a packet of biscuits from some village sweetshop. At this thought a ravening hunger took possession of them. They toiled exhaustedly up an enormous hill, hoping to find a village on the other side. There was no village, but far below a dark green river wound, with what seemed quite like a large town scattered along its edge and a grey bridge crossing it. They did not even know what river it was — it was the Thames, of course.

'Thank God!' said Gordon. 'There must be plenty of pubs down there. We'd better take the first one we can find.'

'Yes, do let's. I'm starving.'

But when they neared the town it seemed strangely quiet. Gordon wondered whether the people were all at church or eating their Sunday dinners, until he realized that the place was quite deserted. It was Crickham-on-Thames, one of those riverside towns which live for the boating season and go into hibernation for the rest of the year. It straggled along the bank for a mile or more, and it consisted entirely of boat-houses and bungalows, all of them shut up and empty. There were no signs of life anywhere. At last, however, they came upon a fat, aloof, red-nosed man, with a ragged moustache, sitting on a camp-stool beside a jar of beer on the towpath. He was fishing with a twenty-foot roach pole, while on the smooth green water two swans circled about his float, trying to steal his bait as often as he pulled it up.

'Can you tell us where we can get something to eat?' said Gordon.

The fat man seemed to have been expecting this question and to derive a sort of private pleasure from it. He answered without looking at Gordon.

'YOU won't get nothing to eat. Not here you won't,' he said.

'But dash it! Do you mean to say there isn't a pub in the whole

place? We've walked all the way from Farnham Common.'

The fat man sniffed and seemed to reflect, still keeping his eye on the float. 'I dessay you might try the Ravenscroft Hotel,' he said. 'About half a mile along, that is. I dessay they'd give you something; that is, they would if they was open.'

'But ARE they open?'

'They might be and they might not,' said the fat man comfortably.

'And can you tell us what time it is?' said Rosemary.

'It's jest gone ten parse one.'

The two swans followed Gordon and Rosemary a little way along the towpath, evidently expecting to be fed. There did not seem much hope that the Ravenscroft Hotel would be open. The whole place had that desolate flyblown air of pleasure resorts in the off-season. The woodwork of the bungalows was cracking, the white paint was peeling off, the dusty windows showed bare interiors. Even the slot machines that were dotted along the bank were out of order. There seemed to be another bridge at the other end of the town. Gordon swore heartily.

'What bloody fools we were not to go in that pub when we had the chance!'

'Oh, dear! I'm simply STARVING. Had we better turn back, do you think?'

'It's no use, there were no pubs the way we came. We must keep on. I suppose the Ravenscroft Hotel's on the other side of that bridge. If that's a main road there's just a chance it'll be open. Otherwise we're sunk.'

They dragged their way as far as the bridge. They were thoroughly footsore now. But behold! here at last was what they wanted, for just beyond the bridge, down a sort of private road, stood a biggish, smartish hotel, its back lawns running down to the river. It was obviously open. Gordon and Rosemary started eagerly towards it, and then paused, daunted.

'It looks frightfully expensive,' said Rosemary.

It did look expensive. It was a vulgar pretentious place, all gilt and white paint — one of those hotels which have overcharging and bad service written on every brick. Beside the drive, commanding the road, a snobbish board announced in gilt lettering:

THE RAVENSCROFT HOTEL
OPEN TO NON-RESIDENTS
LUNCHEONS-TEAS-DINNERS
DANCE HALL AND TENNIS COURTS
PARTIES CATERED FOR

Two gleaming two-seater cars were parked in the drive. Gordon quailed. The money in his pocket seemed to shrink to nothing, this was the very opposite to the cosy pub they had been looking for. But he was very hungry. Rosemary tweaked at his arm.

'It looks a beastly place. I vote we go on.'

'But we've got to get some food. It's our last chance. We shan't find another pub.'

'The food's always so disgusting in these places. Beastly cold beef that tastes as if it had been saved up from last year. And they charge you the earth for it.'

'Oh, well, we'll just order bread and cheese and beer. It always costs about the same.'

'But they hate you doing that. They'll try to bully us into having a proper lunch, you'll see. We must be firm and just say bread and cheese.'

'All right, we'll be firm. Come on.'

They went in, resolved to be firm. But there was an expensive smell in the draughty hallway — a smell of chintz, dead flowers, Thames water, and the rinsings of wine bottles. It was the characteristic smell of a riverside hotel. Gordon's heart sank lower. He knew the type of place this was. It was one of those desolate hotels which exist all along the motor roads and are frequented by stockbrokers airing their whores on Sunday afternoons. In such places you are insulted and overcharged almost as a matter of course. Rosemary shrank nearer to him. She too was intimidated. They saw a door marked 'Saloon' and pushed it open, thinking it must be the bar. It was not a bar, however, but a large, smart, chilly room with corduroy-upholstered chairs and settees. You could have mistaken it for an ordinary drawing-room except that all the ashtrays advertised White Horse whisky. And round one of the tables the people from the cars outside — two blond, flat-headed, fattish men, over-youthfully dressed, and two disagreeable elegant young women —

were sitting, having evidently just finished lunch. A waiter, bending over their table, was serving them with liqueurs.

Gordon and Rosemary had halted in the doorway. The people at the table were already eyeing them with offensive upper-middle-class eyes. Gordon and Rosemary looked tired and dirty, and they knew it. The notion of ordering bread and cheese and beer had almost vanished from their minds. In such a place as this you couldn't possibly say 'Bread and cheese and beer'; 'Lunch' was the only thing you could say. There was nothing for it but 'Lunch' or flight. The waiter was almost openly contemptuous. He had summed them up at a glance as having no money; but also he had divined that it was in their minds to fly and was determined to stop them before they could escape.

'Sare?' he demanded, lifting his tray off the table.

Now for it! Say 'Bread and cheese and beer', and damn the consequences! Alas! his courage was gone. 'Lunch' it would have to be. With a seeming-careless gesture he thrust his hand into his pocket. He was feeling his money to make sure that it was still there. Seven and elevenpence left, he knew. The waiter's eye followed the movement; Gordon had a hateful feeling that the man could actually see through the cloth and count the money in his pocket. In a tone as lordly as he could make it, he remarked:

'Can we have some lunch, please?'

'Luncheon, sare? Yes, sare. Zees way.'

The waiter was a black-haired young man with a very smooth, well-featured, sallow face. His dress clothes were excellently cut and yet unclean-looking, as though he seldom took them off. He looked like a Russian prince; probably he was an Englishman and had assumed a foreign accent because this was proper in a waiter. Defeated, Rosemary and Gordon followed him to the dining-room, which was at the back, giving on to the lawn. It was exactly like an aquarium. It was built entirely of greenish glass, and it was so damp and chilly that you could almost have fancied yourself under water. You could both see and smell the river outside. In the middle of each of the small round tables there was a bowl of paper flowers, but at one side, to complete the aquarium effect, there was a whole florist's stand of evergreens, palms, and aspidistras and so forth, like dreary

water-plants. In summer such a room might be pleasant enough; at present, when the sun had gone behind a cloud, it was merely dank and miserable. Rosemary was almost as much afraid of the waiter as Gordon was. As they sat down and he turned away for a moment she made a face at his back.

'I'm going to pay for my own lunch,' she whispered to Gordon, across the table.

'No, you're not.'

'What a horrible place! The food's sure to be filthy. I do wish we hadn't come.'

'Sh!'

The waiter had come back with a flyblown printed menu. He handed it to Gordon and stood over him with the menacing air of a waiter who knows that you have not much money in your pocket. Gordon's heart pounded. If it was a table d'hote lunch at three and sixpence or even half a crown, they were sunk. He set his teeth and looked at the menu. Thank God! It was a la carte. The cheapest thing on the list was cold beef and salad for one and sixpence. He said, or rather mumbled:

'We'll have some cold beef, please.'

The waiter's delicate eyebrows lifted. He feigned surprise.

'ONLY ze cold beef, sare?'

'Yes that'll do to go on with, anyway.'

'But you will not have ANYSING else, sare?'

'Oh, well. Bring us some bread, of course. And butter.'

'But no soup to start wiz, sare?'

'No. No soup.'

'Nor any fish, sare? Only ze cold beef?'

'Do we want any fish, Rosemary? I don't think we do. No. No fish.'

'Nor any sweet to follow, sare? ONLY ze cold beef?'

Gordon had difficulty in controlling his features. He thought he had never hated anyone so much as he hated this waiter.

'We'll tell you afterwards if we want anything else,' he said.

'And you will drink sare?'

Gordon had meant to ask for beer, but he hadn't the courage now. He had got to win back his prestige after this affair of the cold beef.

‘Bring me the wine list,’ he said flatly.

Another flyblown list was produced. All the wines looked impossibly expensive. However, at the very top of the list there was some nameless table claret at two and nine a bottle. Gordon made hurried calculations. He could just manage two and nine. He indicated the wine with his thumbnail.

‘Bring us a bottle of this,’ he said.

The waiter’s eyebrows rose again. He essayed a stroke of irony.

‘You will have ze WHOLE bottle, sare? You would not prefare ze half bottle?’

‘A whole bottle,’ said Gordon coldly.

All in a single delicate movement of contempt the waiter inclined his head, shrugged his left shoulder, and turned away. Gordon could not stand it. He caught Rosemary’s eye across the table. Somehow or other they had got to put that waiter in his place! In a moment the waiter came back, carrying the bottle of cheap wine by the neck, and half concealing it behind his coat tails, as though it were something a little indecent or unclean. Gordon had thought of a way to avenge himself. As the waiter displayed the bottle he put out a hand, felt it, and frowned.

‘That’s not the way to serve red wine,’ he said.

Just for a moment the waiter was taken aback. ‘Sare?’ he said.

‘It’s stone cold. Take the bottle away and warm it.’

‘Very good, sare.’

But it was not really a victory. The waiter did not look abashed. Was the wine worth warming? his raised eyebrow said. He bore the bottle away with easy disdain, making it quite clear to Rosemary and Gordon that it was bad enough to order the cheapest wine on the list without making this fuss about it afterwards.

The beef and salad were corpse-cold and did not seem like real food at all. They tasted like water. The rolls, also, though stale, were damp. The reedy Thames water seemed to have got into everything. It was no surprise that when the wine was opened it tasted like mud. But it was alcoholic, that was the great thing. It was quite a surprise to find how stimulating it was, once you had got it past your gullet and into your stomach. After drinking a glass and a half Gordon felt very much better. The waiter stood by the door, ironically patient, his

napkin over his arm, trying to make Gordon and Rosemary uncomfortable by his presence. At first he succeeded, but Gordon's back was towards him, and he disregarded him and presently almost forgot him. By degrees their courage returned. They began to talk more easily and in louder voices.

'Look,' said Gordon. 'Those swans have followed us all the way up here.'

Sure enough, there were the two swans sailing vaguely to and fro over the dark green water. And at this moment the sun burst out again and the dreary aquarium of a dining-room was flooded with pleasant greenish light. Gordon and Rosemary felt suddenly warm and happy. They began chattering about nothing, almost as though the waiter had not been there, and Gordon took up the bottle and poured out two more glasses of wine. Over their glasses their eyes met. She was looking at him with a sort of yielding irony. 'I'm your mistress,' her eyes said; 'what a joke!' Their knees were touching under the small table; momentarily she squeezed his knee between her own. Something leapt inside him; a warm wave of sensuality and tenderness crept up his body. He had remembered! She was his girl, his mistress. Presently, when they were alone, in some hidden place in the warm, windless air, he would have her naked body all for his own at last. True, all the morning he had known this, but somehow the knowledge had been unreal. It was only now that he grasped it. Without words said, with a sort of bodily certainty, he knew that within an hour she would be in his arms, naked. As they sat there in the warm light, their knees touching, their eyes meeting, they felt as though already everything had been accomplished. There was deep intimacy between them. They could have sat there for hours, just looking at one another and talking of trivial things that had meanings for them and for nobody else. They did sit there for twenty minutes or more. Gordon had forgotten the waiter — had even forgotten, momentarily, the disaster of being let in for this wretched lunch that was going to strip him of every penny he had. But presently the sun went in, the room grew grey again, and they realized that it was time to go.

'The bill,' said Gordon, turning half round.

The waiter made a final effort to be offensive.

‘Ze bill, sare? But you do not wish any coffee, sare?’

‘No, no coffee. The bill.’

The waiter retired and came back with a folded slip on a salver. Gordon opened it. Six and threepence — and he had exactly seven and elevenpence in the world! Of course he had known approximately what the bill must be, and yet it was a shock now that it came. He stood up, felt in his pocket, and took out all his money. The sallow young waiter, his salver on his arm, eyed the handful of money; plainly he divined that it was all Gordon had. Rosemary also had got up and come round the table. She pinched Gordon’s elbow; this was a signal that she would like to pay her share. Gordon pretended not to notice. He paid the six and threepence, and, as he turned away, dropped another shilling on to the salver. The waiter balanced it for a moment on his hand, flicked it over, and then slipped it into his waistcoat pocket with the air of covering up something unmentionable.

As they went down the passage, Gordon felt dismayed, helpless — dazed, almost. All his money gone at a single swoop! It was a ghastly thing to happen. If only they had not come to this accursed place! The whole day was ruined now — and all for the sake of a couple of plates of cold beef and a bottle of muddy wine! Presently there would be tea to think about, and he had only six cigarettes left, and there were the bus fares back to Slough and God knew what else; and he had just eightpence to pay for the lot! They got outside the hotel feeling as if they had been kicked out and the door slammed behind them. All the warm intimacy of a moment ago was gone. Everything seemed different now that they were outside. Their blood seemed to grow suddenly cooler in the open air. Rosemary walked ahead of him, rather nervous, not speaking. She was half frightened now by the thing she had resolved to do. He watched her strong delicate limbs moving. There was her body that he had wanted so long; but now when the time had come it only daunted him. He wanted her to be his, he wanted to HAVE HAD her, but he wished it were over and done with. It was an effort — a thing he had got to screw himself up to. It was strange that that beastly business of the hotel bill could have upset him so completely. The easy carefree mood of the morning was shattered; in its place there had come back

the hateful, harassing, familiar thing — worry about money. In a minute he would have to own up that he had only eightpence left; he would have to borrow money off her to get them home; it would be squalid and shameful. Only the wine inside him kept up his courage. The warmth of the wine, and the hateful feeling of having only eightpence left, warred together in his body, neither getting the better of the other.

They walked rather slowly, but soon they were away from the river and on higher ground again. Each searched desperately for something to say and could think of nothing. He came level with her, took her hand, and wound her fingers within his own. Like that they felt better. But his heart beat painfully, his entrails were constricted. He wondered whether she felt the same.

'There doesn't seem to be a soul about,' she said at last.

'It's Sunday afternoon. They're all asleep under the aspidistra, after roast beef and Yorkshire.'

There was another silence. They walked on fifty yards or so. With difficulty mastering his voice, he managed to say:

'It's extraordinarily warm. We might sit down for a bit if we can find a place.'

'Yes, all right. If you like.'

Presently they came to a small copse on the left of the road. It looked dead and empty, nothing growing under the naked trees. But at the corner of the copse, on the far side, there was a great tangled patch of sloe or blackthorn bushes. He put his arm round her without saying anything and turned her in that direction. There was a gap in the hedge with some barbed wire strung across it. He held the wire up for her and she slipped nimbly under it. His heart leapt again. How supple and strong she was! But as he climbed over the wire to follow her, the eightpence — a sixpence and two pennies — clinked in his pocket, daunting him anew.

When they got to the bushes they found a natural alcove. On three sides were beds of thorns, leafless but impenetrable, and on the other side you looked downhill over a sweep of naked ploughed fields. At the bottom of the hill stood a low-roofed cottage, tiny as a child's toy, its chimneys smokeless. Not a creature was stirring anywhere. You could not have been more alone than in such a place. The grass

was the fine mossy stuff that grows under trees.

'We ought to have brought a mackintosh,' he said. He had knelt down.

'It doesn't matter. The ground's fairly dry.'

He pulled her to the ground beside him, kissed her, pulled off the flat felt hat, lay upon her breast to breast, kissed her face all over. She lay under him, yielding rather than responding. She did not resist when his hand sought her breasts. But in her heart she was still frightened. She would do it — oh, yes! she would keep her implied promise, she would not draw back; but all the same she was frightened. And at heart he too was half reluctant. It dismayed him to find how little, at this moment, he really wanted her. The money-business still unnerved him. How can you make love when you have only eightpence in your pocket and are thinking about it all the time? Yet in a way he wanted her. Indeed, he could not do without her. His life would be a different thing when once they were really lovers. For a long time he lay on her breast, her head turned sideways, his face against her neck and hair, attempting nothing further.

Then the sun came out again. It was getting low in the sky now. The warm light poured over them as though a membrane across the sky had broken. It had been a little cold on the grass, really, with the sun behind the clouds; but now once again it was almost as warm as summer. Both of them sat up to exclaim at it.

'Oh, Gordon, look! Look how the sun's lighting everything up!'

As the clouds melted away a widening yellow beam slid swiftly across the valley, gilding everything in its path. Grass that had been dull green shone suddenly emerald. The empty cottage below sprang out into warm colours, purply-blue of tiles, cherry-red of brick. Only the fact that no birds were singing reminded you that it was winter. Gordon put his arm round Rosemary and pulled her hard against him. They sat cheek to cheek, looking down the hill. He turned her round and kissed her.

'You do like me, don't you?'

'Adore you, silly.'

'And you're going to be nice to me, aren't you?'

'Nice to you?'

'Let me do what I want with you?'

‘Yes, I expect so.’

‘Anything?’

‘Yes, all right. Anything.’

He pressed her back upon the grass. It was quite different now. The warmth of the sun seemed to have got into their bones. ‘Take your clothes off, there’s a dear,’ he whispered. She did it readily enough. She had no shame before him. Besides, it was so warm and the place was so solitary that it did not matter how many clothes you took off. They spread her clothes out and made a sort of bed for her to lie on. Naked, she lay back, her hands behind her head, her eyes shut, smiling slightly, as though she had considered everything and were at peace in her mind. For a long time he knelt and gazed at her body. Its beauty startled him. She looked much younger naked than with her clothes on. Her face, thrown back, with eyes shut, looked almost childish. He moved closer to her. Once again the coins clinked in his pocket. Only eightpence left! Trouble coming presently. But he wouldn’t think of it now. Get on with it, that’s the great thing, get on with it and damn the future! He put an arm beneath her and laid his body to hers.

‘May I? — now?’

‘Yes. All right.’

‘You’re not frightened?’

‘No.’

‘I’ll be as gentle as I can with you.’

‘It doesn’t matter.’

A moment later:

‘Oh, Gordon, no! No, no, no!’

‘What? What is it?’

‘No, Gordon, no! You mustn’t! NO!’

She put her hands against him and pushed him violently back. Her face looked remote, frightened, almost hostile. It was terrible to feel her push him away at such a moment. It was as though cold water had been dashed all over him. He fell back from her, dismayed, hurriedly rearranging his clothes.

‘What is it? What’s the matter?’

‘Oh, Gordon! I thought you — oh, dear!’

She threw her arm over her face and rolled over on her side, away

from him, suddenly ashamed.

'What is it?' he repeated.

'How could you be so THOUGHTLESS?'

'What do you mean — thoughtless?'

'Oh! you know what I mean!'

His heart shrank. He did know what she meant; but he had never thought of it till this moment. And of course — oh, yes! — he ought to have thought of it. He stood up and turned away from her. Suddenly he knew that he could go no further with this business. In a wet field on a Sunday afternoon — and in mid-winter at that! Impossible! It seemed so right, so natural only a minute ago; now it seemed merely squalid and ugly.

'I didn't expect THIS,' he said bitterly.

'But I couldn't help it, Gordon! You ought to have — you know.'

'You don't think I go in for that kind of thing, do you?'

'But what else can we do? I can't have a baby, can I?'

'You must take your chance.'

'Oh, Gordon, how impossible you are!'

She lay looking up at him, her face full of distress, too overcome for the moment even to remember that she was naked. His disappointment had turned to anger. There you are, you see! Money again! Even the most secret action of your life you don't escape it; you've still got to spoil everything with filthy cold-blooded precautions for money's sake. Money, money, always money! Even in the bridal bed, the finger of the money-god intruding! In the heights or in the depths, he is there. He walked a pace or two up and down, his hands in his pockets.

'Money again, you see!' he said. 'Even at a moment like this it's got the power to stand over us and bully us. Even when we're alone and miles from anywhere, with not a soul to see us.'

'What's MONEY got to do with it?'

'I tell you it'd never enter your head to worry about a baby if it wasn't for the money. You'd WANT the baby if it wasn't for that. You say you "can't" have a baby. What do you mean, you "can't" have a baby? You mean you daren't; because you'd lose your job and I've got no money and all of us would starve. This birth-control business! It's just another way they've found out of bullying us. And

you want to acquiesce in it, apparently.'

'But what am I to do, Gordon? What am I to do?'

At this moment the sun disappeared behind the clouds. It became perceptibly colder. After all, the scene was grotesque — the naked woman lying in the grass, the dressed man standing moodily by with his hands in his pockets. She'd catch her death of cold in another moment, lying there like that. The whole thing was absurd and indecent.

'But what else am I to do?' she repeated.

'I should think you might start by putting your clothes on,' he said coldly.

He had only said it to avenge his irritation; but its result was to make her so painfully and obviously embarrassed that he had to turn his back on her. She had dressed herself in a very few moments. As she knelt lacing up her shoes he heard her sniff once or twice. She was on the point of crying and was struggling to restrain herself. He felt horribly ashamed. He would have liked to throw himself on his knees beside her, put his arms round her, and ask her pardon. But he could do nothing of the kind; the scene had left him lumpish and awkward. It was with difficulty that he could command his voice even for the most banal remark.

'Are you ready?' he said flatly.

'Yes.'

They went back to the road, climbed through the wire, and started down the hill without another word. Fresh clouds were rolling across the sun. It was getting much colder. Another hour and the early dusk would have fallen. They reached the bottom of the hill and came in sight of the Ravenscroft Hotel, scene of their disaster.

'Where are we going?' said Rosemary in a small sulky voice.

'Back to Slough, I suppose. We must cross the bridge and have a look at the signposts.'

They scarcely spoke again till they had gone several miles. Rosemary was embarrassed and miserable. A number of times she edged closer to him, meaning to take his arm, but he edged away from her; and so they walked abreast with almost the width of the road between them. She imagined that she had offended him mortally. She supposed that it was because of his disappointment —

because she had pushed him away at the critical moment — that he was angry with her; she would have apologized if he had given her a quarter of a chance. But as a matter of fact he was scarcely thinking of this any longer. His mind had turned away from that side of things. It was the money-business that was troubling him now — the fact that he had only eightpence in his pocket. In a very little while he would have to confess it. There would be the bus fares from Farnham to Slough, and tea in Slough, and cigarettes, and more bus fares and perhaps another meal when they got back to London; and just eightpence to cover the lot! He would have to borrow from Rosemary after all. And that was so damned humiliating. It is hateful to have to borrow money off someone you have just been quarrelling with. What nonsense it made of all his fine attitudes! There was he, lecturing her, putting on superior airs, pretending to be shocked because she took contraception for granted; and the next moment turning round and asking her for money! But there you are, you see, that's what money can do. There is no attitude that money or the lack of it cannot puncture.

By half past four it was almost completely dark. They tramped along misty roads where there was no illumination save the cracks of cottage windows and the yellow beam of an occasional car. It was getting beastly cold, too, but they had walked four miles and the exercise had warmed them. It was impossible to go on being unsociable any longer. They began to talk more easily and by degrees they edged closer together. Rosemary took Gordon's arm. Presently she stopped him and swung him round to face her.

'Gordon, WHY are you so beastly to me?'

'How am I beastly to you?'

'Coming all this way without speaking a word!'

'Oh, well!'

'Are you still angry with me because of what happened just now?'

'No. I was never angry with you. YOU'RE not to blame.'

She looked up at him, trying to divine the expression of his face in the almost pitch darkness. He drew her against him, and, as she seemed to expect it, tilted her face back and kissed her. She clung to him eagerly; her body melted against his. She had been waiting for

this, it seemed.

'Gordon, you do love me, don't you?'

'Of course I do.'

'Things went wrong somehow. I couldn't help it. I got frightened suddenly.'

'It doesn't matter. Another time it'll be all right.'

She was lying limp against him, her head on his breast. He could feel her heart beating. It seemed to flutter violently, as though she were taking some decision.

'I don't care,' she said indistinctly, her face buried in his coat.

'Don't care about what?'

'The baby. I'll risk it. You can do what you like with me.'

At these surrendering words a weak desire raised itself in him and died away at once. He knew why she had said it. It was not because, at this moment, she really wanted to be made love to. It was from a mere generous impulse to let him know that she loved him and would take a dreaded risk rather than disappoint him.

'Now?' he said.

'Yes, if you like.'

He considered. He so wanted to be sure that she was his! But the cold night air flowed over them. Behind the hedges the long grass would be wet and chill. This was not the time or the place. Besides, that business of the eightpence had usurped his mind. He was not in the mood any longer.

'I can't,' he said finally.

'You can't! But, Gordon! I thought— '

'I know. But it's all different now.'

'You're still upset?'

'Yes. In a way.'

'Why?'

He pushed her a little away from him. As well have the explanation now as later. Nevertheless he was so ashamed that he mumbled rather than said:

'I've got a beastly thing to say to you. It's been worrying me all the way along.'

'What is it?'

'It's this. Can you lend me some money? I'm absolutely cleaned

out. I had just enough money for today, but that beastly hotel bill upset everything. I've only eightpence left.'

Rosemary was amazed. She broke right out of his arms in her amazement.

'Only eightpence left! What ARE you talking about? What does it matter if you've only eightpence left?'

'Don't I tell you I shall have to borrow money off you in another minute? You'll have to pay for your own bus fares, and my bus fares, and your tea and Lord knows what. And I asked you to come out with me! You're supposed to be my guest. It's bloody.'

'Your GUEST! Oh, Gordon. Is THAT what's been worrying you all this time?'

'Yes.'

'Gordon, you ARE a baby! How can you let yourself be worried by a thing like that? As though I minded lending you money! Aren't I always telling you I want to pay my share when we go out together?'

'Yes, and you know how I hate your paying. We had that out the other night.'

'Oh, how absurd, how absurd you are! Do you think there's anything to be ashamed of in having no money?'

'Of course there is! It's the only thing in the world there IS to be ashamed of.'

'But what's it got to do with you and me making love, anyway? I don't understand you. First you want to and then you don't want to. What's money got to do with it?'

'Everything.'

He wound her arm in his and started down the road. She would never understand. Nevertheless he had got to explain.

'Don't you understand that one isn't a full human being — that one doesn't FEEL a human being — unless one's got money in one's pocket?'

'No. I think that's just silly.'

'It isn't that I don't want to make love to you. I do. But I tell you I can't make love to you when I've only eightpence in my pocket. At least when you know I've only eightpence. I just can't do it. It's physically impossible.'

‘But why? Why?’

‘You’ll find it in Lempriere,’ he said obscurely.

That settled it. They talked no more about it. For the second time he had behaved grossly badly and yet he had made her feel as if it were she who was in the wrong. They walked on. She did not understand him; on the other hand, she forgave him everything. Presently they reached Farnham Common, and, after a wait at the cross road, got a bus to Slough. In the darkness, as the bus loomed near, Rosemary found Gordon’s hand and slipped half a crown into it, so that he might pay the fares and not be shamed in public by letting a woman pay for him.

For his own part Gordon would sooner have walked to Slough and saved the bus fares, but he knew Rosemary would refuse. In Slough, also, he was for taking the train straight back to London, but Rosemary said indignantly that she wasn’t going to go without her tea, so they went to a large, dreary, draughty hotel near the station. Tea, with little wilting sandwiches and rock cakes like balls of putty, was two shillings a head. It was torment to Gordon to let her pay for his food. He sulked, ate nothing, and, after a whispered argument, insisted on contributing his eightpence towards the cost of the tea.

It was seven o’clock when they took the train back to London. The train was full of tired hikers in khaki shorts. Rosemary and Gordon did not talk much. They sat close together, Rosemary with her arm twined through his, playing with his hand, Gordon looking out of the window. People in the carriage eyed them, wondering what they had quarrelled about. Gordon watched the lamp-starred darkness streaming past. So the day to which he had looked forward was ended. And now back to Willowbed Road, with a penniless week ahead. For a whole week, unless some miracle happened, he wouldn’t even be able to buy himself a cigarette. What a bloody fool he had been! Rosemary was not angry with him. By the pressure of her hand she tried to make it clear to him that she loved him. His pale discontented face, turned half away from her, his shabby coat, and his unkempt mouse-coloured hair that wanted cutting more than ever, filled her with profound pity. She felt more tenderly towards him than she would have done if everything had gone well, because in her feminine way she grasped that he was unhappy and that life was

difficult for him.

'See me home, will you?' she said as they got out at Paddington.

'If you don't mind walking. I haven't got the fare.'

'But let ME pay the fare. Oh, dear! I suppose you won't. But how are you going to get home yourself?'

'Oh, I'll walk. I know the way. It's not very far.'

'I hate to think of you walking all that way. You look so tired. Be a dear and let me pay your fare home. DO!'

'No. You've paid quite enough for me already.'

'Oh, dear! You are so silly!'

They halted at the entrance to the Underground. He took her hand. 'I suppose we must say good-bye for the present,' he said.

'Good-bye, Gordon dear. Thanks ever so much for taking me out. It was such fun this morning.'

'Ah, this morning! It was different then.' His mind went back to the morning hours, when they had been alone on the road together and there was still money in his pocket. Compunction seized him. On the whole he had behaved badly. He pressed her hand a little tighter. 'You're not angry with me, are you?'

'No, silly, of course not.'

'I didn't mean to be beastly to you. It was the money. It's always the money.'

'Never mind, it'll be better next time. We'll go to some better place. We'll go down to Brighton for the week-end, or something.'

'Perhaps, when I've got the money. You will write soon, won't you?'

'Yes.'

'Your letters are the only things that keep me going. Tell me when you'll write, so that I can have your letter to look forward to.'

'I'll write tomorrow night and post it on Tuesday. Then you'll get it last post on Tuesday night.'

'Then good-bye, Rosemary dear.'

'Good-bye, Gordon darling.'

He left her at the booking-office. When he had gone twenty yards he felt a hand laid on his arm. He turned sharply. It was Rosemary. She thrust a packet of twenty Gold Flake, which she had bought at the tobacco kiosk, into his coat pocket and ran back to the

Underground before he could protest.

He trailed homeward through the wastes of Marylebone and Regent's Park. It was the fag-end of the day. The streets were dark and desolate, with that strange listless feeling of Sunday night when people are more tired after a day of idleness than after a day of work. It was vilely cold, too. The wind had risen when the night fell. Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over. Gordon was footsore, having walked a dozen or fifteen miles, and also hungry. He had had little food all day. In the morning he had hurried off without a proper breakfast, and the lunch at the Ravenscroft Hotel wasn't the kind of meal that did you much good; since then he had had no solid food. However, there was no hope of getting anything when he got home. He had told Mother Wisbeach that he would be away all day.

When he reached the Hampstead Road he had to wait on the kerb to let a stream of cars go past. Even here everything seemed dark and gloomy, in spite of the glaring lamps and the cold glitter of the jewellers' windows. The raw wind pierced his thin clothes, making him shiver. Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare. He had finished that poem, all except the last two lines. He thought again of those hours this morning — the empty misty roads, the feeling of freedom and adventure, of having the whole day and the whole country before you in which to wander at will. It was having money that did it, of course. Seven and elevenpence he had had in his pocket this morning. It had been a brief victory over the money-god; a morning's apostasy, a holiday in the groves of Ashtaroth. But such things never last. Your money goes and your freedom with it. Circumcise ye your foreskins, saith the Lord. And back we creep, duly snivelling.

Another shoal of cars swam past. One in particular caught his eye, a long slender thing, elegant as a swallow, all gleaming blue and silver; a thousand guineas it would have cost, he thought. A blue-clad chauffeur sat at the wheel, upright, immobile, like some scornful statue. At the back, in the pink-lit interior, four elegant young people, two youths, and two girls, were smoking cigarettes and laughing. He had a glimpse of sleek bunny-faces; faces of ravishing pinkness and smoothness, lit by that peculiar inner glow that can never be counterfeited, the soft warm radiance of money.

He crossed the road. No food tonight. However, there was still oil in the lamp, thank God; he would have a secret cup of tea when he got back. At this moment he saw himself and his life without saving disguises. Every night the same — back to the cold lonely bedroom and the grimy littered sheets of the poem that never got any further. It was a blind alley. He would never finish London Pleasures, he would never marry Rosemary, he would never set his life in order. He would only drift and sink, drift and sink, like the others of his family; but worse than them — down, down into some dreadful sub-world that as yet he could only dimly imagine. It was what he had chosen when he declared war on money. Serve the money-god or go under; there is no other rule.

Something deep below made the stone street shiver. The tube-train, sliding through middle earth. He had a vision of London, of the western world; he saw a thousand million slaves toiling and grovelling about the throne of money. The earth is ploughed, ships sail, miners sweat in dripping tunnels underground, clerks hurry for the eight-fifteen with the fear of the boss eating at their vitals. And even in bed with their wives they tremble and obey. Obey whom? The money-priesthood, the pink-faced masters of the world. The Upper Crust. A welter of sleek young rabbits in thousand guinea motor cars, of golfing stockbrokers and cosmopolitan financiers, of Chancery lawyers and fashionable Nancy boys, of bankers, newspaper peers, novelists of all four sexes, American pugilists, lady aviators, film stars, bishops, titled poets, and Chicago gorillas.

When he had gone another fifty yards the rhyme for the final stanza of his poem occurred to him. He walked homeward, repeating the poem to himself:

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over The bending poplars, newly bare, And the dark ribbons of the chimneys Veer downward; flicked by whips of air,

Torn posters flutter; coldly sound The boom of trains and the rattle of hooves, And the clerks who hurry to the station Look, shuddering, over the eastern rooves,

Thinking, each one, ‘Here comes the winter! Please God I keep my job this year!’ And bleakly, as the cold strikes through Their entrails like an icy spear,

They think of rent, rates, season tickets, Insurance, coal, the skivvy's wages, Boots, school-bills, and the next instalment Upon the two twin beds from Drage's.

For if in careless summer days In groves of Ashtaroth we whored, Repentant now, when winds blow cold, We kneel before our rightful lord;

The lord of all, the money-god, Who rules us blood and hand and brain, Who gives the roof that stops the wind, And, giving, takes away again;

Who spies with jealous, watchful care, Our thoughts, our dreams, our secret ways, Who picks our words and cuts our clothes, And maps the pattern of our days;

Who chills our anger, curbs our hope, And buys our lives and pays with toys, Who claims as tribute broken faith, Accepted insults, muted joys;

Who binds with chains the poet's wit, The navvy's strength, the soldier's pride, And lays the sleek, estranging shield Between the lover and his bride.

Chapter 8

As the clock struck one Gordon slammed the shop door to and hurried, almost ran, to the branch of the Westminster Bank down the street.

With a half-conscious gesture of caution he was clutching the lapel of his coat, holding it tight against him. In there, stowed away in his right-hand inner pocket, was an object whose very existence he partly doubted. It was a stout blue envelope with an American stamp; in the envelope was a cheque for fifty dollars; and the cheque was made out to 'Gordon Comstock'!

He could feel the square shape of the envelope outlined against his body as clearly as though it had been red hot. All the morning he had felt it there, whether he touched it or whether he did not; he seemed to have developed a special patch of sensitiveness in the skin below his right breast. As often as once in ten minutes he had taken the cheque out of its envelope and anxiously examined it. After all, cheques are tricky things. It would be frightful if there turned out to be some hitch about the date or the signature. Besides, he might lose it — it might even vanish of its own accord like fairy gold.

The cheque had come from the Californian Review, that American magazine to which, weeks or months ago, he had despairingly sent a poem. He had almost forgotten about the poem, it had been so long away, until this morning their letter had come sailing out of the blue. And what a letter! No English editor ever writes letters like that. They were 'very favorably impressed' by his poem. They would 'endeavor' to include it in their next number. Would he 'favor' them by showing them some more of his work? (Would he? Oh, boy! — as Flaxman would say.) And the cheque had come with it. It seemed the most monstrous folly, in this year of blight 1934, that anyone should pay fifty dollars for a poem. However, there it was; and there was the cheque, which looked perfectly genuine however often he inspected it.

He would have no peace of mind till the cheque was cashed — for quite possibly the bank would refuse it — but already a stream of visions was flowing through his mind. Visions of girls' faces, visions

of cobwebby claret bottles and quart pots of beer, visions of a new suit and his overcoat out of pawn, visions of a week-end at Brighton with Rosemary, visions of the crisp, crackling five pound note which he was going to give to Julia. Above all, of course, that fiver for Julia. It was almost the first thing he had thought of when the cheque came. Whatever else he did with the money, he must give Julia half of it. It was only the barest justice, considering how much he had 'borrowed' from her in all these years. All the morning the thought of Julia and the money he owed her had been cropping up in his mind at odd moments. It was a vaguely distasteful thought, however. He would forget about it for half an hour at a time, would plan a dozen ways of spending his ten pounds to the uttermost farthing, and then suddenly he would remember about Julia. Good old Julia! Julia should have her share. A fiver at the very least. Even that was not a tenth of what he owed her. For the twentieth time, with a faint malaise, he registered the thought: five quid for Julia.

The bank made no trouble about the cheque. Gordon had no banking account, but they knew him well, for Mr McKechnie banked there. They had cashed editors' cheques for Gordon before. There was only a minute's consultation, and then the cashier came back.

'Notes, Mr Comstock?'

'One five pound, and the rest pounds, please.'

The flimsy luscious fiver and the five clean pound notes slid rustling under the brass rail. And after them the cashier pushed a little pile of half-crowns and pennies. In lordly style Gordon shot the coins into his pocket without even counting them. That was a bit of backsheesh. He had only expected ten pounds for fifty dollars. The dollar must be above par. The five pound note, however, he carefully folded up and stowed away in the American envelope. That was Julia's fiver. It was sacrosanct. He would post it to her presently.

He did not go home for dinner. Why chew leathery beef in the aspidistral dining-room when he had ten quid in pocket — five quid, rather? (He kept forgetting that half the money was already mortgaged to Julia.) For the moment he did not bother to post Julia's five pounds. This evening would be soon enough. Besides, he rather enjoyed the feeling of it in his pocket. It was queer how different you felt with all that money in your pocket. Not opulent, merely, but

reassured, revivified, reborn. He felt a different person from what he had been yesterday. He WAS a different person. He was no longer the downtrodden wretch who made secret cups of tea over the oil stove at 31 Willowbed Road. He was Gordon Comstock, the poet, famous on both sides of the Atlantic. Publications: Mice (1932), London Pleasures (1935). He thought with perfect confidence of London Pleasures now. In three months it should see the light. Demy octavo, white buckram covers. There was nothing that he did not feel equal to now that his luck had turned.

He strolled into the Prince of Wales for a bite of food. A cut off the joint and two veg., one and twopence, a pint of pale ale ninepence, twenty Gold Flakes a shilling. Even after that extravagance he still had well over ten pounds in hand — or rather, well over five pounds. Beer-warmed, he sat and meditated on the things you can do with five pounds. A new suit, a week-end in the country, a day-trip to Paris, five rousing drunks, ten dinners in Soho restaurants. At this point it occurred to him that he and Rosemary and Ravelston must certainly have dinner together tonight. Just to celebrate his stroke of luck; after all, it isn't every day that ten pounds — five pounds — drops out of the sky into your lap. The thought of the three of them together, with good food and wine and money no object took hold of him as something not to be resisted. He had just a tiny twinge of caution. Mustn't spend ALL his money, of course. Still, he could afford a quid — two quid. In a couple of minutes he had got Ravelston on the pub phone.

'Is that you, Ravelston? I say, Ravelston! Look here, you've got to have dinner with me tonight.'

From the other end of the line Ravelston faintly demurred. 'No, dash it! You have dinner with ME.' But Gordon overbore him. Nonsense! Ravelston had got to have dinner with HIM tonight. Unwillingly, Ravelston assented. All right, yes, thanks; he'd like it very much. There was a sort of apologetic misery in his voice. He guessed what had happened. Gordon had got hold of money from somewhere and was squandering it immediately; as usual, Ravelston felt he hadn't the right to interfere. Where should they go? Gordon was demanding. Ravelston began to speak in praise of those jolly little Soho restaurants where you get such a wonderful dinner for half

a crown. But the Soho restaurants sounded beastly as soon as Ravelston mentioned them. Gordon wouldn't hear of it. Nonsense! They must go somewhere decent. Let's do it all regardless, was his private thought; might as well spend two quid — three quid, even. Where did Ravelston generally go? Modigliani's, admitted Ravelston. But Modigliani's was very — but no! not even over the phone could Ravelston frame that hateful word 'expensive'. How remind Gordon of his poverty? Gordon mightn't care for Modigliani's, he euphemistically said. But Gordon was satisfied. Modigliani's? Right you are — half past eight. Good! After all, if he spent even three quid on the dinner he'd still have two quid to buy himself a new pair of shoes and a vest and a pair of pants.

He had fixed it up with Rosemary in another five minutes. The New Albion did not like their employees being rung up on the phone, but it did not matter once in a way. Since that disastrous Sunday journey, five days ago, he had heard from her once but had not seen her. She answered eagerly when she heard whose voice it was. Would she have dinner with him tonight? Of course! What fun! And so in ten minutes the whole thing was settled. He had always wanted Rosemary and Ravelston to meet, but somehow had never been able to contrive it. These things are so much easier when you've got a little money to spend.

The taxi bore him westward through the darkling streets. A three-mile journey — still, he could afford it. Why spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar? He had dropped that notion of spending only two pounds tonight. He would spend three pounds, three pounds ten — four pounds if he felt like it. Slap up and regardless — that was the idea. And, oh! by the way! Julia's fiver. He hadn't sent it yet. No matter. Send it first thing in the morning. Good old Julia! She should have her fiver.

How voluptuous were the taxi cushions under his bum! He lolled this way and that. He had been drinking, of course — had had two quick ones, or possibly three, before coming away. The taxi-driver was a stout philosophic man with a weather-beaten face and a knowing eye. He and Gordon understood one another. They had palled up in the bar where Gordon was having his quick ones. As they neared the West End the taximan drew up, unbidden, at a

discreet pub on a corner. He knew what was in Gordon's mind. Gordon could do with a quick one. So could the taximan. But the drinks were on Gordon — that too was understood.

'You anticipated my thoughts,' said Gordon, climbing out.

'Yes, sir.'

'I could just about do with a quick one.'

'Thought you might, sir.'

'And could you manage one yourself, do you think?'

'Where there's a will there's a way,' said the taximan.

'Come inside,' said Gordon.

They leaned matily on the brass-edged bar, elbow to elbow, lighting two of the taximan's cigarettes. Gordon felt witty and expansive. He would have liked to tell the taximan the history of his life. The white-aproned barman hastened towards them.

'Yes sir?' said the barman.

'Gin,' said Gordon.

'Make it two,' said the taximan.

More matily than ever, they clinked glasses.

'Many happy returns,' said Gordon.

'Your birthday today, sir?'

'Only metaphorically. My re-birthday, so to speak.'

'I never had much education,' said the taximan.

'I was speaking in parables,' said Gordon.

'English is good enough for me,' said the taximan.

'It was the tongue of Shakespeare,' said Gordon.

'Literary gentleman, are you, sir, by any chance?'

'Do I look as moth-eaten as all that?'

'Not moth-eaten, sir. Only intellectual-like.'

'You're quite right. A poet.'

'Poet! It takes all sorts to make a world, don't it now?' said the taximan.

'And a bloody good world it is,' said Gordon.

His thoughts moved lyrically tonight. They had another gin and presently went back to the taxi all but arm in arm, after yet another gin. That made five gins Gordon had had this evening. There was an ethereal feeling in his veins; the gin seemed to be flowing there, mingled with his blood. He lay back in the corner of the seat,

watching the great blazing skysigns swim across the bluish dark. The evil red and blue of the Neon lights pleased him at this moment. How smoothly the taxi glided! More like a gondola than a car. It was having money that did that. Money greased the wheels. He thought of the evening ahead of him; good food, good wine, good talk — above all, no worrying about money. No damned niggling with sixpences and 'We can't afford this' and 'We can't afford that!' Rosemary and Ravelston would try to stop him being extravagant. But he would shut them up. He'd spend every penny he had if he felt like it. Ten whole quid to bust! At least, five quid. The thought of Julia passed flickeringly through his mind and disappeared again.

He was quite sober when they got to Modigliani's. The monstrous commissionaire, like a great glittering waxwork with the minimum of joints, stepped stiffly forward to open the taxi door. His grim eye looked askance at Gordon's clothes. Not that you were expected to 'dress' at Modigliani's. They were tremendously Bohemian at Modigliani's, of course; but there are ways and ways of being Bohemian, and Gordon's way was the wrong way. Gordon did not care. He bade the taximan an affectionate farewell, and tipped him half a crown over his fare, whereat the commissionaire's eye looked a little less grim. At this moment Ravelston emerged from the doorway. The commissionaire knew Ravelston, of course. He lounged out on to the pavement, a tall distinguished figure, aristocratically shabby, his eye rather moody. He was worrying already about the money this dinner was going to cost Gordon.

'Ah, there you are, Gordon!'

'Hullo, Ravelston! Where's Rosemary?'

'Perhaps she's waiting inside. I don't know her by sight, you know. But I say, Gordon, look here! Before we go in, I wanted— '

'Ah, look, there she is!'

She was coming towards them, swift and debonair. She threaded her way through the crowd with the air of some neat little destroyer gliding between large clumsy cargo-boats. And she was nicely dressed, as usual. The sub-shovel hat was cocked at its most provocative angle. Gordon's heart stirred. There was a girl for you! He was proud that Ravelston should see her. She was very gay tonight. It was written all over her that she was not going to remind

herself or Gordon of their last disastrous encounter. Perhaps she laughed and talked just a little too vivaciously as Gordon introduced them and they went inside. But Ravelston had taken a liking to her immediately. Indeed, everyone who met her did take a liking to Rosemary. The inside of the restaurant overawed Gordon for a moment. It was so horribly, artistically smart. Dark gate-leg tables, pewter candlesticks, pictures by modern French painters on the walls. One, a street scene, looked like a Utrillo. Gordon stiffened his shoulders. Damn it, what was there to be afraid of? The five pound note was tucked away in its envelope in his pocket. It was Julia's five pounds, of course; he wasn't going to spend it. Still, its presence gave him moral support. It was a kind of talisman. They were making for the corner table — Ravelston's favourite table — at the far end. Ravelston took Gordon by the arm and drew him a little back, out of Rosemary's hearing.

'Gordon, look here!'

'What?'

'Look here, you're going to have dinner with ME tonight.'

'Bosh! This is on me.'

'I do wish you would. I hate to see you spending all that money.'

'We won't talk about money tonight,' said Gordon.

'Fifty-fifty, then,' pleaded Ravelston.

'It's on me,' said Gordon firmly.

Ravelston subsided. The fat, white-haired Italian waiter was bowing and smiling beside the corner table. But it was at Ravelston, not at Gordon, that he smiled. Gordon sat down with the feeling that he must assert himself quickly. He waved away the menu which the waiter had produced.

'We must settle what we're going to drink first,' he said.

'Beer for me,' said Ravelston, with a sort of gloomy haste. 'Beer's the only drink I care about.'

'Me too,' echoed Rosemary.

'Oh, rot! We've got to have some wine. What do you like, red or white? Give me the wine list,' he said to the waiter.

'Then let's have a plain Bordeaux. Medoc or St Julien or something,' said Ravelston.

'I adore St Julien,' said Rosemary, who thought she remembered

that St Julien was always the cheapest wine on the list.

Inwardly, Gordon damned their eyes. There you are, you see! They were in league against him already. They were trying to prevent him from spending his money. There was going to be that deadly, hateful atmosphere of 'You can't afford it' hanging over everything. It made him all the more anxious to be extravagant. A moment ago he would have compromised on Burgundy. Now he decided that they must have something really expensive — something fizzy, something with a kick in it. Champagne? No, they'd never let him have champagne. Ah!

'Have you got any Asti?' he said to the waiter.

The waiter suddenly beamed, thinking of his corkage. He had grasped now that Gordon and not Ravelston was the host. He answered in the peculiar mixture of French and English which he affected.

'Asti, sir? Yes, sir. Very nice Asti! Asti Spumanti. Tres fin! Tres vif!'

Ravelston's worried eye sought Gordon's across the table. You can't afford it! his eye pleaded.

'Is that one of those fizzy wines?' said Rosemary.

'Very fizzy, madame. Very lively wine. Tres vif! Pop!' His fat hands made a gesture, picturing cascades of foam.

'Asti,' said Gordon, before Rosemary could stop him

Ravelston looked miserable. He knew that Asti would cost Gordon ten or fifteen shillings a bottle. Gordon pretended not to notice. He began talking about Stendhal — association with Duchesse de Sanseverina and her 'force vin d'Asti'. Along came the Asti in a pail of ice — a mistake, that, as Ravelston could have told Gordon. Out came the cork. Pop! The wild wine foamed into the wide flat glasses. Mysteriously the atmosphere of the table changed. Something had happened to all three of them. Even before it was drunk the wine had worked its magic. Rosemary had lost her nervousness, Ravelston his worried preoccupation with the expense, Gordon his defiant resolve to be extravagant. They were eating anchovies and bread and butter, fried sole, roast pheasant with bread sauce and chipped potatoes; but principally they were drinking and talking. And how brilliantly they were talking — or so it seemed to

them, anyway! They talked about the bloodiness of modern life and the bloodiness of modern books. What else is there to talk about nowadays? As usual (but, oh! how differently, now that there was money in his pocket and he didn't really believe what he was saying) Gordon descanted on the deadness, the dreadfulness of the age we live in. French letters and machine-guns! The movies and the Daily Mail! It was a bone-deep truth when he walked the streets with a couple of coppers in his pocket; but it was a joke at this moment. It was great fun — it IS fun when you have good food and good wine inside you — to demonstrate that we live in a dead and rotting world. He was being witty at the expense of the modern literature; they were all being witty. With the fine scorn of the unpublished Gordon knocked down reputation after reputation. Shaw, Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Huxley, Lewis, Hemingway — each with a careless phrase or two was shovelled into the dustbin. What fun it all was, if only it could last! And of course, at this particular moment, Gordon believed that it COULD last. Of the first bottle of Asti, Gordon drank three glasses, Ravelston two, and Rosemary one. Gordon became aware that a girl at the table opposite was watching him. A tall elegant girl with a shell-pink skin and wonderful, almond-shaped eyes. Rich, obviously; one of the moneyed intelligentsia. She thought him interesting — was wondering who he was. Gordon found himself manufacturing special witticisms for her benefit. And he WAS being witty, there was no doubt about that. That too was money. Money greasing the wheels — wheels of thought as well as wheels of taxis.

But somehow the second bottle of Asti was not such a success as the first. To begin with there was uncomfortableness over its ordering. Gordon beckoned to the waiter.

'Have you got another bottle of this?'

The waiter beamed fatly. 'Yes, sir! Mais certainement, monsieur!'

Rosemary frowned and tapped Gordon's foot under the table. 'No, Gordon, NO! You're not to.'

'Not to what?'

'Order another bottle. We don't want it.'

'Oh, bosh! Get another bottle, waiter.'

'Yes, sir.'

Ravelston rubbed his nose. With eyes too guilty to meet Gordon's he looked at his wine glass. 'Look here, Gordon. Let ME stand this bottle. I'd like to.'

'Bosh!' repeated Gordon.

'Get half a bottle, then,' said Rosemary.

'A whole bottle, waiter,' said Gordon.

After that nothing was the same. They still talked, laughed, argued, but things were not the same. The elegant girl at the table opposite had ceased watching Gordon. Somehow, Gordon wasn't being witty any longer. It is almost always a mistake to order a second bottle. It is like bathing for a second time on a summer day. However warm the day is, however much you have enjoyed your first bathe, you are always sorry for it if you go in a second time. The magic had departed from the wine. It seemed to foam and sparkle less, it was merely a clogging sourish liquid which you gulped down half in disgust and half in hopes of getting drunk quicker. Gordon was now definitely though secretly drunk. One half of him was drunk and the other half sober. He was beginning to have that peculiar blurred feeling, as though your features had swollen and your fingers grown thicker, which you have in the second stage of drunkenness. But the sober half of him was still in command to outward appearance, anyway. The conversation grew more and more tedious. Gordon and Ravelston talked in the detached uncomfortable manner of people who have had a little scene and are not going to admit it. They talked about Shakespeare. The conversation tailed off into a long discussion about the meaning of Hamlet. It was very dull. Rosemary stifled a yawn. While Gordon's sober half talked, his drunken half stood aside and listened. Drunken half was very angry. They'd spoiled his evening, damn them! with their arguing about that second bottle. All he wanted now was to be properly drunk and have done with it. Of the six glasses in the second bottle he drank four — for Rosemary refused more wine. But you couldn't do much on this weak stuff. Drunken half clamoured for more drink, and more, and more. Beer by the quart and the bucket! A real good rousing drink! And by God! he was going to have it later on. He thought of the five pound note stowed away in his inner pocket. He still had that to blow, anyway.

The musical clock that was concealed somewhere in Modigliani's interior struck ten.

'Shall we shove off?' said Gordon.

Ravelston's eyes looked pleadingly, guiltily across the table. Let me share the bill! his eyes said. Gordon ignored him.

'I vote we go to the Cafe Imperial,' he said.

The bill failed to sober him. A little over two quid for the dinner, thirty bob for the wine. He did not let the others see the bill, of course, but they saw him paying. He threw four pound notes on to the waiter's salver and said casually, 'Keep the change.' That left him with about ten bob besides the fiver. Ravelston was helping Rosemary on with her coat; as she saw Gordon throw notes to the waiter her lips parted in dismay. She had had no idea that the dinner was going to cost anything like four pounds. It horrified her to see him throwing money about like that. Ravelston looked gloomy and disapproving. Gordon damned their eyes again. Why did they have to keep on worrying? He could afford it, couldn't he? He still had that fiver. But by God, it wouldn't be his fault if he got home with a penny left!

But outwardly he was quite sober, and much more subdued than he had been half an hour ago. 'We'd better have a taxi to the Cafe Imperial,' he said.

'Oh, let's walk!' said Rosemary. 'It's only a step.'

'No, we'll have a taxi.'

They got into the taxi and were driven away, Gordon sitting next to Rosemary. He had half a mind to put his arm round her, in spite of Ravelston's presence. But at that moment a swirl of cold night air came in at the window and blew against Gordon's forehead. It gave him a shock. It was like one of those moments in the night when suddenly from deep sleep you are broad awake and full of some dreadful realization — as that you are doomed to die, for instance, or that your life is a failure. For perhaps a minute he was cold sober. He knew all about himself and the awful folly he was committing — knew that he had squandered five pounds on utter foolishness and was now going to squander the other five that belonged to Julia. He had a fleeting but terribly vivid vision of Julia, with her thin face and her greying hair, in the cold of her dismal bed-sitting room. Poor,

good Julia! Julia who had been sacrificed to him all her life, from whom he had borrowed pound after pound after pound; and now he hadn't even the decency to keep her five intact! He recoiled from the thought; he fled back into his drunkenness as into a refuge. Quick, quick, we're getting sober! Booze, more booze! Recapture that first fine careless rapture! Outside, the multi-coloured window of an Italian grocery, still open, swam towards them. He tapped sharply on the glass. The taxi drew up. Gordon began to climb out across Rosemary's knees.

'Where are you going, Gordon?'

'To recapture that first fine careless rapture,' said Gordon, on the pavement.

'What?'

'It's time we laid in some more booze. The pubs'll be shutting in half an hour.'

'No, Gordon, no! You're not to get anything more to drink. You've had quite enough already.'

'Wait!'

He came out of the shop nursing a litre bottle of Chianti. The grocer had taken the cork out for him and put it in loosely again. The others had grasped now that he was drunk — that he must have been drinking before he met them. It made them both embarrassed. They went into the Cafe Imperial, but the chief thought in both their minds was to get Gordon away and to bed as quickly as possible. Rosemary whispered behind Gordon's back, 'PLEASE don't let him drink any more!' Ravelston nodded gloomily. Gordon was marching ahead of them to a vacant table, not in the least troubled by the stares everyone was casting at the wine-bottle which he carried on his arm. They sat down and ordered coffee, and with some difficulty Ravelston restrained Gordon from ordering brandy as well. All of them were ill at ease. It was horrible in the great garish cafe, stuffily hot and deafeningly noisy with the jabber of several hundred voices, the clatter of plates and glasses, and the intermittent squalling of the band. All three of them wanted to get away. Ravelston was still worrying about the expense, Rosemary was worried because Gordon was drunk, Gordon was restless and thirsty. He had wanted to come here, but he was no sooner here than he wanted to escape. Drunken

half was clamouring for a bit of fun. And drunken half wasn't going to be kept in check much longer. Beer, beer! cried drunken half. Gordon hated this stuffy place. He had visions of a pub taproom with great oozy barrels and quart pots topped with foam. He kept an eye on the clock. It was nearly half past ten and the pubs even in Westminster would shut at eleven. Mustn't miss his beer! The bottle of wine was for afterwards, when the pubs were shut. Rosemary was sitting opposite him, talking to Ravelston, uncomfortably but with a sufficient pretence that she was enjoying herself and there was nothing the matter. They were still talking in a rather futile way about Shakespeare. Gordon hated Shakespeare. As he watched Rosemary talking there came over him a violent, perverse desire for her. She was leaning forward, her elbows on the table; he could see her small breasts clearly through her dress. It came to him with a kind of shock, a catch of breath, which once again almost sobered him, that he had seen her naked. She was his girl! He could have her whenever he wanted her! And by God, he was going to have her tonight! Why not? It was a fitting end to the evening. They could find a place easily enough; there are plenty of hotels round Shaftesbury Avenue where they don't ask questions if you can pay the bill. He still had his fiver. He felt her foot under the table, meaning to imprint a delicate caress upon it, and only succeeded in treading on her toe. She drew her foot away from him.

'Let's get out of this,' he said abruptly, and at once stood up.

'Oh, let's!' said Rosemary with relief.

They were in Regent Street again. Down on the left Piccadilly Circus blazed, a horrible pool of light. Rosemary's eyes turned towards the bus stop opposite.

'It's half past ten,' she said doubtfully. 'I've got to be back by eleven.'

'Oh, rot! Let's look for a decent pub. I mustn't miss my beer.'

'Oh, no, Gordon! No more pubs tonight. I couldn't drink any more. Nor ought you.'

'It doesn't matter. Come this way.'

He took her by the arm and began to lead her down towards the bottom of Regent Street, holding her rather tight as though afraid she would escape. For the moment he had forgotten about Ravelston.

Ravelston followed, wondering whether he ought to leave them to themselves or whether he ought to stay and keep an eye on Gordon. Rosemary hung back, not liking the way Gordon was pulling at her arm.

'Where are you taking me, Gordon?'

'Round the corner, where it's dark. I want to kiss you.'

'I don't think I want to be kissed.'

'Of course you do.'

'No!'

'Yes!'

She let him take her. Ravelston waited on the corner by the Regent Palace, uncertain what to do. Gordon and Rosemary disappeared round the corner and were almost immediately in darker, narrower streets. The appalling faces of tarts, like skulls coated with pink powder, peered meaningly from several doorways. Rosemary shrank from them. Gordon was rather amused.

'They think you're one of them,' he explained to her.

He stood his bottle on the pavement, carefully, against the wall, then suddenly seized her and twisted her backwards. He wanted her badly, and he did not want to waste time over preliminaries. He began to kiss her face all over, clumsily but very hard. She let him do it for a moment, but it frightened her; his face, so close to hers, looked pale, strange, and distracted. He smelt very strongly of wine. She struggled, turning her face away so that he was only kissing her hair and neck.

'Gordon, you mustn't!'

'Why mustn't I?'

'What are you doing?'

'What do you suppose I'm doing?'

He shoved her back against the wall, and with the careful, preoccupied movements of a drunken man, tried to undo the front of her dress. It was of a kind that did not undo, as it happened. This time she was angry. She struggled violently, fending his hand aside.

'Gordon, stop that at once!'

'Why?'

'If you do it again I'll smack your face.'

'Smack my face! Don't you come the Girl Guide with me.'

‘Let me go, will you!’

‘Think of last Sunday,’ he said lewdly.

‘Gordon, if you go on I’ll hit you, honestly I will.’

‘Not you.’

He thrust his hand right into the front of her dress. The movement was curiously brutal, as though she had been a stranger to him. She grasped that from the expression of his face. She was not Rosemary to him any longer, she was just a girl, a girl’s body. That was the thing that upset her. She struggled and managed to free herself from him. He came after her again and clutched her arm. She smacked his face as hard as she could and dodged neatly out of his reach.

‘What did you do that for?’ he said, feeling his cheek but not hurt by the blow.

‘I’m not going to stand that sort of thing. I’m going home. You’ll be different tomorrow.’

‘Rot! You come along with me. You’re going to bed with me.’

‘Good night!’ she said, and fled up the dark side street.

For a moment he thought of following her, but found his legs too heavy. It did not seem worth while, anyway. He wandered back to where Ravelston was still waiting, looking moody and alone, partly because he was worried about Gordon and partly because he was trying not to notice two hopeful tarts who were on patrol just behind him. Gordon looked properly drunk, Ravelston thought. His hair was tumbling down over his forehead, one side of his face was very pale and on the other there was a red smudge where Rosemary had slapped him. Ravelston thought this must be the flush of drunkenness.

‘What have you done with Rosemary?’ he said.

‘She’s gone,’ said Gordon, with a wave of his hand which was meant to explain everything. ‘But the night’s still young.’

‘Look here, Gordon, it’s time you were in bed.’

‘In bed, yes. But not alone.’

He stood on the kerb gazing out into the hideous midnight-noon. For a moment he felt quite deathly. His face was burning. His whole body had a dreadful, swollen, fiery feeling. His head in particular seemed on the point of bursting. Somehow the baleful light was bound up with his sensations. He watched the skysigns flicking on

and off, glaring red and blue, arrowing up and down — the awful, sinister glitter of a doomed civilization, like the still blazing lights of a sinking ship. He caught Ravelston's arm and made a gesture that comprehended the whole of Piccadilly Circus.

'The lights down in hell will look just like that.'

'I shouldn't wonder.'

Ravelston was looking out for a disengaged taxi. He must get Gordon home to bed without further delay. Gordon wondered whether he was in joy or in agony. That burning, bursting feeling was dreadful. The sober half of him was not dead yet. Sober half still knew with ice-cold clarity what he had done and what he was doing. He had committed follies for which tomorrow he would feel like killing himself. He had squandered five pounds in senseless extravagance, he had robbed Julia, he had insulted Rosemary. And tomorrow — oh, tomorrow, we'll be sober! Go home, go home! cried sober half. —— to you! said drunken half contemptuously. Drunken half was still clamouring for a bit of fun. And drunken half was the stronger. A fiery clock somewhere opposite caught his eye. Twenty to eleven. Quick, before the pubs are shut! Haro! la gorge m'ard! Once again his thoughts moved lyrically. He felt a hard round shape under his arm, discovered that it was the Chianti bottle, and tweaked out the cork. Ravelston was waving to a taxi-driver without managing to catch his eye. He heard a shocked squeal from the tarts behind. Turning, he saw with horror that Gordon had up-ended the bottle and was drinking from it.

'Hi! Gordon!'

He sprang towards him and forced his arm down. A gout of wine went down Gordon's collar.

'For God's sake be careful! You don't want the police to get hold of you, do you?'

'I want a drink,' complained Gordon.

'But dash it! You can't start drinking here.'

'Take me to a pub,' said Gordon.

Ravelston rubbed his nose helplessly. 'Oh, God! I suppose that's better than drinking on the pavement. Come on, we'll go to a pub. You shall have your drink there.'

Gordon recorked his bottle carefully. Ravelston shepherded him

across the circus, Gordon clinging to his arm, but not for support, for his legs were still quite steady. They halted on the island, then managed to find a gap in the traffic and went down the Haymarket.

In the pub the air seemed wet with beer. It was all a mist of beer shot through with the sickly tang of whisky. Along the bar a press of men seethed, downing with Faustlike eagerness their last drinks before eleven should sound its knell. Gordon slid easily through the crowd. He was not in a mood to worry about a few jostlings and elbowings. In a moment he had fetched up at the bar between a stout commercial traveller drinking Guinness and a tall, lean, decayed major type of man with droopy moustaches, whose entire conversation seemed to consist of 'What ho!' and 'What, what!' Gordon threw half a crown on to the beer-wet bar.

'A quart of bitter, please!'

'No quart pots here!' cried the harassed barmaid, measuring pegs of whisky with one eye on the clock.

'Quart pots on the top shelf, Effie!' shouted the landlord over his shoulder, from the other side of the bar.

The barmaid hauled the beer-handle three times hurriedly. The monstrous glass pot was set before him. He lifted it. What a weight! A pint of pure water weighs a pound and a quarter. Down with it! Swish — gurgle! A long, long sup of beer flowed gratefully down his gullet. He paused for breath, and felt a little sickish. Come on, now for another. Swish — gurgle! It almost choked him this time. But stick it out, stick it out! Through the cascade of beer that poured down his throat and seemed to drown his ears he heard the landlord's shout: 'Last orders, gentlemen, please!' For a moment he removed his face from the pot, gasped, and got his breath back. Now for the last. Swish — gurgle! A-a-ah! Gordon set down the pot. Emptied in three gulps — not bad. He clattered it on the bar.

'Hi! Give me the other half of that — quick!'

'What ho!' said the major.

'Coming it a bit, aren't you?' said the commercial traveller.

Ravelston, farther down the bar and hemmed in by several men, saw what Gordon was doing. He called to him, 'Hi, Gordon!', frowned and shook his head, too shy to say in front of everybody, 'Don't drink any more.' Gordon settled himself on his legs. He was

still steady, but consciously steady. His head seemed to have swollen to an immense size, his whole body had the same horrible, swollen, fiery feeling as before. Languidly he lifted the refilled beerpot. He did not want it now. Its smell nauseated him. It was just a hateful, pale yellow, sickly-tasting liquid. Like urine, almost! That bucketful of stuff to be forced down into his bursting guts — horrible! But come on, no flinching! What else are we here for? Down with it! Here she is so near my nose. So tip her up and down she goes. Swish — gurgle!

In the same moment something dreadful happened. His gullet had shut up of its own accord, or the beer had missed his mouth. It was pouring all over him, a tidal wave of beer. He was drowning in beer like lay-brother Peter in the Ingoldsby Legends. Help! He tried to shout, choked, and let fall the beer-pot. There was a flurry all round him. People were leaping aside to avoid the jet of beer. Crash! went the pot. Gordon stood rocking. Men, bottles, mirrors were going round and round. He was falling, losing consciousness. But dimly visible before him was a black upright shape, sole point of stability in a reeling world — the beer-handle. He clutched it, swung, held tight. Ravelston started towards him.

The barmaid leaned indignantly over the bar. The roundabout world slowed down and stopped. Gordon's brain was quite clear.

'Here! What are you hanging on to the beer-handle for?'

'All over my bloody trousers!' cried the commercial traveller.

'What am I hanging on to the beer-handle for?'

'YES! What are you hanging on to the beer-handle for?'

Gordon swung himself sideways. The elongated face of the major peered down at him, with wet moustaches drooping.

'She says, "What am I hanging on to the beer-handle for?"'

'What ho! What?'

Ravelston had forced his way between several men and reached him. He put a strong arm round Gordon's waist and hoisted him to his feet.

'Stand up, for God's sake! You're drunk.'

'Drunk?' said Gordon.

Everyone was laughing at them. Ravelston's pale face flushed.

'Two and three those mugs cost,' said the barmaid bitterly.

‘And what about my bloody trousers?’ said the commercial traveller.

‘I’ll pay for the mug,’ said Ravelston. He did so. ‘Now come on out of it. You’re drunk.’

He began to shepherd Gordon towards the door, one arm round his shoulder, the other holding the Chianti bottle, which he had taken from him earlier. Gordon freed himself. He could walk with perfect steadiness. He said in a dignified manner:

‘Drunk did you say I was?’

Ravelston took his arm again. ‘Yes, I’m afraid you are. Decidedly.’

‘Swan swam across the sea, well swam swan,’ said Gordon.

‘Gordon, you ARE drunk. The sooner you’re in bed the better.’

‘First cast out the beam that is in thine own eye before thou castest out the mote that is in thy brother’s,’ said Gordon.

Ravelston had got him out on to the pavement by this time. ‘We’d better get hold of a taxi,’ he said, looking up and down the street.

There seemed to be no taxis about, however. The people were streaming noisily out of the pub, which was on the point of closing. Gordon felt better in the open air. His brain had never been clearer. The red satanic gleam of a Neon light, somewhere in the distance, put a new and brilliant idea into his head. He plucked at Ravelston’s arm.

‘Ravelston! I say, Ravelston!’

‘What?’

‘Let’s pick up a couple of tarts.’

In spite of Gordon’s drunken state, Ravelston was scandalized. ‘My dear old chap! You can’t do that kind of thing.’

‘Don’t be so damned upper-class. Why not?’

‘But how could you, dash it! After you’ve just said good night to Rosemary — a really charming girl like that!’

‘At night all cats are grey,’ said Gordon, with the feeling that he voiced a profound and cynical wisdom.

Ravelston decided to ignore this remark. ‘We’d better walk up to Piccadilly Circus,’ he said. ‘There’ll be plenty of taxis there.’

The theatres were emptying. Crowds of people and streams of cars flowed to and fro in the frightful corpse-light. Gordon’s brain

was marvellously clear. He knew what folly and evil he had committed and was about to commit. And yet after all it hardly seemed to matter. He saw as something far, far away, like something seen through the wrong end of the telescope, his thirty years, his wasted life, the blank future, Julia's five pounds, Rosemary. He said with a sort of philosophic interest:

'Look at the Neon lights! Look at those awful blue ones over the rubber shop. When I see those lights I know that I'm a damned soul.'

'Quite,' said Ravelston, who was not listening. 'Ah, there's a taxi!' He signalled. 'Damn! He didn't see me. Wait here a second.'

He left Gordon by the Tube station and hurried across the street. For a little while Gordon's mind receded into blankness. Then he was aware of two hard yet youthful faces, like the faces of young predatory animals, that had come close up to his own. They had blackened eye-brows and hats that were like vulgarer versions of Rosemary's. He was exchanging badinage with them. This seemed to him to have been going on for several minutes.

'Hullo, Dora! Hullo, Barbara! (He knew their names, it seemed.) And how are you? And how's old England's winding-sheet?'

'Oo — haven't you got a cheek, just!'

'And what are you up to at this time of night?'

'Oo — jes' strolling around.'

'Like a lion, seeking whom he may devour?'

'Oo — you haven't half got a cheek! Hasn't he got a cheek, Barbara? You HAVE got a cheek!'

Ravelston had caught the taxi and brought it round to where Gordon was standing. He stepped out, saw Gordon between the two girls, and stood aghast.

'Gordon! Oh, my God! What the devil have you been doing?'

'Let me introduce you. Dora and Barbara,' said Gordon.

For a moment Ravelston looked almost angry. As a matter of fact, Ravelston was incapable of being properly angry. Upset, pained, embarrassed — yes; but not angry. He stepped forward with a miserable effort not to notice the two girls' existence. Once he noticed them the game was up. He took Gordon by the arm and would have bundled him into the taxi.

'Come on, Gordon, for God's sake! Here's the taxi. We'll go

straight home and put you to bed.'

Dora caught Gordon's other arm and hauled him out of reach as though he had been a stolen handbag.

'What bloody business is it of yours?' she cried ferociously.

'You don't want to insult these two ladies, I hope?' said Gordon.

Ravelston faltered, stepped back, rubbed his nose. It was a moment to be firm; but Ravelston had never in his life been firm. He looked from Dora to Gordon, from Gordon to Barbara. That was fatal. Once he had looked them in the face he was lost. Oh, God! What could he do? They were human beings — he couldn't insult them. The same instinct that sent his hand into his pocket at the very sight of a beggar made him helpless at this moment. The poor, wretched girls! He hadn't the heart to send them packing into the night. Suddenly he realized that he would have to go through with this abominable adventure into which Gordon had led him. For the first time in his life he was let in for going home with a tart.

'But dash it all!' he said feebly.

'Allons-y,' said Gordon.

The taximan had taken his direction at a nod from Dora. Gordon slumped into the corner seat and seemed immediately to sink into some immense abyss from which he rose again more gradually and with only partial consciousness of what he had been doing. He was gliding smoothly through darkness starred with lights. Or were the lights moving and he stationary? It was like being on the ocean bottom, among the luminous, gliding fishes. The fancy returned to him that he was a damned soul in hell. The landscape in hell would be just like this. Ravines of cold evil-coloured fire, with darkness all above. But in hell there would be torment. Was this torment? He strove to classify his sensations. The momentary lapse into unconsciousness had left him weak, sick, shaken; his forehead seemed to be splitting. He put out a hand. It encountered a knee, a garter, and a small soft hand which sought mechanically for his. He became aware that Ravelston, sitting opposite, was tapping his toe urgently and nervously.

'Gordon! Gordon! Wake up!'

'What?'

'Gordon! Oh, damn! Causons en francais. Qu'est-ce que tu as

fait? Crois-tu que je veux coucher avec une sale — oh, damnation!'

'Oo-parley-voo francey!' squealed the girls.

Gordon was mildly amused. Do Ravelston good, he thought. A parlour Socialist going home with a tart! The first genuinely proletarian action of his life. As though aware of this thought, Ravelston subsided into his corner in silent misery, sitting as far away from Barbara as possible. The taxi drew up at a hotel in a side-street; a dreadful, shoddy, low place it was. The 'hotel' sign over the door looked skew-eyed. The windows were almost dark, but the sound of singing, boozy and dreary, trickled from within. Gordon staggered out of the taxi and felt for Dora's arm. Give us a hand, Dora. Mind the step. What ho!

A smallish, darkish, smelly hallway, lino-carpeted, mean, uncared-for, and somehow impermanent. From a room somewhere on the left the singing swelled, mournful as a church organ. A cross-eyed, evil-looking chambermaid appeared from nowhere. She and Dora seemed to know one another. What a mug! No competition there. From the room on the left a single voice took up the song with would-be facetious emphasis:

'The man that kisses a pretty girl And goes and tells his mother, Ought to have his lips cut off, Ought to— '

It tailed away, full of the ineffable, undisguisable sadness of debauchery. A very young voice it sounded. The voice of some poor boy who in his heart only wanted to be at home with his mother and sisters, playing hunt-the-slipper. There was a party of young fools in there, on the razzle with whisky and girls. The tune reminded Gordon. He turned to Ravelston as he came in, Barbara following.

'Where's my Chianti?' he said.

Ravelston gave him the bottle. His face looked pale, harassed, hunted, almost. With guilty restless movements he kept himself apart from Barbara. He could not touch her or even look at her, and yet to escape was beyond him. His eyes sought Gordon's. 'For the love of God can't we get out of it somehow?' they signalled. Gordon frowned at him. Stick it out! No flinching! He took Dora's arm again. Come on, Dora! Now for those stairs. Ah! Wait a moment.

Her arm round his waist, supporting him, Dora drew him aside. Down the darkish, smelly stairs a young woman came mincingly,

buttoning on a glove; after her a bald, middle-aged man in evening clothes, black overcoat, and white silk muffler, his opera hat in his hand. He walked past them with small mean mouth tightened, pretending not to see them. A family man, by the guilty look in his eye. Gordon watched the gaslight gleam on the back of his bald head. His predecessor. In the same bed, probably. The mantle of Elisha. Now then, Dora, up we go! Ah, these stairs! Difficilis ascensus Averni. That's right, here we are! 'Mind the step,' said Dora. They were on the landing. Black and white lino like a chessboard. White-painted doors. A smell of slops and a fainter smell of stale linen.

We this way, you that. At the other door Ravelston halted, his fingers on the handle. He could not — no, he COULD not do it. He could not enter that dreadful room. For the last time his eyes, like those of a dog about to be whipped, turned upon Gordon. 'Must I, must I?' his eyes said. Gordon eyed him sternly. Stick it out, Regulus! March to your doom! Atqui sciebat quae sibi Barbara. It is a far, far more proletarian thing that you do. And then with startling suddenness Ravelston's face cleared. An expression of relief, almost of joy, stole over it. A wonderful thought had occurred to him. After all, you could always pay the girl without actually doing anything! Thank God! He set his shoulders, plucked up courage, went in. The door shut.

So here we are. A mean, dreadful room. Lino on the floor, gas-fire, huge double bed with sheets vaguely dingy. Over the bed a framed coloured picture from La Vie Parisienne. A mistake, that. Sometimes the originals don't compare so well. And, by Jove! on the bamboo table by the window, positively an aspidistra! Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? But come here, Dora. Let's have a look at you.

He seemed to be lying on the bed. He could not see very well. Her youthful, rapacious face, with blackened eyebrows, leaned over him as he sprawled there.

'How about my present?' she demanded, half wheedling, half menacing.

Never mind that now. To work! Come here. Not a bad mouth. Come here. Come closer. Ah!

No. No use. Impossible. The will but not the way. The spirit is

willing but the flesh is weak. Try again. No. The booze, it must be. See Macbeth. One last try. No, no use. Not this evening, I'm afraid.

All right, Dora, don't you worry. You'll get your two quid all right. We aren't paying by results.

He made a clumsy gesture. 'Here, give us that bottle. That bottle off the dressing-table.'

Dora brought it. Ah, that's better. That at least doesn't fail. With hands that had swollen to monstrous size he up-ended the Chianti bottle. The wine flowed down his throat, bitter and choking, and some of it went up his nose. It overwhelmed him. He was slipping, sliding, falling off the bed. His head met the floor. His legs were still on the bed. For a while he lay in this position. Is this the way to live? Down below the youthful voices were still mournfully singing:

'For tonight we'll merry be, For tonight we'll merry be, For tonight we'll merry be-e-e — Tomorrow we'll be so-ober!'

Chapter 9

And, by Jove, tomorrow we WERE sober!

Gordon emerged from some long, sickly dream to the consciousness that the books in the lending library were the wrong way up. They were all lying on their sides. Moreover, for some reason their backs had turned white — white and shiny, like porcelain.

He opened his eyes a little wider and moved an arm. Small rivulets of pain, seemingly touched off by the movement, shot through his body at unexpected places — down the calves of his legs, for instance, and up both sides of his head. He perceived that he was lying on his side, with a hard smooth pillow under his cheek and a coarse blanket scratching his chin and pushing its hairs into his mouth. Apart from the minor pains that stabbed him every time he moved, there was a large, dull sort of pain which was not localized but which seemed to hover all over him.

Suddenly he flung off the blanket and sat up. He was in a police cell. At this moment a frightful spasm of nausea overcame him. Dimly perceiving a W.C. in the corner, he crept towards it and was violently sick, three or four times.

After that, for several minutes, he was in agonizing pain. He could scarcely stand on his feet, his head throbbed as though it were going to burst, and the light seemed like some scalding white liquid pouring into his brain through the sockets of his eyes. He sat on the bed holding his head between his hands. Presently, when some of the throbbing had died down, he had another look about him. The cell measured about twelve feet long by six wide and was very high. The walls were all of white porcelain bricks, horribly white and clean. He wondered dully how they cleaned as high up as the ceiling. Perhaps with a hose, he reflected. At one end there was a little barred window, very high up, and at the other end, over the door, an electric bulb let into the wall and protected by a stout grating. The thing he was sitting on was not actually a bed, but a shelf with one blanket and a canvas pillow. The door was of steel, painted green. In the door there was a little round hole with a flap on the outside.

Having seen this much he lay down and pulled the blanket over him again. He had no further curiosity about his surroundings. As to what had happened last night, he remembered everything — at least, he remembered everything up to the time when he had gone with Dora into the room with the aspidistra. God knew what had happened after that. There had been some kind of bust-up and he had landed in the clink. He had no notion of what he had done; it might be murder for all he knew. In any case he did not care. He turned his face to the wall and pulled the blanket over his head to shut out the light.

After a long time the spyhole in the door was pushed aside. Gordon managed to turn his head round. His neck-muscles seemed to creak. Through the spyhole he could see a blue eye and a semi-circle of pink chubby cheek.

‘‘Ja do with a cup of tea?’ a voice said.

Gordon sat up and instantly felt very sick again. He took his head between his hands and groaned. The thought of a cup of hot tea appealed to him, but he knew it would make him sick if it had sugar in it.

‘Please,’ he said.

The police constable opened a partition in the top half of the door and passed in a thick white mug of tea. It had sugar in it. The constable was a solid rosy young man of about twenty-five, with a kind face, white eyelashes, and a tremendous chest. It reminded Gordon of the chest of a carthorse. He spoke with a good accent but with vulgar turns of speech. For a minute or so he stood regarding Gordon.

‘You weren’t half bad last night,’ he said finally.

‘I’m bad now.’

‘You was worse last night, though. What you go and hit the sergeant for?’

‘Did I hit the sergeant?’

‘Did you? Coo! He wasn’t half wild. He turns to me and he says — holding his ear he was, like this — he says, “Now, if that man wasn’t too drunk to stand, I’d knock his block off.” It’s all gone down on your charge sheet. Drunk and disorderly. You’d only ha’ bin drunk and incapable if you hadn’t of hit the sergeant.’

‘Do you know what I shall get for this?’

‘Five quid or fourteen days. You’ll go up before Mr Groom. Lucky for you it wasn’t Mr Walker. He’d give you a month without the option, Mr Walker would. Very severe on the drunks he is. Teetotaller.’

Gordon had drunk some of the tea. It was nauseatingly sweet but its warmth made him feel stronger. He gulped it down. At this moment a nasty, snarling sort of voice — the sergeant whom Gordon had hit, no doubt — yelped from somewhere outside:

‘Take that man out and get him washed. Black Maria leaves at half past nine.’

The constable hastened to open the cell door. As soon as Gordon stepped outside he felt worse then ever. This was partly because it was much colder in the passage than in the cell. He walked a step or two, and then suddenly his head was going round and round. ‘I’m going to be sick!’ he cried. He was falling — he flung out a hand and stopped himself against the wall. The constable’s strong arm went round him. Across the arm, as over a rail, Gordon sagged, doubled up and limp. A jet of vomit burst from him. It was the tea, of course. There was a gutter running along the stone floor. At the end of the passage the moustachio’d sergeant, in tunic without a belt, stood with his hand on his hip, looking on disgustedly.

‘Dirty little tyke,’ he muttered, and turned away.

‘Come on, old chap,’ said the constable. ‘You’ll be better in half a mo’.’

He half led, half dragged Gordon to a big stone sink at the end of the passage and helped him to strip to the waist. His gentleness was astonishing. He handled Gordon almost like a nurse handling a child. Gordon had recovered enough strength to sluice himself with the ice-cold water and rinse his mouth out. The constable gave him a torn towel to dry himself with and then led him back to the cell.

‘Now you sit quiet till the Black Maria comes. And take my tip — when you go up to the court, you plead guilty and say you won’t do it again. Mr Groom won’t be hard on you.’

‘Where are my collar and tie?’ said Gordon.

‘We took ‘em away last night. You’ll get ‘em back before you go up to court. We had a bloke hung himself with his tie, once.’

Gordon sat down on the bed. For a little while he occupied

himself by calculating the number of porcelain bricks in the walls, then sat with his elbows on his knees, his head between his hands. He was still aching all over; he felt weak, cold, jaded, and, above all, bored. He wished that boring business of going up to the court could be avoided somehow. The thought of being put into some jolting vehicle and taken across London to hang about in chilly cells and passages, and of having to answer questions and be lectured by magistrates, bored him indescribably. All he wanted was to be left alone. But presently there was the sound of several voices farther down the passage, and then of feet approaching. The partition in the door was opened.

'Couple of visitors for you,' the constable said.

Gordon was bored by the very thought of visitors. Unwillingly he looked up, and saw Flaxman and Ravelston looking in upon him. How they had got there together was a mystery, but Gordon felt not the faintest curiosity about it. They bored him. He wished they would go away.

'Hullo, chappie!' said Flaxman.

'YOU here?' said Gordon with a sort of weary offensiveness.

Ravelston looked miserable. He had been up since the very early morning, looking for Gordon. This was the first time he had seen the interior of a police cell. His face shrank with disgust as he looked at the chilly white-tiled place with its shameless W.C. in the corner. But Flaxman was more accustomed to this kind of thing. He cocked a practised eye at Gordon.

'I've seen 'em worse,' he said cheerfully. 'Give him a prairie oyster and he'd buck up something wonderful. D'you know what your eyes look like, chappie?' he added to Gordon. 'They look as if they'd been taken out and poached.'

'I was drunk last night,' said Gordon, his head between his hands.

'I gathered something of the kind, old chappie.'

'Look here, Gordon,' said Ravelston, 'we came to bail you out, but it seems we're too late. They're taking you up to court in a few minutes' time. This is a bloody show. It's a pity you didn't give them a false name when they brought you here last night.'

'Did I tell them my name?'

‘You told them everything. I wish to God I hadn’t let you out of my sight. You slipped out of that house somehow and into the street.’

‘Wandering up and down Shaftesbury Avenue, drinking out of a bottle,’ said Flaxman appreciatively. ‘But you oughtn’t to have hit the sergeant, old chappie! That was a bit of bloody foolishness. And I don’t mind telling you Mother Wisbeach is on your track. When your pal here came round this morning and told her you’d been for a night on the tiles, she took on as if you’d done a bloody murder.’

‘And look here, Gordon,’ said Ravelston.

There was the familiar note of discomfort in his face. It was something about money, as usual. Gordon looked up. Ravelston was gazing into the distance.

‘Look here.’

‘What?’

‘About your fine. You’d better leave that to me. I’ll pay it.’

‘No, you won’t.’

‘My dear old chap! They’ll send you to jail if I don’t.’

‘Oh, hell! I don’t care.’

He did not care. At this moment he did not care if they sent him to prison for a year. Of course he couldn’t pay his fine himself. He knew without even needing to look that he had no money left. He would have given it all to Dora, or more probably she would have pinched it. He lay down on the bed again and turned his back on the others. In the sulky, sluggish state that he was in, his sole desire was to get rid of them. They made a few more attempts to talk to him, but he would not answer, and presently they went away. Flaxman’s voice boomed cheerfully down the passage. He was giving Ravelston minute instructions as to how to make a prairie oyster.

The rest of that day was very beastly. Beastly was the ride in the Black Maria, which, inside, was like nothing so much as a miniature public lavatory, with tiny cubicles down each side, into which you were locked and in which you had barely room to sit down. Beastlier yet was the long wait in one of the cells adjoining the magistrate’s court. This cell was an exact replica of the cell at the police station, even to having precisely the same number of porcelain bricks. But it differed from the police station cell in being repulsively dirty. It was cold, but the air was so fetid as to be almost unbreathable. Prisoners

were coming and going all the time. They would be thrust into the cell, taken out after an hour or two to go up to the court, and then perhaps brought back again to wait while the magistrate decided upon their sentence or fresh witnesses were sent for. There were always five or six men in the cell, and there was nothing to sit on except the plank bed. And the worst was that nearly all of them used the W.C. — there, publicly, in the tiny cell. They could not help it. There was nowhere else to go. And the plug of the beastly thing did not even pull properly.

Until the afternoon Gordon felt sick and weak. He had had no chance to shave, and his face was hatefully scrubby. At first he merely sat on the corner of the plank bed, at the end nearest the door, as far away from the W.C. as he could get, and took no notice of the other prisoners. They bored and disgusted him; later, as his headache wore off, he observed them with a faint interest. There was a professional burglar, a lean worried-looking man with grey hair, who was in a terrible stew about what would happen to his wife and kids if he were sent to jail. He had been arrested for 'loitering with intent to enter' — a vague offence for which you generally get convicted if there are previous convictions against you. He kept walking up and down, flicking the fingers of his right hand with a curious nervous gesture, and exclaiming against the unfairness of it. There was also a deaf mute who stank like a ferret, and a small middle-aged Jew with a fur-collared overcoat, who had been buyer to a large firm of kosher butchers. He had bolted with twenty-seven pounds, gone to Aberdeen, of all places, and spent the money on tarts. He too had a grievance, for he said his case ought to have been tried in the rabbi's court instead of being turned over to the police. There was also a publican who had embezzled his Christmas club money. He was a big, hearty, prosperous-looking man of about thirty-five, with a loud red face and a loud blue overcoat — the sort of man who, if he were not a publican, would be a bookie. His relatives had paid back the embezzled money, all except twelve pounds, but the club members had decided to prosecute. There was something in this man's eyes that troubled Gordon. He carried everything off with a swagger, but all the while there was that blank, staring look in his eyes; he would fall into a kind of reverie at every gap in the conversation. It was

somehow rather dreadful to see him. There he was, still in his smart clothes, with the splendour of a publican's life only a month or two behind him; and now he was ruined, probably for ever. Like all London publicans he was in the claw of the brewer, he would be sold up and his furniture and fittings seized, and when he came out of jail he would never have a pub or a job again.

The morning wore on with dismal slowness. You were allowed to smoke — matches were forbidden, but the constable on duty outside would give you a light through the trap in the door. Nobody had any cigarettes except the publican, who had his pockets full of them and distributed them freely. Prisoners came and went. A ragged dirty man who claimed to be a coster 'up' for obstruction was put into the cell for half an hour. He talked a great deal, but the others were deeply suspicious of him; when he was taken out again they all declared he was a 'split'. The police, it was said, often put a 'split' into the cells, disguised as a prisoner, to pick up information. Once there was great excitement when the constable whispered through the trap that a murderer, or would-be murderer, was being put into the cell next door. He was a youth of eighteen who had stabbed his 'tart' in the belly, and she was not expected to live. Once the trap opened and the tired, pale face of a clergyman looked in. He saw the burglar, said wearily, 'YOU here again, Jones?' and went away again. Dinner, so-called, was served out at about twelve o'clock. All you got was a cup of tea and two slices of bread and marg. You could have food sent in, though, if you could pay for it. The publican had a good dinner sent in in covered dishes; but he had no appetite for it, and gave most of it away. Ravelston was still hanging about the court, waiting for Gordon's case to come on, but he did not know the ropes well enough to have food sent in to Gordon. Presently the burglar and the publican were taken away, sentenced, and brought back to wait till the Black Maria should take them off to jail. They each got nine months. The publican questioned the burglar about what prison was like. There was a conversation of unspeakable obscenity about the lack of women there.

Gordon's case came on at half past two, and it was over so quickly that it seemed preposterous to have waited all that time for it. Afterwards he could remember nothing about the court except the

coat of arms over the magistrate's chair. The magistrate was dealing with the drunks at the rate of two a minute. To the tune of 'John-Smith-drunk six-shillings-move-on-NEXT!' they filed past the railings of the dock, precisely like a crowd taking tickets at a booking-office. Gordon's case, however, took two minutes instead of thirty seconds, because he had been disorderly and the sergeant had to testify that Gordon had struck him on the ear and called him a —— bastard. There was also a mild sensation in the court because Gordon, when questioned at the police station, had described himself as a poet. He must have been very drunk to say a thing like that. The magistrate looked at him suspiciously.

'I see you call yourself a POET. ARE you a poet?'

'I write poetry,' said Gordon sulkily.

'Hm! Well, it doesn't seem to teach you to behave yourself, does it? You will pay five pounds or go to prison for fourteen days. NEXT!'

And that was all. Nevertheless, somewhere at the back of the court a bored reporter had pricked up his ears.

On the other side of the court there was a room where a police sergeant sat with a large ledger, entering up the drunks' fines and taking payment. Those who could not pay were taken back to the cells. Gordon had expected this to happen to himself. He was quite resigned to going to prison. But when he emerged from the court it was to find that Ravelston was waiting there and had already paid his fine for him. Gordon did not protest. He allowed Ravelston to pack him into a taxi and take him back to the flat in Regent's Park. As soon as they got there Gordon had a hot bath; he needed one, after the beastly contaminating grime of the last twelve hours. Ravelston lent him a razor, lent him a clean shirt and pyjamas and socks and underclothes, even went out of doors and bought him a toothbrush. He was strangely solicitous about Gordon. He could not rid himself of a guilty feeling that what had happened last night was mainly his own fault; he ought to have put his foot down and taken Gordon home as soon as he showed signs of being drunk. Gordon scarcely noticed what was being done for him. Even the fact the Ravelston had paid his fine failed to trouble him. For the rest of that afternoon he lay in one of the armchairs in front of the fire, reading a detective

story. About the future he refused to think. He grew sleepy very early. At eight o'clock he went to bed in the spare bedroom and slept like a log for nine hours.

It was not till next morning that he began to think seriously about his situation. He woke in the wide caressing bed, softer and warmer than any bed he had ever slept in, and began to grope about for his matches. Then he remembered that in places like this you didn't need matches to get a light, and felt for the electric switch that hung on a cord at the bedhead. Soft light flooded the room. There was a syphon of soda water on the bed-table. Gordon discovered that even after thirty-six hours there was still a vile taste in his mouth. He had a drink and looked about him.

It was a queer feeling, lying there in somebody else's pyjamas in somebody else's bed. He felt that he had no business there — that this wasn't the sort of place where he belonged. There was a sense of guilt in lying here in luxury when he was ruined and hadn't a penny in the world. For he was ruined right enough, there was no doubt about that. He seemed to know with perfect certainty that his job was lost. God knew what was going to happen next. The memory of that stupid dull debauch rolled back upon him with beastly vividness. He could recall everything, from his first pink gin before he started out to Dora's peach-coloured garters. He squirmed when he thought of Dora. WHY does one do these things? Money again, always money! The rich don't behave like that. The rich are graceful even in their vices. But if you have no money you don't even know how to spend it when you get it. You just splurge it frantically away, like a sailor in a bawdy-house his first night ashore.

He had been in the clink, twelve hours. He thought of the cold faecal stench of that cell at the police court. A foretaste of future days. And everyone would know that he had been in the clink. With luck it might be kept from Aunt Angela and Uncle Walter, but Julia and Rosemary probably knew already. With Rosemary it didn't matter so much, but Julia would be ashamed and miserable. He thought of Julia. Her long thin back as she bent over the tea-caddy; her good, goose-like, defeated face. She had never lived. From childhood she had been sacrificed to him — to Gordon, to 'the boy'. It might be a hundred quid he had 'borrowed' from her in all these

years; and then even five quid he couldn't spare her. Five quid he had set aside for her, and then spent it on a tart!

He turned out the light and lay on his back, wide awake. At this moment he saw himself with frightful clarity. He took a sort of inventory of himself and his possessions. Gordon Comstock, last of the Comstocks, thirty years old, with twenty-six teeth left; with no money and no job; in borrowed pyjamas in a borrowed bed; with nothing before him except cadging and destitution, and nothing behind him except squalid fooleries. His total wealth a puny body and two cardboard suitcases full of worn-out clothes.

At seven Ravelston was awakened by a tap on his door. He rolled over and said sleepily, 'Hullo?' Gordon came in, a dishevelled figure almost lost in the borrowed silk pyjamas. Ravelston roused himself, yawning. Theoretically he got up at the proletarian hour of seven. Actually he seldom stirred until Mrs Beaver, the charwoman, arrived at eight. Gordon pushed the hair out of his eyes and sat down on the foot of Ravelston's bed.

'I say, Ravelston, this is bloody. I've been thinking things over. There's going to be hell to pay.'

'What?'

'I shall lose my job. McKechnie can't keep me on after I've been in the clink. Besides, I ought to have been at work yesterday. Probably the shop wasn't opened all day.'

Ravelston yawned. 'It'll be all right, I think. That fat chap — what's his name? Flaxman — rang McKechnie up and told him you were down with flu. He made it pretty convincing. He said your temperature was a hundred and three. Of course your landlady knows. But I don't suppose she'd tell McKechnie.'

'But suppose it's got into the papers!'

'Oh, lord! I suppose that might happen. The char brings the papers up at eight. But do they report drunk cases? Surely not?'

Mrs Beaver brought the Telegraph and the Herald. Ravelston sent her out for the Mail and the Express. They searched hurriedly through the police-court news. Thank God! it hadn't 'got into the papers' after all. There was no reason why it should, as a matter of fact. It was not as if Gordon had been a racing motorist or a professional footballer. Feeling better, Gordon managed to eat some

breakfast, and after breakfast Ravelston went out. It was agreed that he should go up to the shop, see Mr McKechnie, give him further details of Gordon's illness, and find out how the land lay. It seemed quite natural to Ravelston to waste several days in getting Gordon out of his scrape. All the morning Gordon hung about the flat, restless and out of sorts, smoking cigarettes in an endless chain. Now that he was alone, hope had deserted him. He knew by profound instinct that Mr McKechnie would have heard about his arrest. It wasn't the kind of thing you could keep dark. He had lost his job, and that was all about it.

He lounged across to the window and looked out. A desolate day; the whitey-grey sky looked as if it could never be blue again; the naked trees wept slowly into the gutters. Down a neighbouring street the cry of the coal-man echoed mournfully. Only a fortnight to Christmas now. Jolly to be out of work at this time of year! But the thought, instead of frightening him, merely bored him. The peculiar lethargic feeling, the stuffy heaviness behind the eyes, that one has after a fit of drunkenness, seemed to have settled upon him permanently. The prospect of searching for another job bored him even more than the prospect of poverty. Besides, he would never find another job. There are no jobs to be had nowadays. He was going down, down into the sub-world of the unemployed — down, down into God knew what workhouse depths of dirt and hunger and futility. And chiefly he was anxious to get it over with as little fuss and effort as possible.

Ravelston came back at about one o'clock. He pulled his gloves off and threw them into a chair. He looked tired and depressed. Gordon saw at a glance that the game was up.

'He's heard, of course?' he said.

'Everything, I'm afraid.'

'How? I suppose that cow of a Wisbeach woman went and sneaked to him?'

'No. It was in the paper after all. The local paper. He got it out of that.'

'Oh, hell! I'd forgotten that.'

Ravelston produced from his coat pocket a folded copy of a bi-weekly paper. It was one that they took in at the shop because Mr

McKechnie advertised in it — Gordon had forgotten that. He opened it. Gosh! What a splash! It was all over the middle page.

BOOKSELLER'S ASSISTANT FINED
MAGISTRATE'S SEVERE STRICTURE
'DISGRACEFUL FRACAS'

There were nearly two columns of it. Gordon had never been so famous before and never would be again. They must have been very hard up for a bit of news. But these local papers have a curious notion of patriotism. They are so avid for local news that a bicycle-accident in the Harrow Road will occupy more space than a European crisis, and such items of news as 'Hampstead Man on Murder Charge' or 'Dismembered Baby in Cellar in Camberwell' are displayed with positive pride.

Ravelston described his interview with Mr McKechnie. Mr McKechnie, it seemed, was torn between his rage against Gordon and his desire not to offend such a good customer as Ravelston. But of course, after such a thing like that, you could hardly expect him to take Gordon back. These scandals were bad for trade, and besides, he was justly angry at the lies Flaxman had told him over the phone. But he was angriest of all at the thought of HIS assistant being drunk and disorderly. Ravelston said that the drunkenness seemed to anger him in a way that was peculiar. He gave the impression that he would almost have preferred Gordon to pinch money out of the till. Of course, he was a teetotaller himself. Gordon had sometimes wondered whether he wasn't also a secret drinker, in the traditional Scottish style. His nose was certainly very red. But perhaps it was snuff that did it. Anyway, that was that. Gordon was in the soup, full fathom five.

'I suppose the Wisbeach will stick to my clothes and things,' he said. 'I'm not going round there to fetch them. Besides, I owe her a week's rent.'

'Oh, don't worry about that. I'll see to your rent and everything.'

'My dear chap, I can't let you pay my rent!'

'Oh, dash it!' Ravelston's face grew faintly pink. He looked miserably into the distance, and then said what he had to say all in a sudden burst: 'Look here, Gordon, we must get this settled. You've just got to stay here till this business has blown over. I'll see you

through about money and all that. You needn't think you're being a nuisance, because you're not. And anyway, it's only till you get another job.'

Gordon moved moodily away from him, his hands in his pockets. He had foreseen all this, of course. He knew that he ought to refuse, he WANTED to refuse, and yet he had not quite the courage.

'I'm not going to sponge on you like that,' he said sulkily.

'Don't use such expressions, for God's sake! Besides, where could you go if you didn't stay here?'

'I don't know — into the gutter, I suppose. It's where I belong. The sooner I get there the better.'

'Rot! You're going to stay here till you've found another job.'

'But there isn't a job in the world. It might be a year before I found a job. I don't WANT a job.'

'You mustn't talk like that. You'll find a job right enough. Something's bound to turn up. And for God's sake don't talk about SPONGING on me. It's only an arrangement between friends. If you really want to, you can pay it all back when you've got the money.'

'Yes — WHEN!'

But in the end he let himself be persuaded. He had known that he would let himself be persuaded. He stayed on at the flat, and allowed Ravelston to go round to Willowbed Road and pay his rent and recover his two cardboard suitcases; he even allowed Ravelston to 'lend' him a further two pounds for current expenses. His heart sickened while he did it. He was living on Ravelston — sponging on Ravelston. How could there ever be a real friendship between them again? Besides, in his heart he didn't want to be helped. He only wanted to be left alone. He was headed for the gutter; better to reach the gutter quickly and get it over. Yet for the time being he stayed, simply because he lacked the courage to do otherwise.

But as for this business of getting a job, it was hopeless from the start. Even Ravelston, though rich, could not manufacture jobs out of nothing. Gordon knew beforehand that there were no jobs going begging in the book trade. During the next three days he wore his shoes out traipsing from bookseller to bookseller. At shop after shop he set his teeth, marched in, demanded to see the manager, and three minutes later marched out again with his nose in the air. The answer

was always the same — no jobs vacant. A few booksellers were taking on an extra man for the Christmas rush, but Gordon was not the type they were looking for. He was neither smart nor servile; he wore shabby clothes and spoke with the accent of a gentleman. Besides, a few questions always brought it out that he had been sacked from his last job for drunkenness. After only three days he gave it up. He knew it was no use. It was only to please Ravelston that he had even been pretending to look for work.

In the evening he trailed back to the flat, footsore and with his nerves on edge from a series of snubs. He was making all his journeys on foot, to economize Ravelston's two pounds. When he got back Ravelston had just come up from the office and was sitting in one of the armchairs in front of the fire, with some long galley-proofs over his knee. He looked up as Gordon came in.

'Any luck?' he said as usual.

Gordon did not answer. If he had answered it would have been with a stream of obscenities. Without even looking at Ravelston he went straight into his bedroom, kicked off his shoes, and flung himself on the bed. He hated himself at this moment. Why had he come back? What right had he to come back and sponge on Ravelston when he hadn't even the intention of looking for a job any longer? He ought to have stayed out in the streets, slept in Trafalgar Square, begged — anything. But he hadn't the guts to face the streets as yet. The prospect of warmth and shelter had tugged him back. He lay with his hands beneath his head, in a mixture of apathy and self-hatred. After about half an hour he heard the door-bell ring and Ravelston get up to answer it. It was that bitch Hermione Slater, presumably. Ravelston had introduced Gordon to Hermione a couple of days ago, and she had treated him like dirt. But a moment later there was a knock at the bedroom door.

'What is it?' said Gordon.

'Somebody's come to see you,' said Ravelston.

'To see ME?'

'Yes. Come on into the other room.'

Gordon swore and rolled sluggishly off the bed. When he got to the other room he found that the visitor was Rosemary. He had been half expecting her, of course, but it wearied him to see her. He knew

why she had come; to sympathize with him, to pity him, to reproach him — it was all the same. In his despondent, bored mood he did not want to make the effort of talking to her. All he wanted was to be left alone. But Ravelston was glad to see her. He had taken a liking to her in their single meeting and thought she might cheer Gordon up. He made a transparent pretext to go downstairs to the office, leaving the two of them together.

They were alone, but Gordon made no move to embrace her. He was standing in front of the fire, round-shouldered, his hands in his coat pockets, his feet thrust into a pair of Ravelston's slippers which were much too big for him. She came rather hesitantly towards him, not yet taking off her hat or her coat with the lamb-skin collar. It hurt her to see him. In less than a week his appearance had deteriorated strangely. Already he had that unmistakable, seedy, lounging look of a man who is out of work. His face seemed to have grown thinner, and there were rings round his eyes. Also it was obvious that he had not shaved that day.

She laid her hand on his arm, rather awkwardly, as a woman does when it is she who has to make the first embrace.

'Gordon— '

'Well?'

He said it almost sulkily. The next moment she was in his arms. But it was she who had made the first movement, not he. Her head was on his breast, and behold! she was struggling with all her might against the tears that almost overwhelmed her. It bored Gordon dreadfully. He seemed so often to reduce her to tears! And he didn't want to be cried over; he only wanted to be left alone — alone to sulk and despair. As he held her there, one hand mechanically caressing her shoulder, his main feeling was boredom. She had made things more difficult for him by coming here. Ahead of him were dirt, cold, hunger, the streets, the workhouse, and the jail. It was against THAT that he had got to steel himself. And he could steel himself, if only she would leave him alone and not come plaguing him with these irrelevant emotions.

He pushed her a little way from him. She had recovered herself quickly, as she always did.

'Gordon, my dear one! Oh, I'm so sorry, so sorry!'

‘Sorry about what?’

‘You losing your job and everything. You look so unhappy.’

‘I’m not unhappy. Don’t pity me, for God’s sake.’

He disengaged himself from her arms. She pulled her hat off and threw it into a chair. She had come here with something definite to say. It was something she had refrained from saying all these years — something that it had seemed to her a point of chivalry not to say. But now it had got to be said, and she would come straight out with it. It was not in her nature to beat about the bush.

‘Gordon, will you do something to please me?’

‘What?’

‘Will you go back to the New Albion?’

So that was it! Of course he had foreseen it. She was going to start nagging at him like all the others. She was going to add herself to the band of people who worried him and badgered him to ‘get on’. But what else could you expect? It was what any woman would say. The marvel was that she had never said it before. Go back to the New Albion! It had been the sole significant action of his life, leaving the New Albion. It was his religion, you might say, to keep out of that filthy money-world. Yet at this moment he could not remember with any clarity the motives for which he had left the New Albion. All he knew was that he would never go back, not if the skies fell, and that the argument he foresaw bored him in advance.

He shrugged his shoulders and looked away. ‘The New Albion wouldn’t take me back,’ he said shortly.

‘Yes, they would. You remember what Mr Erskine said. It’s not so long ago — only two years. And they’re always on the look-out for good copywriters. Everyone at the office says so. I’m sure they’d give you a job if you went and asked them. And they’d pay you at least four pounds a week.’

‘Four pounds a week! Splendid! I could afford to keep an aspidistra on that, couldn’t I?’

‘No, Gordon, don’t joke about it now.’

‘I’m not joking. I’m serious.’

‘You mean you won’t go back to them — not even if they offered you a job?’

‘Not in a thousand years. Not if they paid me fifty pounds a

week.'

'But why? Why?'

'I've told you why,' he said wearily.

She looked at him helplessly. After all, it was no use. There was this money-business standing in the way — these meaningless scruples which she had never understood but which she had accepted merely because they were his. She felt all the impotence, the resentment of a woman who sees an abstract idea triumphing over common sense. How maddening it was, that he should let himself be pushed into the gutter by a thing like that! She said almost angrily:

'I don't understand you, Gordon, I really don't. Here you are out of work, you may be starving in a little while for all you know; and yet when there's a good job which you can have almost for the asking, you won't take it.'

'No, you're quite right. I won't.'

'But you must have SOME kind of job, mustn't you?'

'A job, but not a GOOD job. I've explained that God knows how often. I dare say I'll get a job of sorts sooner or later. The same kind of job as I had before.'

'But I don't believe you're even TRYING to get a job, are you?'

'Yes, I am. I've been out all today seeing booksellers.'

'And you didn't even shave this morning!' she said, changing her ground with feminine swiftness.

He felt his chin. 'I don't believe I did, as a matter of fact.'

'And then you expect people to give you a job! Oh, Gordon!'

'Oh, well, what does it matter? It's too much fag to shave every day.'

'You're letting yourself go to pieces,' she said bitterly. 'You don't seem to WANT to make any effort. You want to sink — just SINK!'

'I don't know — perhaps. I'd sooner sink than rise.'

There were further arguments. It was the first time she had ever spoken to him like this. Once again the tears came into her eyes, and once again she fought them back. She had come here swearing to herself that she would not cry. The dreadful thing was that her tears, instead of distressing him, merely bored him. It was as though he COULD not care, and yet at his very centre there was an inner heart that cared because he could not care. If only she would leave him

alone! Alone, alone! Free from the nagging consciousness of his failure; free to sink, as she had said, down, down into quiet worlds where money and effort and moral obligation did not exist. Finally he got away from her and went back to the spare bedroom, it was definitely a quarrel — the first really deadly quarrel they had ever had. Whether it was to be final he did not know. Nor did he care, at this moment. He locked the door behind him and lay on the bed smoking a cigarette. He must get out of this place, and quickly! Tomorrow morning he would clear out. No more sponging on Ravelston! No more blackmail to the gods of decency! Down, down, into the mud — down to the streets, the workhouse, and the jail. It was only there that he could be at peace.

Ravelston came upstairs to find Rosemary alone and on the point of departure. She said good-bye and then suddenly turned to him and laid her hand on his arm. She felt that she knew him well enough now to take him into her confidence.

'Mr Ravelston, please — WILL you try and persuade Gordon to get a job?'

'I'll do what I can. Of course it's always difficult. But I expect we'll find him a job of sorts before long.'

'It's so dreadful to see him like this! He goes absolutely to pieces. And all the time, you see, there's a job he could quite easily get if he wanted it — a really GOOD job. It's not that he can't, it's simply that he won't.'

She explained about the New Albion. Ravelston rubbed his nose.

'Yes. As a matter of fact I've heard all about that. We talked it over when he left the New Albion.'

'But you don't think he was right to leave them?' she said, promptly divining that Ravelston DID think Gordon right.

'Well — I grant you it wasn't very wise. But there's a certain amount of truth in what he says. Capitalism's corrupt and we ought to keep outside it — that's his idea. It's not practicable, but in a way it's sound.'

'Oh, I dare say it's all right as a theory! But when he's out of work and when he could get this job if he chose to ask for it — SURELY you don't think he's right to refuse?'

'Not from a common-sense point of view. But in principle —

well, yes.'

'Oh, in principle! We can't afford principles, people like us. THAT'S what Gordon doesn't seem to understand.'

Gordon did not leave the flat next morning. One resolves to do these things, one WANTS to do them; but when the time comes, in the cold morning light, they somehow don't get done. He would stay just one day more he told himself; and then again it was 'just one day more', until five whole days had passed since Rosemary's visit, and he was still lurking there, living on Ravelston, with not even a flicker of a job in sight. He still made some pretence of searching for work, but he only did it to save his face. He would go out and loaf for hours in public libraries, and then come home to lie on the bed in the spare bedroom, dressed except for his shoes, smoking endless cigarettes. And for all that inertia and the fear of the streets still held him there, those five days were awful, damnable, unspeakable. There is nothing more dreadful in the world than to live in somebody else's house, eating his bread and doing nothing in return for it. And perhaps it is worst of all when your benefactor won't for a moment admit that he is your benefactor. Nothing could have exceeded Ravelston's delicacy. He would have perished rather than admit that Gordon was sponging on him. He had paid Gordon's fine, he had paid his arrears of rent, he had kept him for a week, and he had 'lent' him two pounds on top of that; but it was nothing, it was a mere arrangement between friends, Gordon would do the same for him another time. From time to time Gordon made feeble efforts to escape, which always ended in the same way.

'Look here, Ravelston, I can't stay here any longer. You've kept me long enough. I'm going to clear out tomorrow morning.'

'But my dear old chap! Do be sensible. You haven't— ' But no! Not even now, when Gordon was openly on the rocks, could Ravelston say, 'You haven't got any money.' One can't say things like that. He compromised: 'Where are you going to live, anyway?'

'God knows — I don't care. There are common lodging-houses and places. I've got a few bob left.'

'Don't be such an ass. You'd much better stay here till you've found a job.'

'But it might be months, I tell you. I can't live on you like this.'

‘Rot, my dear chap! I like having you here.’

But of course, in his inmost heart, he didn’t really like having Gordon there. How should he? It was an impossible situation. There was a tension between them all the time. It is always so when one person is living on another. However delicately disguised, charity is still horrible; there is a malaise, almost a secret hatred, between the giver and the receiver. Gordon knew that his friendship with Ravelston would never be the same again. Whatever happened afterwards, the memory of this evil time would be between them. The feeling of his dependent position, of being in the way, unwanted, a nuisance, was with him night and day. At meals he would scarcely eat, he would not smoke Ravelston’s cigarettes, but bought himself cigarettes out of his few remaining shillings. He would not even light the gas-fire in his bedroom. He would have made himself invisible if he could. Every day, of course, people were coming and going at the flat and at the office. All of them saw Gordon and grasped his status. Another of Ravelston’s pet scroungers, they all said. He even detected a gleam of professional jealousy in one or two of the hangers-on of Antichrist. Three times during that week Hermione Slater came. After his first encounter with her he fled from the flat as soon as she appeared; on one occasion, when she came at night, he had to stay out of doors till after midnight. Mrs Beaver, the charwoman, had also ‘seen through’ Gordon. She knew his type. He was another of those good-for-nothing young ‘writing gentlemen’ who sponged on poor Mr Ravelston. So in none too subtle ways she made things uncomfortable for Gordon. Her favourite trick was to rout him out with broom and pan— ‘Now, Mr Comstock, I’ve got to do this room out, IF you please’ — from whichever room he had settled down in.

But in the end, unexpectedly and through no effort of his own, Gordon did get a job. One morning a letter came for Ravelston from Mr McKechnie. Mr McKechnie had relented — not to the extent of taking Gordon back, of course, but to the extent of helping him find another job. He said that a Mr Cheeseman, a bookseller in Lambeth, was looking for an assistant. From what he said it was evident that Gordon could get the job if he applied for it; it was equally evident that there was some snag about the job. Gordon had vaguely heard of

Mr Cheeseman — in the book trade everybody knows everybody else. In his heart the news bored him. He didn't really want this job. He didn't want ever to work again; all he wanted was to sink, sink, effortless, down into the mud. But he couldn't disappoint Ravelston after all Ravelston had done for him. So the same morning he went down to Lambeth to inquire about the job.

The shop was in the desolate stretch of road south of Waterloo Bridge. It was a poky, mean-looking shop, and the name over it, in faded gilt, was not Cheeseman but Eldridge. In the window, however, there were some valuable calf folios, and some sixteenth-century maps which Gordon thought must be worth money. Evidently Mr Cheeseman specialized in 'rare' books. Gordon plucked up his courage and went in.

As the door-bell ping'd, a tiny, evil-looking creature, with a sharp nose and heavy black eyebrows, emerged from the office behind the shop. He looked up at Gordon with a kind of nosy malice. When he spoke it was in an extraordinary clipped manner, as though he were biting each word in half before it escaped from him. 'Ot c'n I do f'yer!' — that approximately was what it sounded like. Gordon explained why he had come. Mr Cheeseman shot a meaning glance at him and answered in the same clipped manner as before:

'Oh, eh? Comstock, eh? Come 'is way. Got mi office back here. Bin 'specting you.'

Gordon followed him. Mr Cheeseman was a rather sinister little man, almost small enough to be called a dwarf, with very black hair, and slightly deformed. As a rule a dwarf, when malformed, has a full-sized torso and practically no legs. With Mr Cheeseman it was the other way about. His legs were normal length, but the top half of his body was so short that his buttocks seemed to sprout almost immediately below his shoulder blades. This gave him, in walking, a resemblance to a pair of scissors. He had the powerful bony shoulders of the dwarf, the large ugly hands, and the sharp nosing movements of the head. His clothes had that peculiar hardened, shiny texture of clothes that are very old and very dirty. They were just going into the office when the door-bell ping'd again, and a customer came in, holding out a book from the sixpenny box outside and half a crown. Mr Cheeseman did not take the change out of the till —

apparently there was no till — but produced a very greasy wash-leather purse from some secret place under his waistcoat. He handled the purse, which was almost lost in his big hands, in a peculiarly secretive way, as though to hide it from sight.

'I like keep mi money i' mi pocket,' he explained, with an upward glance, as they went into the office.

It was apparent that Mr Cheeseman clipped his words from a notion that words cost money and ought not to be wasted. In the office they had a talk, and Mr Cheeseman extorted from Gordon the confession that he had been sacked for drunkenness. As a matter of fact he knew all about this already. He had heard about Gordon from Mr McKechnie, whom he had met at an auction a few days earlier. He had pricked up his ears when he heard the story, for he was on the look-out for an assistant, and clearly an assistant who had been sacked for drunkenness would come at reduced wages. Gordon saw that his drunkenness was going to be used as a weapon against him. Yet Mr Cheeseman did not seem absolutely unfriendly. He seemed to be the kind of person who will cheat you if he can, and bully you if you give him the chance, but who will also regard you with a contemptuous good-humour. He took Gordon into his confidence, talked of conditions in the trade, and boasted with much chuckling of his own astuteness. He had a peculiar chuckle, his mouth curving upwards at the corners and his large nose seeming about to disappear into it.

Recently, he told Gordon, he had had an idea for a profitable side-line. He was going to start a twopenny library; but it would have to be quite separate from the shop, because anything so low-class would frighten away the book-lovers who came to the shop in search of 'rare' books. He had taken premises a little distance away, and in the lunch-hour he took Gordon to see them. They were farther down the dreary street, between a flyblown ham-and-beef shop and a smartish undertaker. The ads in the undertaker's window caught Gordon's eye. It seems you can get underground for as little as two pounds ten nowadays. You can even get buried on the hire-purchase. There was also an ad for cremations— 'Reverent, Sanitary, and Inexpensive.'

The premises consisted of a single narrow room — a mere pipe of a room with a window as wide as itself, furnished with a cheap desk,

one chair, and a card index. The new-painted shelves were ready and empty. This was not, Gordon saw at a glance, going to be the kind of library that he had presided over at McKechnie's. McKechnie's library had been comparatively highbrow. It had dredged no deeper than Dell, and it even had books by Lawrence and Huxley. But this was one of those cheap arid evil little libraries ('mushroom libraries', they are called) which are springing up all over London and are deliberately aimed at the uneducated. In libraries like these there is not a single book that is ever mentioned in the reviews or that any civilized person has ever heard of. The books are published by special low-class firms and turned out by wretched hacks at the rate of four a year, as mechanically as sausages and with much less skill. In effect they are merely fourpenny novelettes disguised as novels, and they only cost the library-proprietor one and eightpence a volume. Mr Cheeseman explained that he had not ordered the books yet. He spoke of 'ordering the books' as one might speak of ordering a ton of coals. He was going to start with five hundred assorted titles, he said. The shelves were already marked off into sections— 'Sex', 'Crime', 'Wild West', and so forth.

He offered Gordon the job. It was very simple. All you had to do was to remain there ten hours a day, hand out the book, take the money, and choke off the more obvious book-pinchers. The pay, he added with a measuring, sidelong glance, was thirty shillings a week.

Gordon accepted promptly. Mr Cheeseman was perhaps faintly disappointed. He had expected an argument, and would have enjoyed crushing Gordon by reminding him that beggars can't be choosers. But Gordon was satisfied. The job would do. There was no TROUBLE about a job like this; no room for ambition, no effort, no hope. Ten bob less — ten bob nearer the mud. It was what he wanted.

He 'borrowed' another two pounds from Ravelston and took a furnished bed-sitting room, eight bob a week, in a filthy alley parallel to Lambeth Cut. Mr Cheeseman ordered the five hundred assorted titles, and Gordon started work on the twentieth of December. This, as it happened, was his thirtieth birthday.

Chapter 10

Under ground, under ground! Down in the safe soft womb of earth, where there is no getting of jobs or losing of jobs, no relatives or friends to plague you, no hope, fear, ambition, honour, duty — no DUNS of any kind. That was where he wished to be.

Yet it was not death, actual physical death, that he wished for. It was a queer feeling that he had. It had been with him ever since that morning when he had woken up in the police cell. The evil, mutinous mood that comes after drunkenness seemed to have set into a habit. That drunken night had marked a period in his life. It had dragged him downward with strange suddenness. Before, he had fought against the money-code, and yet he had clung to his wretched remnant of decency. But now it was precisely from decency that he wanted to escape. He wanted to go down, deep down, into some world where decency no longer mattered; to cut the strings of his self-respect, to submerge himself — to SINK, as Rosemary had said. It was all bound up in his mind with the thought of being UNDER GROUND. He liked to think about the lost people, the under-ground people: tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes. It is a good world that they inhabit, down there in their frowzy kips and spikes. He liked to think that beneath the world of money there is that great sluttish underworld where failure and success have no meaning; a sort of kingdom of ghosts where all are equal. That was where he wished to be, down in the ghost-kingdom, BELOW ambition. It comforted him somehow to think of the smoke-dim slums of South London sprawling on and on, a huge graceless wilderness where you could lose yourself for ever.

And in a way this job was what he wanted; at any rate, it was something near what he wanted. Down there in Lambeth, in winter, in the murky streets where the sepia-shadowed faces of tea-drunkards drifted through the mist, you had a SUBMERGED feeling. Down here you had no contact with money or with culture. No highbrow customers to whom you had to act the highbrow; no one who was capable of asking you, in that prying way that prosperous people have, ‘What are you, with your brains and education, doing in a job

like this?' You were just part of the slum, and, like all slum-dwellers, taken for granted. The youths and girls and draggled middle-aged women who came to the library scarcely even spotted the fact that Gordon was an educated man. He was just 'the bloke at the library', and practically one of themselves.

The job itself, of course, was of inconceivable futility. You just sat there, ten hours a day, six hours on Thursdays, handing out books, registering them, and receiving twopences. Between whiles there was nothing to do except read. There was nothing worth watching in the desolate street outside. The principal event of the day was when the hearse drove up to the undertaker's establishment next door. This had a faint interest for Gordon, because the dye was wearing off one of the horses and it was assuming by degrees a curious purplish-brown shade. Much of the time, when no customers came, he spent reading the yellow-jacketed trash that the library contained. Books of that type you could read at the rate of one an hour. And they were the kind of books that suited him nowadays. It is real 'escape literature', that stuff in the twopenny libraries. Nothing has ever been devised that puts less strain on the intelligence; even a film, by comparison, demands a certain effort. And so when a customer demanded a book of this category or that, whether it was 'Sex' or 'Crime' or 'Wild West' or 'ROmance' (always with the accent on the O). Gordon was ready with expert advice.

Mr Cheeseman was not a bad person to work for, so long as you understood that if you worked till the Day of Judgement you would never get a rise of wages. Needless to say, he suspected Gordon of pinching the till-money. After a week or two he devised a new system of booking, by which he could tell how many books had been taken out and check this with the day's takings. But it was still (he reflected) in Gordon's power to issue books and make no record of them; and so the possibility that Gordon might be cheating him of sixpence or even a shilling a day continued to trouble him, like the pea under the princess's mattress. Yet he was not absolutely unlikeable, in his sinister, dwarfish way. In the evenings, after he had shut the shop, when he came along to the library to collect the day's takings, he would stay talking to Gordon for a while and recounting

with nosy chuckles any particularly astute swindles that he had worked lately. From these conversations Gordon pieced together Mr Cheeseman's history. He had been brought up in the old-clothes trade, which was his spiritual vocation, so to speak, and had inherited the bookshop from an uncle three years ago. At that time it was one of those dreadful bookshops in which there are not even any shelves, in which the books lie about in monstrous dusty piles with no attempt at classification. It was frequented to some extent by book-collectors, because there was occasionally a valuable book among the piles of rubbish, but mainly it kept going by selling secondhand paper-covered thrillers at twopence each. Over this dustheap Mr Cheeseman had presided, at first, with intense disgust. He loathed books and had not yet grasped that there was money to be made out of them. He was still keeping his old-clothes shop going by means of a deputy, and intended to return to it as soon as he could get a good offer for the bookshop. But presently it was borne in upon him that books, properly handled, are worth money. As soon as he had made this discovery he developed as astonishing flair for bookdealing. Within two years he had worked his shop up till it was one of the best 'rare' bookshops of its size in London. To him a book was as purely an article of merchandise as a pair of second-hand trousers. He had never in his life READ a book himself, nor could he conceive why anyone should want to do so. His attitude towards the collectors who pored so lovingly over his rare editions was that of a sexually cold prostitute towards her clientele. Yet he seemed to know by the mere feel of a book whether it was valuable or not. His head was a perfect mine of auction-records and first-edition dates, and he had a marvellous nose for a bargain. His favourite way of acquiring stock was to buy up the libraries of people who had just died, especially clergymen. Whenever a clergyman died Mr Cheeseman was on the spot with the promptness of a vulture. Clergymen, he explained to Gordon, so often have good libraries and ignorant widows. He lived over the shop, was unmarried, of course, and had no amusements and seemingly no friends. Gordon used sometimes to wonder what Mr Cheeseman did with himself in the evenings, when he was not out snooping after bargains. He had a mental picture of Mr Cheeseman sitting in a double-locked room with the shutters over the windows,

counting piles of half-crowns and bundles of pound notes which he stowed carefully away in cigarette-tins.

Mr Cheeseman bullied Gordon and was on the look-out for an excuse to dock his wages; yet he did not bear him any particular ill-will. Sometimes in the evening when he came to the library he would produce a greasy packet of Smith's Potato Crisps from his pocket, and, holding it out, say in his clipped style:

'Hassome chips?'

The packet was always grasped so firmly in his large hand that it was impossible to extract more than two or three chips. But he meant it as a friendly gesture.

As for the place where Gordon lived, in Brewer's Yard, parallel to Lambeth Cut on the south side, it was a filthy kip. His bed-sitting room was eight shillings a week and was just under the roof. With its sloping ceiling — it was a room shaped like a wedge of cheese — and its skylight window, it was the nearest thing to the proverbial poet's garret that he had ever lived in. There was a large, low, broken-backed bed with a ragged patchwork quilt and sheets that were changed once fortnightly; a deal table ringed by dynasties of teapots; a rickety kitchen chair; a tin basin for washing in; a gas-ring in the fender. The bare floorboards had never been stained but were dark with dirt. In the cracks in the pink wallpaper dwelt multitudes of bugs; however, this was winter and they were torpid unless you over-warmed the room. You were expected to make your own bed. Mrs Meakin, the landlady, theoretically 'did out' the rooms daily, but four days out of five she found the stairs too much for her. Nearly all the lodgers cooked their own squalid meals in their bedrooms. There was no gas-stove, of course; just the gas-ring in the fender, and, down two flights of stairs, a large evil-smelling sink which was common to the whole house.

In the garret adjoining Gordon's there lived a tall handsome old woman who was not quite right in the head and whose face was often as black as a Negro's from dirt. Gordon could never make out where the dirt came from. It looked like coal dust. The children of the neighbourhood used to shout 'Blackie!' after her as she stalked along the pavement like a tragedy queen, talking to herself. On the floor below there was a woman with a baby which cried, cried

everlastingly; also a young couple who used to have frightful quarrels and frightful reconciliations which you could hear all over the house. On the ground floor a house-painter, his wife, and five children existed on the dole and an occasional odd job. Mrs Meakin, the landlady, inhabited some burrow or other in the basement. Gordon liked this house. It was all so different from Mrs Wisbeach's. There was no mingy lower-middle-class decency here, no feeling of being spied upon and disapproved of. So long as you paid your rent you could do almost exactly as you liked; come home drunk and crawl up the stairs, bring women in at all hours, lie in bed all day if you wanted to. Mother Meakin was not the type to interfere. She was a dishevelled, jelly-soft old creature with a figure like a cottage loaf. People said that in her youth she had been no better than she ought, and probably it was true. She had a loving manner towards anything in trousers. Yet it seemed that traces of respectability lingered in her breast. On the day when Gordon installed himself he heard her puffing and struggling up the stairs, evidently bearing some burden. She knocked softly on the door with her knee, or the place where her knee ought to have been, and he let her in.

''Ere y'are, then,' she wheezed kindly as she came in with her arms full. 'I knew as 'ow you'd like this. I likes all my lodgers to feel comfortable-like. Lemme put it on the table for you. There! That makes the room like a bit more 'ome-like, don't it now?'

It was an aspidistra. It gave him a bit of a twinge to see it. Even here, in this final refuge! Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? But it was a poor weedy specimen — indeed, it was obviously dying.

In this place he could have been happy if only people would let him alone. It was a place where you COULD be happy, in a sluttish way. To spend your days in meaningless mechanical work, work that could be slovened through in a sort of coma; to come home and light the fire when you had any coal (there were sixpenny bags at the grocer's) and get the stuffy little attic warm; to sit over a squalid meal of bacon, bread-and-marg and tea, cooked over the gas-ring; to lie on the frowzy bed, reading a thriller or doing the Brain Brighteners in Tit Bits until the small hours; it was the kind of life he wanted. All his habits had deteriorated rapidly. He never shaved more than three times a week nowadays, and only washed the parts

that showed. There were good public baths near by, but he hardly went to them as often as once in a month. He never made his bed properly, but just turned back the sheets, and never washed his few crocks till all of them had been used twice over. There was a film of dust on everything. In the fender there was always a greasy frying-pan and a couple of plates coated with the remnants of fried eggs. One night the bugs came out of one of the cracks and marched across the ceiling two by two. He lay on his bed, his hands under his head, watching them with interest. Without regret, almost intentionally, he was letting himself go to pieces. At the bottom of all his feelings there was sulkiness a je m'en fous in the face of the world. Life had beaten him; but you can still beat life by turning your face away. Better to sink than rise. Down, down into the ghost-kingdom, the shadowy world where shame, effort, decency do not exist!

To sink! How easy it ought to be, since there are so few competitors! But the strange thing is that often it is harder to sink than to rise. There is always something that drags one upwards. After all, one is never quite alone; there are always friends, lovers, relatives. Everyone Gordon knew seemed to be writing him letters, pitying him or bullying him. Aunt Angela had written, Uncle Walter had written, Rosemary had written over and over again, Ravelston had written, Julia had written. Even Flaxman had sent a line to wish him luck. Flaxman's wife had forgiven him, and he was back at Peckham, in aspidistral bliss. Gordon hated getting letters nowadays. They were a link with that other world from which he was trying to escape.

Even Ravelston had turned against him. That was after he had been to see Gordon in his new lodgings. Until this visit he had not realized what kind of neighbourhood Gordon was living in. As his taxi drew up at the corner, in the Waterloo Road, a horde of ragged shock-haired boys came swooping from nowhere, to fight round the taxi door like fish at a bait. Three of them clung to the handle and hauled the door open simultaneously. Their servile, dirty little faces, wild with hope, made him feel sick. He flung some pennies among them and fled up the alley without looking at them again. The narrow pavements were smeared with a quantity of dogs' excrement that was surprising, seeing that there were no dogs in sight. Down in the

basement Mother Meakin was boiling a haddock, and you could smell it half-way up the stairs. In the attic Ravelston sat on the rickety chair, with the ceiling sloping just behind his head. The fire was out and there was no light in the room except four candles guttering in a saucer beside the aspidistra. Gordon lay on the ragged bed, fully dressed but with no shoes on. He had scarcely stirred when Ravelston came in. He just lay there, flat on his back, sometimes smiling a little, as though there were some private joke between himself and the ceiling. The room had already the stuffy sweetish smell of rooms that have been lived in a long time and never cleaned. There were dirty crocks lying about in the fender.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' Gordon said, without stirring.

'No thanks awfully — no,' said Ravelston, a little too hastily.

He had seen the brown-stained cups in the fender and the repulsive common sink downstairs. Gordon knew quite well why Ravelston refused the tea. The whole atmosphere of this place had given Ravelston a kind of shock. That awful mixed smell of slops and haddock on the stairs! He looked at Gordon, supine on the ragged bed. And, dash it, Gordon was a gentleman! At another time he would have repudiated that thought; but in this atmosphere pious humbug was impossible. All the class-instincts which he believed himself not to possess rose in revolt. It was dreadful to think of anyone with brains and refinement living in a place like this. He wanted to tell Gordon to get out of it, pull himself together, earn a decent income, and live like a gentleman. But of course he didn't say so. You can't say things like that. Gordon was aware of what was going on inside Ravelston's head. It amused him, rather. He felt no gratitude towards Ravelston for coming here and seeing him; on the other hand, he was not ashamed of his surroundings as he would once have been. There was a faint, amused malice in the way he spoke.

'You think I'm a B.F., of course,' he remarked to the ceiling.

'No, I don't. Why should I?'

'Yes, you do. You think I'm a B.F. to stay in this filthy place instead of getting a proper job. You think I ought to try for that job at the New Albion.'

'No, dash it! I never thought that. I see your point absolutely. I

told you that before. I think you're perfectly right in principle.'

'And you think principles are all right so long as one doesn't go putting them into practice.'

'No. But the question always is, when IS one putting them into practice?'

'It's quite simple. I've made war on money. This is where it's led me.'

Ravelston rubbed his nose, then shifted uneasily on his chair.

'The mistake you make, don't you see, is in thinking one can live in a corrupt society without being corrupt oneself. After all, what do you achieve by refusing to make money? You're trying to behave as though one could stand right outside our economic system. But one can't. One's got to change the system, or one changes nothing. One can't put things right in a hole-and-corner way, if you take my meaning.'

Gordon waved a foot at the buggy ceiling.

'Of course this IS a hole-and-corner, I admit.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Ravelston, pained.

'But let's face facts. You think I ought to be looking about for a GOOD job, don't you?'

'It depends on the job. I think you're quite right not to sell yourself to that advertising agency. But it does seem rather a pity that you should stay in that wretched job you're in at present. After all, you HAVE got talents. You ought to be using them somehow.'

'There are my poems,' said Gordon, smiling at his private joke.

Ravelston looked abashed. This remark silenced him. Of course, there WERE Gordon's poems. There was London Pleasures, for instance. Ravelston knew, and Gordon knew, and each knew that the other knew, that London Pleasures would never be finished. Never again, probably, would Gordon write a line of poetry; never, at least, while he remained in this vile place, this blind-alley job and this defeated mood. He had finished with all that. But this could not be said, as yet. The pretence was still kept up that Gordon was a struggling poet — the conventional poet-in-garret.

It was not long before Ravelston rose to go. This smelly place oppressed him, and it was increasingly obvious that Gordon did not want him here. He moved hesitantly towards the door, pulling on his

gloves, then came back again, pulling off his left glove and flicking it against his leg.

'Look here, Gordon, you won't mind my saying it — this is a filthy place, you know. This house, this street — everything.'

'I know. It's a pigsty. It suits me.'

'But do you HAVE to live in a place like this?'

'My dear chap, you know what my wages are. Thirty bob a week.'

'Yes, but — ! Surely there ARE better places? What rent are you paying?'

'Eight bob.'

'Eight bob? You could get a fairly decent unfurnished room for that. Something a bit better than this, anyway. Look here, why don't you take an unfurnished place and let me lend you ten quid for furniture?'

'"Lend" me ten quid! After all you've "lent" me already? GIVE me ten quid, you mean.'

Ravelston gazed unhappily at the wall. Dash it, what a thing to say! He said flatly:

'All right, if you like to put it like that. GIVE you ten quid.'

'But as it happens, you see, I don't want it.'

'But dash it all! You might as well have a decent place to live in.'

'But I don't want a decent place. I want an indecent place. This one, for instance.'

'But why? Why?'

'It's suited to my station,' said Gordon, turning his face to the wall.

A few days later Ravelston wrote him a long, diffident sort of letter. It reiterated most of what he had said in their conversation. Its general effect was that Ravelston saw Gordon's point entirely, that there was a lot of truth in what Gordon said, that Gordon was absolutely right in principle, but — ! It was the obvious, the inevitable 'but'. Gordon did not answer. It was several months before he saw Ravelston again. Ravelston made various attempts to get in touch with him. It was a curious fact — rather a shameful fact from a Socialist's point of view — that the thought of Gordon, who had brains and was of gentle birth, lurking in that vile place and that almost menial job, worried him more than the thought of ten

thousand unemployed in Middlesbrough. Several times, in hope of cheering Gordon up, he wrote asking him to send contributions to Antichrist. Gordon never answered. The friendship was at an end, it seemed to him. The evil time when he had lived on Ravelston had spoiled everything. Charity kills friendship.

And then there were Julia and Rosemary. They differed from Ravelston in this, that they had no shyness about speaking their minds. They did not say euphemistically that Gordon was 'right in principle'; they knew that to refuse a 'good' job can never be right. Over and over again they besought him to go back to the New Albion. The worst was that he had both of them in pursuit of him together. Before this business they had never met, but now Rosemary had got to know Julia somehow. They were in feminine league against him. They used to get together and talk about the 'maddening' way in which Gordon was behaving. It was the only thing they had in common, their feminine rage against his 'maddening' behaviour. Simultaneously and one after the other, by letter and by word of mouth, they harried him. It was unbearable.

Thank God, neither of them had seen his room at Mother Meakin's yet. Rosemary might have endured it, but the sight of that filthy attic would have been almost the death of Julia. They had been round to see him at the library, Rosemary a number of times, Julia once, when she could make a pretext to get away from the teashop. Even that was bad enough. It dismayed them to see what a mean, dreary little place the library was. The job at McKechnie's, though wretchedly paid, had not been the kind of job that you need actually be ashamed of. It brought Gordon into touch with cultivated people; seeing that he was a 'writer' himself, it might conceivably 'lead to something'. But here, in a street that was almost a slum, serving out yellow-jacketed trash at thirty bob a week — what hope was there in a job like that? It was just a derelict's job, a blind-alley job. Evening after evening, walking up and down the dreary misty street after the library was shut, Gordon and Rosemary argued about it. She kept on and on at him. WOULD he go back to the New Albion? WHY wouldn't he go back to the New Albion? He always told her that the New Albion wouldn't take him back. After all, he hadn't applied for the job and there was no knowing whether he could get it; he

preferred to keep it uncertain. There was something about him now that dismayed and frightened her. He seemed to have changed and deteriorated so suddenly. She divined, though he did not speak to her about it, that desire of his to escape from all effort and all decency, to sink down, down into the ultimate mud. It was not only from money but from life itself that he was turning away. They did not argue now as they had argued in the old days before Gordon had lost his job. In those days she had not paid much attention to his preposterous theories. His tirades against the money-morality had been a kind of joke between them. And it had hardly seemed to matter that time was passing and that Gordon's chance of earning a decent living was infinitely remote. She had still thought of herself as a young girl and of the future as limitless. She had watched him fling away two years of his life — two years of HER life, for that matter; and she would have felt it ungenerous to protest.

But now she was growing frightened. Time's winged chariot was hurrying near. When Gordon lost his job she had suddenly realized, with the sense of making a startling discovery, that after all she was no longer very young. Gordon's thirtieth birthday was past; her own was not far distant. And what lay ahead of them? Gordon was sinking effortless into grey, deadly failure. He seemed to WANT to sink. What hope was there that they could ever get married now? Gordon knew that she was right. The situation was impossible. And so the thought, unspoken as yet, grew gradually in both their minds that they would have to part — for good.

One night they were to meet under the railway arches. It was a horrible January night; no mist, for once, only a vile wind that screeched round corners and flung dust and torn paper into your face. He waited for her, a small slouching figure, shabby almost to raggedness, his hair blown about by the wind. She was punctual, as usual. She ran towards him, pulled his face down, and kissed his cold cheek.

'Gordon, dear, how cold you are! Why did you come out without an overcoat?'

'My overcoat's up the spout. I thought you knew.'

'Oh, dear! Yes.'

She looked up at him, a small frown between her black brows. He

looked so haggard, so despondent, there in the ill-lit archway, his face full of shadows. She wound her arm through his and pulled him out into the light.

'Let's keep walking. It's too cold to stand about. I've got something serious I want to say to you.'

'What?'

'I expect you'll be very angry with me.'

'What is it?'

'This afternoon I went and saw Mr Erskine. I asked leave to speak to him for a few minutes.'

He knew what was coming. He tried to free his arm from hers, but she held on to it.

'Well?' he said sulkily.

'I spoke to him about you. I asked him if he'd take you back. Of course he said trade was bad and they couldn't afford to take on new staff and all that. But I reminded him of what he'd said to you, and he said, Yes, he'd always thought you were very promising. And in the end he said he'd be quite ready to find a job for you if you'd come back. So you see I WAS right. They WILL give you the job.'

He did not answer. She squeezed his arm. 'So NOW what do you think about it?' she said.

'You know what I think,' he said coldly.

Secretly he was alarmed and angry. This was what he had been fearing. He had known all along that she would do it sooner or later. It made the issue more definite and his own blame clearer. He slouched on, his hands still in his coat pockets, letting her cling to his arm but not looking towards her.

'You're angry with me?' she said.

'No, I'm not. But I don't see why you had to do it — behind my back.'

That wounded her. She had had to plead very hard before she had managed to extort that promise from Mr Erskine. And it had needed all her courage to beard the managing director in his den. She had been in deadly fear that she might be sacked for doing it. But she wasn't going to tell Gordon anything of that.

'I don't think you ought to say BEHIND YOUR BACK. After all, I was only trying to help you.'

‘How does it help me to get the offer of a job I wouldn’t touch with a stick?’

‘You mean you won’t go back, even now?’

‘Never.’

‘Why?’

‘MUST we go into it again?’ he said wearily.

She squeezed his arm with all her strength and pulled him round, making him face her. There was a kind of desperation in the way she clung to him. She had made her last effort and it had failed. It was as though she could feel him receding, fading away from her like a ghost.

‘You’ll break my heart if you go on like this,’ she said.

‘I wish you wouldn’t trouble about me. It would be so much simpler if you didn’t.’

‘But why do you have to throw your life away?’

‘I tell you I can’t help it. I’ve got to stick to my guns.’

‘You know what this will mean?’

With a chill at his heart, and yet with a feeling of resignation, even of relief, he said: ‘You mean we shall have to part — not see each other again?’

They had walked on, and now they emerged into the Westminster Bridge Road. The wind met them with a scream, whirling at them a cloud of dust that made both of them duck their heads. They halted again. Her small face was full of lines, and the cold wind and the cold lamplight did not improve it.

‘You want to get rid of me,’ he said.

‘No. No. It’s not exactly that.’

‘But you feel we ought to part.’

‘How can we go on like this?’ she said desolately.

‘It’s difficult, I admit.’

‘It’s all so miserable, so hopeless! What can it ever lead to?’

‘So you don’t love me after all?’ he said.

‘I do, I do! You know I do.’

‘In a way, perhaps. But not enough to go on loving me when it’s certain I’ll never have the money to keep you. You’ll have me as a husband, but not as a lover. It’s still a question of money, you see.’

‘It is NOT money, Gordon! It’s NOT that.’

‘Yes, it’s just money. There’s been money between us from the start. Money, always money!’

The scene continued, but not for very much longer. Both of them were shivering with cold. There is no emotion that matters greatly when one is standing at a street corner in a biting wind. When finally they parted it was with no irrevocable farewell. She simply said, ‘I must get back,’ kissed him, and ran across the road to the tram-stop. Mainly with relief he watched her go. He could not stop now to ask himself whether he loved her. Simply he wanted to get away — away from the windy street, away from scenes and emotional demands, back in the frowzy solitude of his attic. If there were tears in his eyes it was only from the cold of the wind.

With Julia it was almost worse. She asked him to go and see her one evening. This was after she had heard, from Rosemary, of Mr Erksine’s offer of a job. The dreadful thing with Julia was that she understood nothing, absolutely nothing, of his motives. All she understood was that a ‘good’ job had been offered him and that he had refused it. She implored him almost on her knees not to throw this chance away. And when he told her that his mind was made up, she wept, actually wept. That was dreadful. The poor goose-like girl, with streaks of grey in her hair, weeping without grace or dignity in her little Drage-furnished bed-sitting room! This was the death of all her hopes. She had watched the family go down and down, moneyless and childless, into grey obscurity. Gordon alone had had it in him to succeed; and he, from mad perverseness, would not. He knew what she was thinking; he had to induce in himself a kind of brutality to stand firm. It was only because of Rosemary and Julia that he cared. Ravelston did not matter, because Ravelston understood. Aunt Angela and Uncle Walter, of course, were bleating weakly at him in long, fatuous letters. But them he disregarded.

In desperation Julia asked him, what did he mean to DO now that he had flung away his last chance of succeeding in life. He answered simply, ‘My poems.’ He had said the same to Rosemary and to Ravelston. With Ravelston the answer had sufficed. Rosemary had no longer any belief in his poems, but she would not say so. As for Julia, his poems had never at any time meant anything to her. ‘I don’t see much sense in writing if you can’t make money out of it,’ was

what she had always said. And he himself did not believe in his poems any longer. But he still struggled to 'write', at least at times. Soon after he changed his lodgings he had copied out on to clean sheets the completed portions of London Pleasures — not quite four hundred lines, he discovered. Even the labour of copying it out was a deadly bore. Yet he still worked on it occasionally; cutting out a line here, altering another there, not making or even expecting to make any progress. Before long the pages were as they had been before, a scrawled, grimy labyrinth of words. He used to carry the wad of grimy manuscript about with him in his pocket. The feeling of it there upheld him a little; after all it was a kind of achievement, demonstrable to himself though to nobody else. There it was, sole product of two years — of a thousand hours' work, it might be. He had no feeling for it any longer as a poem. The whole concept of poetry was meaningless to him now. It was only that if London Pleasures were ever finished it would be something snatched from fate, a thing created OUTSIDE the money-world. But he knew, far more clearly than before, that it never would be finished. How was it possible that any creative impulse should remain to him, in the life he was living now? As time went on, even the desire to finish London Pleasures vanished. He still carried the manuscript about in his pocket; but it was only a gesture, a symbol of his private war. He had finished for ever with that futile dream of being a 'writer'. After all, was not that too a species of ambition? He wanted to get away from all that, BELOW all that. Down, down! Into the ghost-kingdom, out of the reach of hope, out of the reach of fear! Under ground, under ground! That was where he wished to be.

Yet in a way it was not so easy. One night about nine he was lying on his bed, with the ragged counterpane over his feet, his hands under his head to keep them warm. The fire was out. The dust was thick on everything. The aspidistra had died a week ago and was withering upright in its pot. He slid a shoeless foot from under the counterpane, held it up, and looked at it. His sock was full of holes — there were more holes than sock. So here he lay, Gordon Comstock, in a slum attic on a ragged bed, with his feet sticking out of his socks, with one and fourpence in the world, with three decades behind him and nothing, nothing accomplished! Surely NOW he was

past redemption? Surely, try as they would, they couldn't prise him out of a hole like this? He had wanted to reach the mud — well, this was the mud, wasn't it?

Yet he knew that it was not so. That other world, the world of money and success, is always so strangely near. You don't escape it merely by taking refuge in dirt and misery. He had been frightened as well as angry when Rosemary told him about Mr Erskine's offer. It brought the danger so close to him. A letter, a telephone message, and from this squalor he could step straight back into the money-world — back to four quid a week, back to effort and decency and slavery. Going to the devil isn't so easy as it sounds. Sometimes your salvation hunts you down like the Hound of Heaven.

For a while he lay in an almost mindless state, gazing at the ceiling. The utter futility of just lying there, dirty and cold, comforted him a little. But presently he was roused by a light tap at the door. He did not stir. It was Mother Meakin, presumably, though it did not sound like her knock.

'Come in,' he said.

The door opened. It was Rosemary.

She stepped in, and then stopped as the dusty sweetish smell of the room caught her. Even in the bad light of the lamp she could see the state of filth the room was in — the litter of food and papers on the table, the grate full of cold ashes, the foul crocks in the fender, the dead aspidistra. As she came slowly towards the bed she pulled her hat off and threw it on to the chair.

'WHAT a place for you to live in!' she said.

'So you've come back?' he said.

'Yes.'

He turned a little away from her, his arm over his face. 'Come back to lecture me some more, I suppose?'

'No.'

'Then why?'

'Because— '

She had knelt down beside the bed. She pulled his arm away, put her face forward to kiss him, then drew back, surprised, and began to stroke the hair over his temple with the tips of her fingers.

'Oh, Gordon!'

‘What?’

‘You’ve got grey in your hair!’

‘Have I? Where?’

‘Here — over the temple. There’s quite a little patch of it. It must have happened all of a sudden.’

‘“My golden locks time hath to silver turned,”’ he said indifferently.

‘So we’re both going grey,’ she said.

She bent her head to show him the three white hairs on her crown. Then she wriggled herself on to the bed beside him, put an arm under him, pulled him towards her, covered his face with kisses. He let her do it. He did not want this to happen — it was the very thing that he least wanted. But she had wriggled herself beneath him; they were breast to breast. Her body seemed to melt into his. By the expression of her face he knew what had brought her here. After all, she was virgin. She did not know what she was doing. It was magnanimity, pure magnanimity, that moved her. His wretchedness had drawn her back to him. Simply because he was penniless and a failure she had got to yield to him, even if it was only once.

‘I had to come back,’ she said.

‘Why?’

‘I couldn’t bear to think of you here alone. It seemed so awful, leaving you like that.’

‘You did quite right to leave me. You’d much better not have come back. You know we can’t ever get married.’

‘I don’t care. That isn’t how one behaves to people one loves. I don’t care whether you marry me or not. I love you.’

‘This isn’t wise,’ he said.

‘I don’t care. I wish I’d done it years ago.’

‘We’d much better not.’

‘Yes.’

‘No.’

‘Yes!’

After all, she was too much for him. He had wanted her so long, and he could not stop to weigh the consequences. So it was done at last, without much pleasure, on Mother Meakin’s dingy bed. Presently Rosemary got up and rearranged her clothes. The room,

though stuffy, was dreadfully cold. They were both shivering a little. She pulled the coverlet further over Gordon. He lay without stirring, his back turned to her, his face hidden against his arm. She knelt down beside the bed, took his other hand, and laid it for a moment against her cheek. He scarcely noticed her. Then she shut the door quietly behind her and tiptoed down the bare, evil-smelling stairs. She felt dismayed, disappointed, and very cold.

Chapter 11

Spring, spring! Bytuene Mershe ant Averil, when spray biginneth to spring! When shaws be sheene and swards full fayre, and leaves both large and longe! When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces, in the spring time, the only pretty ring time, when the birds do sing, hey-ding-a-ding ding, cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-wee, ta-witta-woo! And so on and so on and so on. See almost any poet between the Bronze Age and 1805.

But how absurd that even now, in the era of central heating and tinned peaches, a thousand so-called poets are still writing in the same strain! For what difference does spring or winter or any other time of year make to the average civilized person nowadays? In a town like London the most striking seasonal change, apart from the mere change of temperature, is in the things you see lying about on the pavement. In late winter it is mainly cabbage leaves. In July you tread on cherry stones, in November on burnt-out fireworks. Towards Christmas the orange peel grows thicker. It was a different matter in the Middle Ages. There was some sense in writing poems about spring when spring meant fresh meat and green vegetables after months of frowsting in some windowless hut on a diet of salt fish and mouldy bread.

If it was spring Gordon failed to notice it. March in Lambeth did not remind you of Persephone. The days grew longer, there were vile dusty winds and sometimes in the sky patches of harsh blue appeared. Probably there were a few sooty buds on the trees if you cared to look for them. The aspidistra, it turned out, had not died after all; the withered leaves had dropped off it, but it was putting forth a couple of dull green shoots near its base.

Gordon had been three months at the library now. The stupid slovenly routine did not irk him. The library had swelled to a thousand 'assorted titles' and was bringing Mr Cheeseman a pound a week clear profit, so Mr Cheeseman was happy after his fashion. He was, nevertheless, nurturing a secret grudge against Gordon. Gordon had been sold to him, so to speak, as a drunkard. He had expected Gordon to get drunk and miss a day's work at least once, thus giving

a sufficient pretext for docking his wages; but Gordon had failed to get drunk. Queerly enough, he had no impulse to drink nowadays. He would have gone without beer even if he could have afforded it. Tea seemed a better poison. All his desires and discontents had dwindled. He was better off on thirty bob a week than he had been previously on two pounds. The thirty bob covered, without too much stretching, his rent, cigarettes, a washing bill of about a shilling a week, a little fuel, and his meals, which consisted almost entirely of bacon, bread-and-marg, and tea, and cost about two bob a day, gas included. Sometimes he even had sixpence over for a seat at a cheap but lousy picture-house near the Westminster Bridge Road. He still carried the grimy manuscript of London Pleasures to and fro in his pocket, but it was from mere force of habit; he had dropped even the pretence of working. All his evenings were spent in the same way. There in the remote frowzy attic, by the fire if there was any coal left, in bed if there wasn't, with teapot and cigarettes handy, reading, always reading. He read nothing nowadays except twopenny weekly papers. Tit Bits, Answers, Peg's Paper, The Gem, The Magnet, Home Notes, The Girl's Own Paper — they were all the same. He used to get them a dozen at a time from the shop. Mr Cheeseman had great dusty stacks of them, left over from his uncle's day and used for wrapping paper. Some of them were as much as twenty years old.

He had not seen Rosemary for weeks past. She had written a number of times and then, for some reason, abruptly stopped writing. Ravelston had written once, asking him to contribute an article on twopenny libraries to Antichrist. Julia had sent a desolate little letter, giving family news. Aunt Angela had had bad colds all the winter, and Uncle Walter was complaining of bladder trouble. Gordon did not answer any of their letters. He would have forgotten their existence if he could. They and their affection were only an encumbrance. He would not be free, free to sink down into the ultimate mud, till he had cut his links with all of them, even with Rosemary.

One afternoon he was choosing a book for a tow-headed factory girl, when someone he only saw out of the corner of his eye came into the library and hesitated just inside the door.

'What kind of book did you want?' he asked the factory girl.

‘Oo — jest a kind of a ROmance, please.’

Gordon selected a ROmance. As he turned, his heart bounded violently. The person who had just come in was Rosemary. She did not make any sign, but stood waiting, pale, and worried-looking, with something ominous in her appearance.

He sat down to enter the book on the girl’s ticket, but his hands had begun trembling so that he could hardly do it. He pressed the rubber stamp in the wrong place. The girl trailed out, peeping into the book as she went. Rosemary was watching Gordon’s face. It was a long time since she had seen him by daylight, and she was struck by the change in him. He was shabby to the point of raggedness, his face had grown much thinner and had the dingy, greyish pallor of people who live on bread and margarine. He looked much older — thirty-five at the least. But Rosemary herself did not look quite as usual. She had lost her gay trim bearing, and her clothes had the appearance of having been thrown on in a hurry. It was obvious that there was something wrong.

He shut the door after the factory girl. ‘I wasn’t expecting you,’ he began.

‘I had to come. I got away from the studio at lunch time. I told them I was ill.’

‘You don’t look well. Here, you’d better sit down.’

There was only one chair in the library. He brought it out from behind the desk and was moving towards her, rather vaguely, to offer some kind of caress. Rosemary did not sit down, but laid her small hand, from which she had removed the glove, on the top rung of the chair-back. By the pressure of her fingers he could see how agitated she was.

‘Gordon, I’ve a most awful thing to tell you. It’s happened after all.’

‘What’s happened?’

‘I’m going to have a baby.’

‘A baby? Oh, Christ!’

He stopped short. For a moment he felt as though someone had struck him a violent blow under the ribs. He asked the usual fatuous question:

‘Are you sure?’

‘Absolutely. It’s been weeks now. If you knew the time I’ve had! I kept hoping and hoping — I took some pills — oh, it was too beastly!’

‘A baby! Oh, God, what fools we were! As though we couldn’t have foreseen it!’

‘I know. I suppose it was my fault. I— ‘

‘Damn! Here comes somebody.’

The door-bell ping’d. A fat, freckled woman with an ugly under-lip came in at a rolling gait and demanded ‘Something with a murder in it.’ Rosemary had sat down and was twisting her glove round and round her fingers. The fat woman was exacting. Each book that Gordon offered her she refused on the ground that she had ‘had it already’ or that it ‘looked dry’. The deadly news that Rosemary had brought had unnerved Gordon. His heart pounding, his entrails constricted, he had to pull out book after book and assure the fat woman that this was the very book she was looking for. At last, after nearly ten minutes, he managed to fob her off with something which she said grudgingly she ‘didn’t think she’d had before’.

He turned back to Rosemary. ‘Well, what the devil are we going to do about it?’ he said as soon as the door had shut.

‘I don’t see what I can do. If I have this baby I’ll lose my job, of course. But it isn’t only that I’m worrying about. It’s my people finding out. My mother — oh, dear! It simply doesn’t bear thinking of.’

‘Ah, your people! I hadn’t thought of them. One’s people! What a cursed incubus they are!’

‘MY people are all right. They’ve always been good to me. But it’s different with a thing like this.’

He took a pace or two up and down. Though the news had scared him he had not really grasped it as yet. The thought of a baby, his baby, growing in her womb had awoken in him no emotion except dismay. He did not think of the baby as a living creature; it was a disaster pure and simple. And already he saw where it was going to lead.

‘We shall have to get married, I suppose,’ he said flatly.

‘Well, shall we? That’s what I came here to ask you.’

‘But I suppose you want me to marry you, don’t you?’

‘Not unless YOU want to. I’m not going to tie you down. I know it’s against your ideas to marry. You must decide for yourself.’

‘But we’ve no alternative — if you’re really going to have this baby.’

‘Not necessarily. That’s what you’ve got to decide. Because after all there IS another way.’

‘What way?’

‘Oh, YOU know. A girl at the studio gave me an address. A friend of hers had it done for only five pounds.’

That pulled him up. For the first time he grasped, with the only kind of knowledge that matters, what they were really talking about. The words ‘a baby’ took on a new significance. They did not mean any longer a mere abstract disaster, they meant a bud of flesh, a bit of himself, down there in her belly, alive and growing. His eyes met hers. They had a strange moment of sympathy such as they had never had before. For a moment he did feel that in some mysterious way they were one flesh. Though they were feet apart he felt as though they were joined together — as though some invisible living cord stretched from her entrails to his. He knew then that it was a dreadful thing they were contemplating — a blasphemy, if that word had any meaning. Yet if it had been put otherwise he might not have recoiled from it. It was the squalid detail of the five pounds that brought it home.

‘No fear!’ he said. ‘Whatever happens we’re not going to do THAT. It’s disgusting.’

‘I know it is. But I can’t have the baby without being married.’

‘No! If that’s the alternative I’ll marry you. I’d sooner cut my right hand off than do a thing like that.’

Ping! went the door-bell. Two ugly louts in cheap bright blue suits, and a girl with a fit of the giggles, came in. One of the youths asked with a sort of sheepish boldness for ‘something with a kick in it — something smutty’. Silently, Gordon indicated the shelves where the ‘sex’ books were kept. There were hundreds of them in the library. They had titles like Secrets of Paris and The Man She Trusted; on their tattered yellow jackets were pictures of half-naked girls lying on divans with men in dinner-jackets standing over them. The stories inside, however, were painfully harmless. The two youths

and the girl ranged among them, sniggering over the pictures on their covers, the girl letting out little squeals and pretending to be shocked. They disgusted Gordon so much that he turned his back on them till they had chosen their books.

When they had gone he came back to Rosemary's chair. He stood behind her, took hold of her small firm shoulders, then slid a hand inside her coat and felt the warmth of her breast. He liked the strong springy feeling of her body; he liked to think that down there, a guarded seed, his baby was growing. She put a hand up and caressed the hand that was on her breast, but did not speak. She was waiting for him to decide.

'If I marry you I shall have to turn respectable,' he said musingly.

'Could you?' she said with a touch of her old manner.

'I mean I shall have to get a proper job — go back to the New Albion. I suppose they'd take me back.'

He felt her grow very still and knew that she had been waiting for this. Yet she was determined to play fair. She was not going to bully him or cajole him.

'I never said I wanted you to do that. I want you to marry me — yes, because of the baby. But it doesn't follow you've got to keep me.'

'There's no sense in marrying if I can't keep you. Suppose I married you when I was like I am at present — no money and no proper job? What would you do then?'

'I don't know. I'd go on working as long as I could. And afterwards, when the baby got too obvious — well, I suppose I'd have to go home to father and mother.'

'That would be jolly for you, wouldn't it? But you were so anxious for me to go back to the New Albion before. You haven't changed your mind?'

'I've thought things over. I know you'd hate to be tied to a regular job. I don't blame you. You've got your own life to live.'

He thought it over a little while longer. 'It comes down to this. Either I marry you and go back to the New Albion, or you go to one of those filthy doctors and get yourself messed about for five pounds.'

At this she twisted herself out of his grasp and stood up facing

him. His blunt words had upset her. They had made the issue clearer and uglier than before.

'Oh, why did you say that?'

'Well, those ARE the alternatives.'

'I'd never thought of it like that. I came here meaning to be fair. And now it sounds as if I was trying to bully you into it — trying to play on your feelings by threatening to get rid of the baby. A sort of beastly blackmail.'

'I didn't mean that. I was only stating facts.'

Her face was full of lines, the black brows drawn together. But she had sworn to herself that she would not make a scene. He could guess what this meant to her. He had never met her people, but he could imagine them. He had some notion of what it might mean to go back to a country town with an illegitimate baby; or, what was almost as bad, with a husband who couldn't keep you. But she was going to play fair. No blackmail! She drew a sharp inward breath, taking a decision.

'All right, then, I'm not going to hold THAT over your head. It's too mean. Marry me or don't marry me, just as you like. But I'll have the baby, anyway.'

'You'd do that? Really?'

'Yes, I think so.'

He took her in his arms. Her coat had come open, her body was warm against him. He thought he would be a thousand kinds of fool if he let her go. Yet the alternative was impossible, and he did not see it any less clearly because he held her in his arms.

'Of course, you'd like me to go back to the New Albion,' he said.

'No, I wouldn't. Not if you don't want to.'

'Yes, you would. After all, it's natural. You want to see me earning a decent income again. In a GOOD job, with four pounds a week and an aspidistra in the window. Wouldn't you, now? Own up.'

'All right, then — yes, I would. But it's only something I'd LIKE to see happening; I'm not going to MAKE you do it. I'd just hate you to do it if you didn't really want to. I want you to feel free.'

'Really and truly free?'

'Yes.'

'You know what that means? Supposing I decided to leave you

and the baby in the lurch?'

'Well — if you really wanted to. You're free — quite free.'

After a little while she went away. Later in the evening or tomorrow he would let her know what he decided. Of course it was not absolutely certain that the New Albion would give him a job even if he asked them; but presumably they would, considering what Mr Erskine had said. Gordon tried to think and could not. There seemed to be more customers than usual this afternoon. It maddened him to have to bounce out of his chair every time he had sat down and deal with some fresh influx of fools demanding crime-stories and sex-stories and ROmances. Suddenly, about six o'clock, he turned out the lights, locked up the library, and went out. He had got to be alone. The library was not due to shut for two hours yet. God knew what Mr Cheeseman would say when he found out. He might even give Gordon the sack. Gordon did not care.

He turned westward, up Lambeth Cut. It was a dull sort of evening, not cold. There was muck underfoot, white lights, and hawkers screaming. He had got to think this thing out, and he could think better walking. But it was so hard, so hard! Back to the New Albion, or leave Rosemary in the lurch; there was no other alternative. It was no use thinking, for instance, that he might find some 'good' job which would offend his sense of decency a bit less. There aren't so many 'good' jobs waiting for moth-eaten people of thirty. The New Albion was the only chance he had or ever would have.

At the corner, on the Westminster Bridge Road, he paused a moment. There were some posters opposite, livid in the lamplight. A monstrous one, ten feet high at least, advertised Bovex. The Bovex people had dropped Corner Table and got on to a new tack. They were running a series of four-line poems — Bovex Ballads, they were called. There was a picture of a horribly eupeptic family, with grinning ham-pink faces, sitting at breakfast; underneath, in blatant lettering:

Why should YOU be thin and white? And have that washed-out feeling? Just take hot Bovex every night — Invigorating — healing!

Gordon gazed at the thing. He drank in its puling silliness. God, what trash! 'Invigorating — healing!' The weak incompetence of it!

It hadn't even the vigorous badness of the slogans that really stick. Just soppy, lifeless drivel. It would have been almost pathetic in its feebleness if one hadn't reflected that all over London and all over every town in England that poster was plastered, rotting the minds of men. He looked up and down the graceless street. Yes, war is coming soon. You can't doubt it when you see the Bovex ads. The electric drills in our streets presage the rattle of the machine-guns. Only a little while before the aeroplanes come. Zoom — bang! A few tons of T.N.T. to send our civilization back to hell where it belongs.

He crossed the road and walked on, southward. A curious thought had struck him. He did not any longer want that war to happen. It was the first time in months — years, perhaps — that he had thought of it and not wanted it.

If he went back to the New Albion, in a month's time he might be writing Bovex Ballads himself. To go back to THAT! Any 'good' job was bad enough; but to be mixed up in THAT! Christ! Of course he oughtn't to go back. It was just a question of having the guts to stand firm. But what about Rosemary? He thought of the kind of life she would live at home, in her parents' house, with a baby and no money; and of the news running through that monstrous family that Rosemary had married some awful rotter who couldn't even keep her. She would have the whole lot of them nagging at her together. Besides, there was the baby to think about. The money-god is so cunning. If he only baited his traps with yachts and race-horses, tarts and champagne, how easy it would be to dodge them. It is when he gets at you through your sense of decency that he finds you helpless.

The Bovex Ballad jungled in Gordon's head. He ought to stand firm. He had made war on money — he ought to stick it out. After all, hitherto he HAD stuck it out, after a fashion. He looked back over his life. No use deceiving himself. It had been a dreadful life — lonely, squalid, futile. He had lived thirty years and achieved nothing except misery. But that was what he had chosen. It was what he WANTED, even now. He wanted to sink down, down into the muck where money does not rule. But this baby-business had upset everything. It was a pretty banal predicament, after all. Private vices, public virtues — the dilemma is as old as the world.

He looked up and saw that he was passing a public library. A

thought struck him. That baby. What did it mean, anyway, having a baby? What was it that was actually happening to Rosemary at this moment? He had only vague and general ideas of what pregnancy meant. No doubt they would have books in there that would tell him about it. He went in. The lending library was on the left. It was there that you had to ask for works of reference.

The woman at the desk was a university graduate, young, colourless, spectacled, and intensely disagreeable. She had a fixed suspicion that no one — at least, no male person — ever consulted works of reference except in search of pornography. As soon as you approached she pierced you through and through with a flash of her pince-nez and let you know that your dirty secret was no secret from HER. After all, all works of reference are pornographical, except perhaps Whitaker's Almanack. You can put even the Oxford Dictionary to evil purposes by looking up words like —— and —— .

Gordon knew her type at a glance, but he was too preoccupied to care. 'Have you any book on gynaecology?' he said.

'Any WHAT?' demanded the young woman with a pince-nez flash of unmistakable triumph. As usual! Another male in search of dirt!

'Well, any books on midwifery? About babies being born, and so forth.'

'We don't issue books of that description to the general public,' said the young woman frostily.

'I'm sorry — there's a point I particularly want to look up.'

'Are you a medical student?'

'No.'

'Then I don't QUITE see what you want with books on midwifery.'

Curse the woman! Gordon thought. At another time he would have been afraid of her; at present, however, she merely bored him.

'If you want to know, my wife's going to have a baby. We neither of us know much about it. I want to see whether I can find out anything useful.'

The young woman did not believe him. He looked too shabby and worn, she decided, to be a newly married man. However, it was her job to lend out books, and she seldom actually refused them, except

to children. You always got your book in the end, after you had been made to feel yourself a dirty swine. With an aseptic air she led Gordon to a small table in the middle of the library and presented him with two fat books in brown covers. Thereafter she left him alone, but kept an eye on him from whatever part of the library she happened to be in. He could feel her pince-nez probing the back of his neck at long range, trying to decide from his demeanour whether he was really searching for information or merely picking out the dirty bits.

He opened one of the books and searched inexpertly through it. There were acres of close-printed text full of Latin words. That was no use. He wanted something simple — pictures, for choice. How long had this thing been going on? Six weeks — nine weeks, perhaps. Ah! This must be it.

He came on a print of a nine weeks' foetus. It gave him a shock to see it, for he had not expected it to look in the least like that. It was a deformed, gnomelike thing, a sort of clumsy caricature of a human being, with a huge domed head as big as the rest of its body. In the middle of the great blank expanse of head there was a tiny button of an ear. The thing was in profile; its boneless arm was bent, and one hand, crude as a seal's flipper, covered its face — fortunately, perhaps. Below were little skinny legs, twisted like a monkey's with the toes turned in. It was a monstrous thing, and yet strangely human. It surprised him that they should begin looking human so soon. He had pictured something much more rudimentary; a mere blob of nucleus, like a bubble of frog-spawn. But it must be very tiny, of course. He looked at the dimensions marked below. Length 30 millimetres. About the size of a large gooseberry.

But perhaps it had not been going on quite so long as that. He turned back a page or two and found a print of a six weeks' foetus. A really dreadful thing this time — a thing he could hardly even bear to look at. Strange that our beginnings and endings are so ugly — the unborn as ugly as the dead. This thing looked as if it were dead already. Its huge head, as though too heavy to hold upright, was bent over at right angles at the place where its neck ought to have been. There was nothing you could call a face, only a wrinkle representing the eye — or was it the mouth? It had no human resemblance this

time; it was more like a dead puppy-dog. Its short thick arms were very doglike, the hands being mere stumpy paws. 15.5 millimetres long — no bigger than a hazel nut.

He pored for a long time over the two pictures. Their ugliness made them more credible and therefore more moving. His baby had seemed real to him from the moment when Rosemary spoke of abortion; but it had been a reality without visual shape — something that happened in the dark and was only important after it had happened. But here was the actual process taking place. Here was the poor ugly thing, no bigger than a gooseberry, that he had created by his heedless act. Its future, its continued existence perhaps, depended on him. Besides, it was a bit of himself — it WAS himself. Dare one dodge such a responsibility as that?

But what about the alternative? He got up, handed over his books to the disagreeable young woman, and went out; then, on an impulse, turned back and went into the other part of the library, where the periodicals were kept. The usual crowd of mangy-looking people were dozing over the papers. There was one table set apart for women's papers. He picked up one of them at random and bore it off to another table.

It was an American paper of the more domestic kind, mainly adverts with a few stories lurking apologetically among them. And WHAT adverts! Quickly he flicked over the shiny pages. Lingerie, jewellery, cosmetics, fur coats, silk stockings flicked up and down like the figures in a child's peepshow. Page after page, advert after advert. Lipsticks, undies, tinned food, patent medicines, slimming cures, face-creams. A sort of cross-section of the money-world. A panorama of ignorance, greed, vulgarity, snobbishness, whoredom, and disease.

And THAT was the world they wanted him to re-enter. THAT was the business in which he had a chance of Making Good. He flicked over the pages more slowly. Flick, flick. Adorable — until she smiles. The food that is shot out of a gun. Do you let foot-fag affect your personality? Get back that peach-bloom on a Beautyrest Mattress. Only a PENETRATING face-cream will reach that undersurface dirt. Pink toothbrush is HER trouble. How to alkalize your stomach almost instantly. Roughage for husky kids. Are you

one of the four out of five? The world-famed Culturequick Scrapbook. Only a drummer and yet he quoted Dante.

Christ, what muck!

But of course it was an American paper. The Americans always go one better on any kinds of beastliness, whether it is ice-cream soda, racketeering, or theosophy. He went over to the women's table and picked up another paper. An English one this time. Perhaps the ads in an English paper wouldn't be quite so bad — a little less brutally offensive?

He opened the paper. Flick, flick. Britons never shall be slaves!

Flick, flick. Get that waist-line back to normal! She SAID 'Thanks awfully for the lift,' but she THOUGHT, 'Poor boy, why doesn't somebody tell him?' How a woman of thirty-two stole her young man from a girl of twenty. Prompt relief for feeble kidneys. Silkyseam — the smooth-sliding bathroom tissue. Asthma was choking her! Are YOU ashamed of your undies? Kiddies clamour for their Breakfast Crisps. Now I've a schoolgirl complexion all over. Hike all day on a slab of Vitamalt!

To be mixed up in THAT! To be in it and of it — part and parcel of it! God, God, God!

Presently he went out. The dreadful thing was that he knew already what he was going to do. His mind was made up — had been made up for a long time past. When this problem appeared it had brought its solution with it; all his hesitation had been a kind of make-believe. He felt as though some force outside himself were pushing him. There was a telephone booth near by. Rosemary's hostel was on the phone — she ought to be at home by now. He went into the booth, feeling in his pocket. Yes, exactly two pennies. He dropped them into the slot, swung the dial.

A refaned, adenoidal feminine voice answered him: 'Who's thyah, please?'

He pressed Button A. So the die was cast.

'Is Miss Waterlow in?'

'Who's THYAH, please?'

'Say it's Mr Comstock. She'll know. Is she at home?'

'Ay'll see. Hold the lane, please.'

A pause.

‘Hullo! Is that you, Gordon?’

‘Hullo! Hullo! Is that you, Rosemary? I just wanted to tell you. I’ve thought it over — I’ve made up my mind.’

‘Oh!’ There was another pause. With difficulty mastering her voice, she added: ‘Well, what did you decide?’

‘It’s all right. I’ll take the job — if they’ll give it me, that is.’

‘Oh, Gordon, I’m so glad! You’re not angry with me? You don’t feel I’ve sort of bullied you into it?’

‘No, it’s all right. It’s the only thing I can do. I’ve thought everything out. I’ll go up to the office and see them tomorrow.’

‘I AM so glad!’

‘Of course, I’m assuming they’ll give me the job. But I suppose they will, after what old Erskine said.’

‘I’m sure they will. But, Gordon, there’s just one thing. You will go there nicely dressed, won’t you? It might make a lot of difference.’

‘I know. I’ll have to get my best suit out of pawn. Ravelston will lend me the money.’

‘Never mind about Ravelston. I’ll lend you the money. I’ve got four pounds put away. I’ll run out and wire it you before the post-office shuts. I expect you’ll want some new shoes and a new tie as well. And, oh, Gordon!’

‘What?’

‘Wear a hat when you go up to the office, won’t you? It looks better, wearing a hat.’

‘A hat! God! I haven’t worn a hat for two years. Must I?’

‘Well — it does look more business-like, doesn’t it?’

‘Oh, all right. A bowler hat, even, if you think I ought.’

‘I think a soft hat would do. But get your hair cut, won’t you, there’s a dear?’

‘Yes, don’t you worry. I’ll be a smart young business man. Well groomed, and all that.’

‘Thanks ever so, Gordon dear. I must run out and wire that money. Good night and good luck.’

‘Good night.’

He came out of the booth. So that was that. He had torn it now, right enough.

He walked rapidly away. What had he done? Chucked up the sponge! Broken all his oaths! His long and lonely war had ended in ignominious defeat. Circumcise ye your foreskins, saith the Lord. He was coming back to the fold, repentant. He seemed to be walking faster than usual. There was a peculiar sensation, an actual physical sensation, in his heart, in his limbs, all over him. What was it? Shame, misery, despair? Rage at being back in the clutch of money? Boredom when he thought of the deadly future? He dragged the sensation forth, faced it, examined it. It was relief.

Yes, that was the truth of it. Now that the thing was done he felt nothing but relief; relief that now at last he had finished with dirt, cold, hunger, and loneliness and could get back to decent, fully human life. His resolutions, now that he had broken them, seemed nothing but a frightful weight that he had cast off. Moreover, he was aware that he was only fulfilling his destiny. In some corner of his mind he had always known that this would happen. He thought of the day when he had given them notice at the New Albion; and Mr Erskine's kind, red, beefish face, gently counselling him not to chuck up a 'good' job for nothing. How bitterly he had sworn, then, that he was done with 'good' jobs for ever! Yet it was foredoomed that he should come back, and he had known it even then. And it was not merely because of Rosemary and the baby that he had done it. That was the obvious cause, the precipitating cause, but even without it the end would have been the same; if there had been no baby to think about, something else would have forced his hand. For it was what, in his secret heart, he had desired.

After all he did not lack vitality, and that moneyless existence to which he had condemned himself had thrust him ruthlessly out of the stream of life. He looked back over the last two frightful years. He had blasphemed against money, rebelled against money, tried to live like an anchorite outside the money-world; and it had brought him not only misery, but also a frightful emptiness, an inescapable sense of futility. To abjure money is to abjure life. Be not righteous over much; why shouldst thou die before thy time? Now he was back in the money-world, or soon would be. Tomorrow he would go up to the New Albion, in his best suit and overcoat (he must remember to get his overcoat out of pawn at the same time as his suit), in homburg

hat of the correct gutter-crawling pattern, neatly shaved and with his hair cut short. He would be as though born anew. The sluttish poet of today would be hardly recognizable in the natty young business man of tomorrow. They would take him back, right enough; he had the talent they needed. He would buckle to work, sell his soul, and hold down his job.

And what about the future? Perhaps it would turn out that these last two years had not left much mark upon him. They were merely a gap, a small setback in his career. Quite quickly, now that he had taken the first step, he would develop the cynical, blinkered business mentality. He would forget his fine disgusts, cease to rage against the tyranny of money — cease to be aware of it, even — cease to squirm at the ads for Bovex and Breakfast Crisps. He would sell his soul so utterly that he would forget it had ever been his. He would get married, settle down, prosper moderately, push a pram, have a villa and a radio and an aspidistra. He would be a law-abiding little cit like any other law-abiding little cit — a soldier in the strap-hanging army. Probably it was better so.

He slowed his pace a little. He was thirty and there was grey in his hair, yet he had a queer feeling that he had only just grown up. It occurred to him that he was merely repeating the destiny of every human being. Everyone rebels against the money-code, and everyone sooner or later surrenders. He had kept up his rebellion a little longer than most, that was all. And he had made such a wretched failure of it! He wondered whether every anchorite in his dismal cell pines secretly to be back in the world of men. Perhaps there were a few who did not. Somebody or other had said that the modern world is only habitable by saints and scoundrels. He, Gordon, wasn't a saint. Better, then, to be an unpretending scoundrel along with the others. It was what he had secretly pined for; now that he had acknowledged his desire and surrendered to it, he was at peace.

He was making roughly in the direction of home. He looked up at the houses he was passing. It was a street he did not know. Oldish houses, mean-looking and rather dark, let off in flatlets and single rooms for the most part. Railed areas, smoke-grimed bricks, whited steps, dingy lace curtains. 'Apartments' cards in half the windows, aspidistras in nearly all. A typical lower-middle-class street. But not,

on the whole, the kind of street that he wanted to see blown to hell by bombs.

He wondered about the people in houses like those. They would be, for example, small clerks, shop-assistants, commercial travellers, insurance touts, tram conductors. Did THEY know that they were only puppets dancing when money pulled the strings? You bet they didn't. And if they did, what would they care? They were too busy being born, being married, begetting, working, dying. It mightn't be a bad thing, if you could manage it, to feel yourself one of them, one of the ruck of men. Our civilization is founded on greed and fear, but in the lives of common men the greed and fear are mysteriously transmuted into something nobler. The lower-middle-class people in there, behind their lace curtains, with their children and their scraps of furniture and their aspidistras — they lived by the money-code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency. The money-code as they interpreted it was not merely cynical and hoggish. They had their standards, their inviolable points of honour. They 'kept themselves respectable' — kept the aspidistra flying. Besides, they were ALIVE. They were bound up in the bundle of life. They begot children, which is what the saints and the soul-savers never by any chance do.

The aspidistra is the tree of life, he thought suddenly.

He was aware of a lumpish weight in his inner pocket. It was the manuscript of London Pleasures. He took it out and had a look at it under a street lamp. A great wad of paper, soiled and tattered, with that peculiar, nasty, grimed-at-the-edges look of papers which have been a long time in one's pocket. About four hundred lines in all. The sole fruit of his exile, a two years' foetus which would never be born. Well, he had finished with all that. Poetry! POETRY, indeed! In 1935.

What should he do with the manuscript? Best thing, shove it down the W.C. But he was a long way from home and had not the necessary penny. He halted by the iron grating of a drain. In the window of the nearest house an aspidistra, a striped one, peeped between the yellow lace curtains.

He unrolled a page of London Pleasures. In the middle of the labyrinthine scrawlings a line caught his eye. Momentary regret

stabbed him. After all, parts of it weren't half bad! If only it could ever be finished! It seemed such a shame to shy it away after all the work he had done on it. Save it, perhaps? Keep it by him and finish it secretly in his spare time? Even now it might come to something.

No, no! Keep your parole. Either surrender or don't surrender.

He doubled up the manuscript and stuffed it between the bars of the drain. It fell with a plop into the water below.

Vicisti, O aspidistra!

Chapter 12

Ravelston wanted to say good-bye outside the registry office, but they would not hear of it, and insisted on dragging him off to have lunch with them. Not at Modigliani's, however. They went to one of those jolly little Soho restaurants where you can get such a wonderful four-course lunch for half a crown. They had garlic sausage with bread and butter, fried plaice, entrecote aux pommes frites, and a rather watery caramel pudding; also a bottle of Medoc Superieur, three and sixpence the bottle.

Only Ravelston was at the wedding. The other witness was a poor meek creature with no teeth, a professional witness whom they picked up outside the registry office and tipped half a crown. Julia hadn't been able to get away from the teashop, and Gordon and Rosemary had only got the day off from the office by pretexts carefully manoeuvred a long time ahead. Nobody knew they were getting married, except Ravelston and Julia. Rosemary was going to go on working at the studio for another month or two. She had preferred to keep her marriage a secret until it was over, chiefly for the sake of her innumerable brothers and sisters, none of whom could afford wedding presents. Gordon, left to himself, would have done it in a more regular manner. He had even wanted to be married in church. But Rosemary had put her foot down to that idea.

Gordon had been back at the office two months now. Four ten a week he was getting. It would be a tight pinch when Rosemary stopped working, but there was hope of a rise next year. They would have to get some money out of Rosemary's parents, of course, when the baby was due to arrive. Mr Clew had left the New Albion a year ago, and his place had been taken by a Mr Warner, a Canadian who had been five years with a New York publicity firm. Mr Warner was a live wire but quite a likeable person. He and Gordon had a big job on hand at the moment. The Queen of Sheba Toilet Requisites Co. were sweeping the country with a monster campaign for their deodorant, April Dew. They had decided that B.O. and halitosis were worked out, or nearly, and had been racking their brains for a long time past to think of some new way of scaring the public. Then some

bright spark suggested, What about smelling feet? That field had never been exploited and had immense possibilities. The Queen of Sheba had turned the idea over to the New Albion. What they asked for was a really telling slogan; something in the class of 'Night-starvation' — something that would rankle in the public consciousness like a poisoned arrow. Mr Warner had thought it over for three days and then emerged with the unforgettable phrase 'P.P.' 'P.P.' stood for Pedic Perspiration. It was a real flash of genius, that. It was so simple and so arresting. Once you knew what they stood for, you couldn't possibly see those letters 'P.P.' without a guilty tremor. Gordon had searched for the word 'pedic' in the Oxford Dictionary and found that it did not exist. But Mr Warner has said, Hell! what did it matter, anyway? It would put the wind up them just the same. The Queen of Sheba had jumped at the idea, of course.

They were putting every penny they could spare into the campaign. On every hoarding in the British Isles huge accusing posters were hammering 'P.P.' into the public mind. All the posters were identically the same. They wasted no words, but just demanded with sinister simplicity:

'P.P.'
WHAT ABOUT
YOU?

Just that — no pictures, no explanations. There was no longer any need to say what 'P.P.' stood for; everyone in England knew it by this time. Mr Warner, with Gordon to help him, was designing the smaller ads for the newspapers and magazines. It was Mr Warner who supplied the bold sweeping ideas, sketched the general lay-out of the ads, and decided what pictures would be needed; but it was Gordon who wrote most of the letterpress — wrote the harrowing little stories, each a realistic novel in a hundred words, about despairing virgins of thirty, and lonely bachelors whose girls had unaccountably thrown them over, and overworked wives who could not afford to change their stockings once a week and who saw their husbands subsiding into the clutches of 'the other woman'. He did it very well; he did it far better than he had ever done anything else in his life. Mr Warner gave golden reports of him. There was no doubt about Gordon's literary ability. He could use words with the

economy that is only learned by years of effort. So perhaps his long agonizing struggles to be a 'writer' had not been wasted after all.

They said good-bye to Ravelston outside the restaurant. The taxi bore them away. Ravelston had insisted on paying for the taxi from the registry office, so they felt they could afford another taxi. Warmed with wine, they lolled together, in the dusty May sunshine that filtered through the taxi window. Rosemary's head on Gordon's shoulder, their hands together in her lap. He played with the very slender wedding ring on Rosemary's ring finger. Rolled gold, five and sixpence. It looked all right, however.

'I must remember to take if off before I go to the studio tomorrow,' said Rosemary reflectively.

'To think we're really married! Till death do us part. We've done it now, right enough.'

'Terrifying, isn't it?'

'I expect we'll settle down all right, though. With a house of our own and a pram and an aspidistra.'

He lifted her face up to kiss her. She had a touch of make-up on today, the first he had ever seen on her, and not too skilfully applied. Neither of their faces stood the spring sunshine very well. There were fine lines on Rosemary's, deep seams on Gordon's. Rosemary looked twenty-eight, perhaps; Gordon looked at least thirty-five. But Rosemary had pulled the three white hairs out of her crown yesterday.

'Do you love me?' he said.

'Adore you, silly.'

'I believe you do. It's queer. I'm thirty and moth-eaten.'

'I don't care.'

They began to kiss, then drew hurriedly apart as they saw two scrawny upper-middle-class women, in a car that was moving parallel to their own, observing them with catty interest.

The flat off the Edgware Road wasn't too bad. It was a dull quarter and rather a slummy street, but it was convenient for the centre of London; also it was quiet, being a blind alley. From the back window (it was a top floor) you could see the roof of Paddington Station. Twenty-one and six a week, unfurnished. One bed, one reception, kitchenette, bath (with geyser), and W.C. They

had got their furniture already, most of it on the never-never. Ravelston had given them a complete set of crockery for a wedding present — a very kindly thought, that. Julia had given them a rather dreadful 'occasional' table, veneered walnut with a scalloped edge. Gordon had begged and implored her not to give them anything. Poor Julia! Christmas had left her utterly broke, as usual, and Aunt Angela's birthday had been in March. But it would have seemed to Julia a kind of crime against nature to let a wedding go by without giving a present. God knew what sacrifices she had made to scrape together thirty bob for that 'occasional' table. They were still very short of linen and cutlery. Things would have to be bought piecemeal, when they had a few bob to spare.

They ran up the last flight of stairs in their excitement to get to the flat. It was all ready to inhabit. They had spent their evenings for weeks past getting the stuff in. It seemed to them a tremendous adventure to have this place of their own. Neither of them had ever owned furniture before; they had been living in furnished rooms ever since their childhood. As soon as they got inside they made a careful tour of the flat, checking, examining, and admiring everything as though they did not know by heart already every item that was there. They fell into absurd raptures over each separate stick of furniture. The double bed with the clean sheet ready turned down over the pink eiderdown! The linen and towels stowed away in the chest of drawers! The gateleg table, the four hard chairs, the two armchairs, the divan, the bookcase, the red Indian rug, the copper coal-scuttle which they had picked up cheap in the Caledonian market! And it was all their own, every bit of it was their own — at least, so long as they didn't get behind with the instalments! They went into the kitchenette. Everything was ready, down to the minutest detail. Gas stove, meat safe, enamel-topped table, plate rack, saucepans, kettle, sink basket, mops, dishcloths — even a tin of Panshine, a packet of soapflakes, and a pound of washing soda in a jam-jar. It was all ready for use, ready for life. You could have cooked a meal in it here and now. They stood hand in hand by the enamel-topped table, admiring the view of Paddington Station.

'Oh, Gordon, what fun it all is! To have a place that's really our own and no landladies interfering!'

‘What I like best of all is to think of having breakfast together. You opposite me on the other side of the table, pouring out coffee. How queer it is! We’ve known each other all these years and we’ve never once had breakfast together.’

‘Let’s cook something now. I’m dying to use those saucepans.’

She made some coffee and brought it into the front room on the red lacquered tray which they had bought in Selfridge’s Bargain Basement. Gordon wandered over to the ‘occasional’ table by the window. Far below the mean street was drowned in a haze of sunlight, as though a glassy yellow sea had flooded it fathoms deep. He laid his coffee cup down on the ‘occasional’ table.

‘This is where we’ll put the aspidistra,’ he said.

‘Put the WHAT?’

‘The aspidistra.’

She laughed. He saw that she thought he was joking, and added: ‘We must remember to go out and order it before all the florists are shut.’

‘Gordon! You don’t mean that? You aren’t REALLY thinking of having an aspidistra?’

‘Yes, I am. We won’t let ours get dusty, either. They say an old toothbrush is the best thing to clean them with.’

She had come over to his side, and she pinched his arm.

‘You aren’t serious, by any chance, are you?’

‘Why shouldn’t I be?’

‘An aspidistra! To think of having one of those awful depressing things in here! Besides, where could we put it? I’m not going to have it in this room, and in the bedroom it would be worse. Fancy having an aspidistra in one’s bedroom!’

‘We don’t want one in the bedroom. This is the place for an aspidistra. In the front window, where the people opposite can see it.’

‘Gordon, you ARE joking — you must be joking!’

‘No, I’m not. I tell you we’ve got to have an aspidistra.’

‘But why?’

‘It’s the proper thing to have. It’s the first thing one buys after one’s married. In fact, it’s practically part of the wedding ceremony.’

‘Don’t be so absurd! I simply couldn’t bear to have one of those things in here. You shall have a geranium if you really must. But not

an aspidistra.'

'A geranium's no good. It's an aspidistra we want.'

'Well, we're not going to have one, that's flat.'

'Yes, we are. Didn't you promise to obey me just now?'

'No, I did not. We weren't married in church.'

'Oh, well, it's implied in the marriage service. "Love, honour, and obey" and all that.'

'No, it isn't. Anyway we aren't going to have that aspidistra.'

'Yes, we are.'

'We are NOT, Gordon!'

'Yes.'

'No!'

'Yes!'

'NO!'

She did not understand him. She thought he was merely being perverse. They grew heated, and, according to their habit, quarrelled violently. It was their first quarrel as man and wife. Half an hour later they went out to the florist's to order the aspidistra.

But when they were half-way down the first flight of stairs Rosemary stopped short and clutched the banister. Her lips parted; she looked very queer for a moment. She pressed a hand against her middle.

'Oh, Gordon!'

'What?'

'I felt it move!'

'Felt what move?'

'The baby. I felt it move inside me.'

'You did?'

A strange, almost terrible feeling, a sort of warm convulsion, stirred in his entrails. For a moment he felt as though he were sexually joined to her, but joined in some subtle way that he had never imagined. He had paused a step or two below her. He fell on his knees, pressed his ear to her belly, and listened.

'I can't hear anything,' he said at last.

'Of course not, silly! Not for months yet.'

'But I shall be able to hear it later on, shan't I?'

'I think so. YOU can hear it at seven months, *I* can feel it at four. I

think that's how it is.'

'But it really did move? You're sure? You really felt it move?'

'Oh, yes. It moved.'

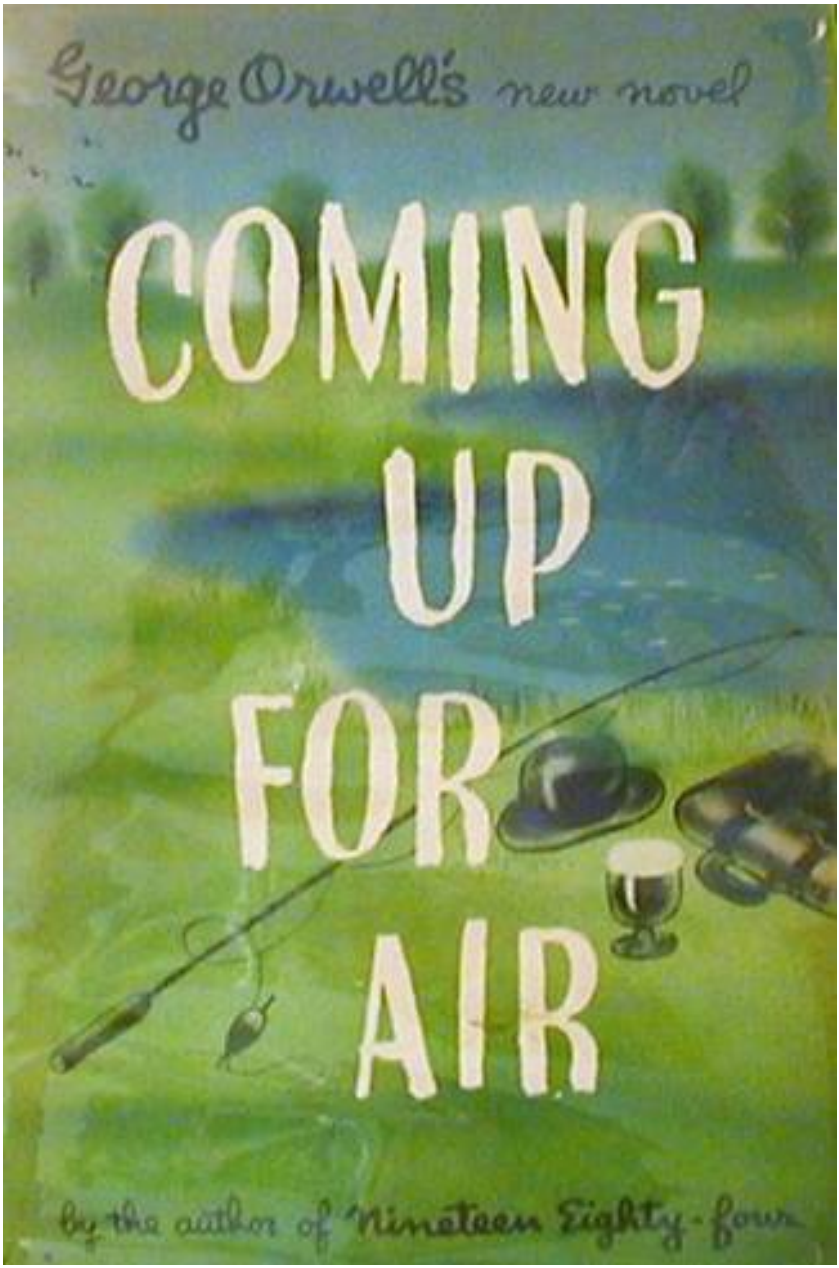
For a long time he remained kneeling there, his head pressed against the softness of her belly. She clasped her hands behind his head and pulled it closer. He could hear nothing, only the blood drumming in his own ear. But she could not have been mistaken. Somewhere in there, in the safe, warm, cushioned darkness, it was alive and stirring.

Well, once again things were happening in the Comstock family.

COMING UP FOR AIR

Coming Up for Air was the last of Orwell's novels to be published by Victor Gollancz, and was released on June the 12th 1939. The work references the imminence of war and the dread of this impending catastrophe that awaits the country. The text is a first person narrative which centres on the character of George Bowling who is stuck in the wage-labour hell of Gordon Comstock's (*Keeping the Aspidistra Flying)* nightmares. Bowling, like Comstock, wishes to escape his world, but pursues the desire in a less radical manner. He wants to be free of his family commitments, the drudge of work and the fear of the oncoming war.

When Bowling wins some money gambling, a fact he conceals from his wife and children, he must decide how to spend it. He determines on a trip down memory lane to revisit places of importance and sentimental value from his childhood in the countryside. The fish pond in particular is a beloved location for the narrator, which is almost certainly reflective of Orwell's affection for fishing with family friends during his youth. Bowling attempts to escape into his past, to rediscover the tranquillity of rural life and renew his mental rigour. Above all he is seeking a sense of purity, of something better and truer. The novel is a bleakly comic piece of literature as Bowling discovers his favourite childhood changed beyond recognition. The countryside of his youth has been destroyed and no longer exists in anything more substantial than his memory. The respite, the holiday, the escape the narrator craves so badly cannot be found in the land of his past which appears to no longer exist. Orwell explores how the restrictive and oppressive structure of society impinges on the mental state of those who inhabit it.



The first edition

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An image from the 1965 television adaptation

Part I

1

The idea really came to me the day I got my new false teeth.

I remember the morning well. At about a quarter to eight I'd nipped out of bed and got into the bathroom just in time to shut the kids out. It was a beastly January morning, with a dirty yellowish-grey sky. Down below, out of the little square of bathroom window, I could see the ten yards by five of grass, with a privet hedge round it and a bare patch in the middle, that we call the back garden. There's the same back garden, some privets, and same grass, behind every house in Ellesmere Road. Only difference — where there are no kids there's no bare patch in the middle.

I was trying to shave with a bluntish razor-blade while the water ran into the bath. My face looked back at me out of the mirror, and underneath, in a tumbler of water on the little shelf over the washbasin, the teeth that belonged in the face. It was the temporary set that Warner, my dentist, had given me to wear while the new ones were being made. I haven't such a bad face, really. It's one of those bricky-red faces that go with butter-coloured hair and pale-blue eyes. I've never gone grey or bald, thank God, and when I've got my teeth in I probably don't look my age, which is forty-five.

Making a mental note to buy razor-blades, I got into the bath and started soaping. I soaped my arms (I've got those kind of pudgy arms that are freckled up to the elbow) and then took the back- brush and soaped my shoulder-blades, which in the ordinary way I can't reach. It's a nuisance, but there are several parts of my body that I can't reach nowadays. The truth is that I'm inclined to be a little bit on the fat side. I don't mean that I'm like something in a sideshow at a fair. My weight isn't much over fourteen stone, and last time I measured round my waist it was either forty-eight or forty-nine, I forget which. And I'm not what they call 'disgustingly' fat, I haven't got one of those bellies that sag half-way down to the knees. It's merely that I'm a little bit broad in the beam, with a tendency to be barrel-shaped. Do you know the active, hearty kind of fat man, the athletic bouncing type that's nicknamed Fatty or Tubby and is always the life and soul of the party? I'm that type. 'Fatty' they mostly call me.

Fatty Bowling. George Bowling is my real name.

But at that moment I didn't feel like the life and soul of the party. And it struck me that nowadays I nearly always do have a morose kind of feeling in the early mornings, although I sleep well and my digestion's good. I knew what it was, of course — it was those bloody false teeth. The things were magnified by the water in the tumbler, and they were grinning at me like the teeth in a skull. It gives you a rotten feeling to have your gums meet, a sort of pinched-up, withered feeling like when you've bitten into a sour apple. Besides, say what you will, false teeth are a landmark. When your last natural tooth goes, the time when you can kid yourself that you're a Hollywood sheik, is definitely at an end. And I was fat as well as forty-five. As I stood up to soap my crutch I had a look at my figure. It's all rot about fat men being unable to see their feet, but it's a fact that when I stand upright I can only see the front halves of mine. No woman, I thought as I worked the soap round my belly, will ever look twice at me again, unless she's paid to. Not that at that moment I particularly wanted any woman to look twice at me.

But it struck me that this morning there were reasons why I ought to have been in a better mood. To begin with I wasn't working today. The old car, in which I 'cover' my district (I ought to tell you that I'm in the insurance business. The Flying Salamander. Life, fire, burglary, twins, shipwreck — everything), was temporarily in dock, and though I'd got to look in at the London office to drop some papers, I was really taking the day off to go and fetch my new false teeth. And besides, there was another business that had been in and out of my mind for some time past. This was that I had seventeen quid which nobody else had heard about — nobody in the family, that is. It had happened this way. A chap in our firm, Mellors by name, had got hold of a book called Astrology applied to Horse-racing which proved that it's all a question of influence of the planets on the colours the jockey is wearing. Well, in some race or other there was a mare called Corsair's Bride, a complete outsider, but her jockey's colour was green, which it seemed was just the colour for the planets that happened to be in the ascendant. Mellors, who was deeply bitten with this astrology business, was putting several quid on the horse and went down on his knees to me to do the same. In the

end, chiefly to shut him up, I risked ten bob, though I don't bet as a general rule. Sure enough Corsair's Bride came home in a walk. I forget the exact odds, but my share worked out at seventeen quid. By a kind of instinct — rather queer, and probably indicating another landmark in my life — I just quietly put the money in the bank and said nothing to anybody. I'd never done anything of this kind before. A good husband and father would have spent it on a dress for Hilda (that's my wife) and boots for the kids. But I'd been a good husband and father for fifteen years and I was beginning to get fed up with it.

After I'd soaped myself all over I felt better and lay down in the bath to think about my seventeen quid and what to spend it on. The alternatives, it seemed to me, were either a week-end with a woman or dribbling it quietly away on odds and ends such as cigars and double whiskies. I'd just turned on some more hot water and was thinking about women and cigars when there was a noise like a herd of buffaloes coming down the two steps that lead to the bathroom. It was the kids, of course. Two kids in a house the size of ours is like a quart of beer in a pint mug. There was a frantic stamping outside and then a yell of agony.

'Dadda! I wanna come in!'

'Well, you can't. Clear out!'

'But dadda! I wanna go somewhere!'

'Go somewhere else, then. Hop it. I'm having my bath.'

'Dad-DA! I wanna GO SOME — WHERE!'

No use! I knew the danger signal. The W.C. is in the bathroom — it would be, of course, in a house like ours. I hooked the plug out of the bath and got partially dry as quickly as I could. As I opened the door, little Billy — my youngest, aged seven — shot past me, dodging the smack which I aimed at his head. It was only when I was nearly dressed and looking for a tie that I discovered that my neck was still soapy.

It's a rotten thing to have a soapy neck. It gives you a disgusting sticky feeling, and the queer thing is that, however carefully you sponge it away, when you've once discovered that your neck is soapy you feel sticky for the rest of the day. I went downstairs in a bad temper and ready to make myself disagreeable.

Our dining-room, like the other dining-rooms in Ellesmere Road,

is a poky little place, fourteen feet by twelve, or maybe it's twelve by ten, and the Japanese oak sideboard, with the two empty decanters and the silver egg-stand that Hilda's mother gave us for a wedding present, doesn't leave much room. Old Hilda was glooming behind the teapot, in her usual state of alarm and dismay because the News Chronicle had announced that the price of butter was going up, or something. She hadn't lighted the gas-fire, and though the windows were shut it was beastly cold. I bent down and put a match to the fire, breathing rather loudly through my nose (bending always makes me puff and blow) as a kind of hint to Hilda. She gave me the little sidelong glance that she always gives me when she thinks I'm doing something extravagant.

Hilda is thirty-nine, and when I first knew her she looked just like a hare. So she does still, but she's got very thin and rather wizened, with a perpetual brooding, worried look in her eyes, and when she's more upset than usual she's got a trick of humping her shoulders and folding her arms across her breast, like an old gypsy woman over her fire. She's one of those people who get their main kick in life out of foreseeing disasters. Only petty disasters, of course. As for wars, earthquakes, plagues, famines, and revolutions, she pays no attention to them. Butter is going up, and the gas-bill is enormous, and the kids' boots are wearing out, and there's another instalment due on the radio — that's Hilda's litany. She gets what I've finally decided is a definite pleasure out of rocking herself to and fro with her arms across her breast, and glooming at me, 'But, George, it's very SERIOUS! I don't know what we're going to DO! I don't know where the money's coming from! You don't seem to realize how serious it IS!' and so on and so forth. It's fixed firmly in her head that we shall end up in the workhouse. The funny thing is that if we ever do get to the workhouse Hilda won't mind it a quarter as much as I shall, in fact she'll probably rather enjoy the feeling of security.

The kids were downstairs already, having washed and dressed at lightning speed, as they always do when there's no chance to keep anyone else out of the bathroom. When I got to the breakfast table they were having an argument which went to the tune of 'Yes, you did!' 'No, I didn't!' 'Yes, you did!' 'No, I didn't!' and looked like going on for the rest of the morning, until I told them to cheese it.

There are only the two of them, Billy, aged seven, and Lorna, aged eleven. It's a peculiar feeling that I have towards the kids. A great deal of the time I can hardly stick the sight of them. As for their conversation, it's just unbearable. They're at that dreary bread-and-butter age when a kid's mind revolves round things like rulers, pencil-boxes, and who got top marks in French. At other times, especially when they're asleep, I have quite a different feeling. Sometimes I've stood over their cots, on summer evenings when it's light, and watched them sleeping, with their round faces and their tow-coloured hair, several shades lighter than mine, and it's given me that feeling you read about in the Bible when it says your bowels yearn. At such times I feel that I'm just a kind of dried-up seed-pod that doesn't matter twopence and that my sole importance has been to bring these creatures into the world and feed them while they're growing. But that's only at moments. Most of the time my separate existence looks pretty important to me, I feel that there's life in the old dog yet and plenty of good times ahead, and the notion of myself as a kind of tame dairy-cow for a lot of women and kids to chase up and down doesn't appeal to me.

We didn't talk much at breakfast. Hilda was in her 'I don't know what we're going to DO!' mood, partly owing to the price of butter and partly because the Christmas holidays were nearly over and there was still five pounds owing on the school fees for last term. I ate my boiled egg and spread a piece of bread with Golden Crown marmalade. Hilda will persist in buying the stuff. It's fivepence-halfpenny a pound, and the label tells you, in the smallest print the law allows, that it contains 'a certain proportion of neutral fruit-juice'. This started me off, in the rather irritating way I have sometimes, talking about neutral fruit-trees, wondering what they looked like and what countries they grew in, until finally Hilda got angry. It's not that she minds me chipping her, it's only that in some obscure way she thinks it's wicked to make jokes about anything you save money on.

I had a look at the paper, but there wasn't much news. Down in Spain and over in China they were murdering one another as usual, a woman's legs had been found in a railway waiting-room, and King Zog's wedding was wavering in the balance. Finally, at about ten

o’clock, rather earlier than I’d intended, I started out for town. The kids had gone off to play in the public gardens. It was a beastly raw morning. As I stepped out of the front door a nasty little gust of wind caught the soapy patch on my neck and made me suddenly feel that my clothes didn’t fit and that I was sticky all over.

2

Do you know the road I live in — Ellesmere Road, West Bletchley? Even if you don't, you know fifty others exactly like it.

You know how these streets fester all over the inner-outer suburbs. Always the same. Long, long rows of little semi-detached houses — the numbers in Ellesmere Road run to 212 and ours is 191 — as much alike as council houses and generally uglier. The stucco front, the creosoted gate, the privet hedge, the green front door. The Laurels, the Myrtles, the Hawthorns, Mon Abri, Mon Repos, Belle Vue. At perhaps one house in fifty some anti-social type who'll probably end in the workhouse has painted his front door blue instead of green.

That sticky feeling round my neck had put me into a demoralized kind of mood. It's curious how it gets you down to have a sticky neck. It seems to take all the bounce out of you, like when you suddenly discover in a public place that the sole of one of your shoes is coming off. I had no illusions about myself that morning. It was almost as if I could stand at a distance and watch myself coming down the road, with my fat, red face and my false teeth and my vulgar clothes. A chap like me is incapable of looking like a gentleman. Even if you saw me at two hundred yards' distance you'd know immediately — not, perhaps, that I was in the insurance business, but that I was some kind of tout or salesman. The clothes I was wearing were practically the uniform of the tribe. Grey herring-bone suit, a bit the worse for wear, blue overcoat costing fifty shillings, bowler hat, and no gloves. And I've got the look that's peculiar to people who sell things on commission, a kind of coarse, brazen look. At my best moments, when I've got a new suit or when I'm smoking a cigar, I might pass for a bookie or a publican, and when things are very bad I might be touting vacuum cleaners, but at ordinary times you'd place me correctly. 'Five to ten quid a week', you'd say as soon as you saw me. Economically and socially I'm about at the average level of Ellesmere Road.

I had the street pretty much to myself. The men had bunked to catch the 8.21 and the women were fiddling with the gas-stoves.

When you've time to look about you, and when you happen to be in the right mood, it's a thing that makes you laugh inside to walk down these streets in the inner-outer suburbs and to think of the lives that go on there. Because, after all, what IS a road like Ellesmere Road? Just a prison with the cells all in a row. A line of semidetached torture-chambers where the poor little five-to-ten- pound-a-weekers quake and shiver, every one of them with the boss twisting his tail and his wife riding him like the nightmare and the kids sucking his blood like leeches. There's a lot of rot talked about the sufferings of the working class. I'm not so sorry for the proles myself. Did you ever know a navvy who lay awake thinking about the sack? The prole suffers physically, but he's a free man when he isn't working. But in every one of those little stucco boxes there's some poor bastard who's NEVER free except when he's fast asleep and dreaming that he's got the boss down the bottom of a well and is bunging lumps of coal at him.

Of course, the basic trouble with people like us, I said to myself, is that we all imagine we've got something to lose. To begin with, nine-tenths of the people in Ellesmere Road are under the impression that they own their houses. Ellesmere Road, and the whole quarter surrounding it, until you get to the High Street, is part of a huge racket called the Hesperides Estate, the property of the Cheerful Credit Building Society. Building societies are probably the cleverest racket of modern times. My own line, insurance, is a swindle, I admit, but it's an open swindle with the cards on the table. But the beauty of the building society swindles is that your victims think you're doing them a kindness. You wallop them, and they lick your hand. I sometimes think I'd like to have the Hesperides Estate surmounted by an enormous statue to the god of building societies. It would be a queer sort of god. Among other things it would be bisexual. The top half would be a managing director and the bottom half would be a wife in the family way. In one hand it would carry an enormous key — the key of the workhouse, of course — and in the other — what do they call those things like French horns with presents coming out of them? — a cornucopia, out of which would be pouring portable radios, life- insurance policies, false teeth, aspirins, French letters, and concrete garden rollers.

As a matter of fact, in Ellesmere Road we don't own our houses, even when we've finished paying for them. They're not freehold, only leasehold. They're priced at five-fifty, payable over a period of sixteen years, and they're a class of house, which, if you bought them for cash down, would cost round about three-eighty. That represents a profit of a hundred and seventy for the Cheerful Credit, but needless to say that Cheerful Credit makes a lot more out of it than that. Three-eighty includes the builder's profit, but the Cheerful Credit, under the name of Wilson & Bloom, builds the houses itself and scoops the builder's profit. All it has to pay for is the materials. But it also scoops the profit on the materials, because under the name of Brookes & Scatterby it sells itself the bricks, tiles, doors, window-frames, sand, cement, and, I think, glass. And it wouldn't altogether surprise me to learn that under yet another alias it sells itself the timber to make the doors and window-frames. Also — and this was something which we really might have foreseen, though it gave us all a knock when we discovered it — the Cheerful Credit doesn't always keep to its end of the bargain. When Ellesmere Road was built it gave on some open fields — nothing very wonderful, but good for the kids to play in — known as Platt's Meadows. There was nothing in black and white, but it had always been understood that Platt's Meadows weren't to be built on. However, West Bletchley was a growing suburb, Rothwell's jam factory had opened in '28 and the Anglo-American All-Steel Bicycle factory started in '33, and the population was increasing and rents were going up. I've never seen Sir Herbert Crum or any other of the big noises of the Cheerful Credit in the flesh, but in my mind's eye I could see their mouths watering. Suddenly the builders arrived and houses began to go up on Platt's Meadows. There was a howl of agony from the Hesperides, and a tenants' defence association was set up. No use! Crum's lawyers had knocked the stuffing out of us in five minutes, and Platt's Meadows were built over. But the really subtle swindle, the one that makes me feel old Crum deserved his baronetcy, is the mental one. Merely because of the illusion that we own our houses and have what's called 'a stake in the country', we poor saps in the Hesperides, and in all such places, are turned into Crum's devoted slaves for ever. We're all respectable householders — that's to say

Tories, yes-men, and bumsuckers. Daren't kill the goose that lays the gilded eggs! And the fact that actually we aren't householders, that we're all in the middle of paying for our houses and eaten up with the ghastly fear that something might happen before we've made the last payment, merely increases the effect. We're all bought, and what's more we're bought with our own money. Every one of those poor downtrodden bastards, sweating his guts out to pay twice the proper price for a brick doll's house that's called Belle Vue because there's no view and the bell doesn't ring — every one of those poor suckers would die on the field of battle to save his country from Bolshevism.

I turned down Walpole Road and got into the High Street. There's a train to London at 10.14. I was just passing the Sixpenny Bazaar when I remembered the mental note I'd made that morning to buy a packet of razor-blades. When I got to the soap counter the floor-manager, or whatever his proper title is, was cursing the girl in charge there. Generally there aren't many people in the Sixpenny at that hour of the morning. Sometimes if you go in just after opening-time you see all the girls lined up in a row and given their morning curse, just to get them into trim for the day. They say these big chain-stores have chaps with special powers of sarcasm and abuse who are sent from branch to branch to ginger the girls up. The floor-manager was an ugly little devil, under-sized, with very square shoulders and a spiky grey moustache. He'd just pounced on her about something, some mistake in the change evidently, and was going for her with a voice like a circular saw.

'Ho, no! Course you couldn't count it! COURSE you couldn't. Too much trouble, that'd be. Ho, no!'

Before I could stop myself I'd caught the girl's eye. It wasn't so nice for her to have a fat middle-aged bloke with a red face looking on while she took her cursing. I turned away as quickly as I could and pretended to be interested in some stuff at the next counter, curtain rings or something. He was on to her again. He was one of those people who turn away and then suddenly dart back at you, like a dragon-fly.

'COURSE you couldn't count it! Doesn't matter to YOU if we're two bob out. Doesn't matter at all. What's two bob to YOU?

Couldn't ask YOU to go to the trouble of counting it properly. Ho, no! Nothing matters 'ere 'cept YOUR convenience. You don't think about others, do you?'

This went on for about five minutes in a voice you could hear half across the shop. He kept turning away to make her think he'd finished with her and then darting back to have another go. As I edged a bit farther off I had a glance at them. The girl was a kid about eighteen, rather fat, with a sort of moony face, the kind that would never get the change right anyway. She'd turned pale pink and she was wriggling, actually wriggling with pain. It was just the same as if he'd been cutting into her with a whip. The girls at the other counters were pretending not to hear. He was an ugly, stiff-built little devil, the sort of cock-sparrow type of man that sticks his chest out and puts his hands under his coattails — the type that'd be a sergeant-major only they aren't tall enough. Do you notice how often they have under-sized men for these bullying jobs? He was sticking his face, moustaches and all, almost into hers so as to scream at her better. And the girl all pink and wriggling.

Finally he decided that he'd said enough and strutted off like an admiral on the quarter-deck, and I came up to the counter for my razor-blades. He knew I'd heard every word, and so did she, and both of them knew I knew they knew. But the worst of it was that for my benefit she'd got to pretend that nothing had happened and put on the standoffish keep-your-distance attitude that a shopgirl's supposed to keep up with male customers. Had to act the grown-up young lady half a minute after I'd seen her cursed like a skivvy! Her face was still pink and her hands were trembling. I asked her for penny blades and she started fumbling in the threepenny tray. Then the little devil of a floor-manager turned our way and for a moment both of us thought he was coming back to begin again. The girl flinched like a dog that sees the whip. But she was looking at me out of the corner of her eye. I could see that because I'd seen her cursed she hated me like the devil. Queer!

I cleared out with my razor-blades. Why do they stand it? I was thinking. Pure funk, of course. One back-answer and you get the sack. It's the same everywhere. I thought of the lad that sometimes serves me at the chain-store grocery we deal at. A great hefty lump

of twenty, with cheeks like roses and enormous fore- arms, ought to be working in a blacksmith's shop. And there he is in his white jacket, bent double across the counter, rubbing his hands together with his 'Yes, sir! Very true, sir! Pleasant weather for the time of the year, sir! What can I have the pleasure of getting you today, sir?' practically asking you to kick his bum. Orders, of course. The customer is always right. The thing you can see in his face is mortal dread that you might report him for impertinence and get him sacked. Besides, how's he to know you aren't one of the narks the company sends round? Fear! We swim in it. It's our element. Everyone that isn't scared stiff of losing his job is scared stiff of war, or Fascism, or Communism, or something. Jews sweating when they think of Hitler. It crossed my mind that that little bastard with the spiky moustache was probably a damn sight more scared for his job than the girl was. Probably got a family to support. And perhaps, who knows, at home he's meek and mild, grows cucumbers in the back garden, lets his wife sit on him and the kids pull his moustache. And by the same token you never read about a Spanish Inquisitor or one of these higher-ups in the Russian Ogpu without being told that in private life he was such a good kind man, best of husbands and fathers, devoted to his tame canary, and so forth.

The girl at the soap counter was looking after me as I went out of the door. She'd have murdered me if she could. How she hated me because of what I'd seen! Much more than she hated the floor-manager.

3

There was a bombing plane flying low overhead. For a minute or two it seemed to be keeping pace with the train. Two vulgar kind of blokes in shabby overcoats, obviously commercials of the lowest type, newspaper canvassers probably, were sitting opposite me. One of them was reading the Mail and the other was reading the Express. I could see by their manner that they'd spotted me for one of their kind. Up at the other end of the carriage two lawyers' clerks with black bags were keeping up a conversation full of legal baloney that was meant to impress the rest of us and show that they didn't belong to the common herd.

I was watching the backs of the houses sliding past. The line from West Bletchley runs most of the way through slums, but it's kind of peaceful, the glimpses you get of little backyards with bits of flowers stuck in boxes and the flat roofs where the women peg out the washing and the bird-cage on the wall. The great black bombing plane swayed a little in the air and zoomed ahead so that I couldn't see it. I was sitting with my back to the engine. One of the commercials cocked his eye at it for just a second. I knew what he was thinking. For that matter it's what everybody else is thinking. You don't have to be a highbrow to think such thoughts nowadays. In two years' time, one year's time, what shall we be doing when we see one of those things? Making a dive for the cellar, wetting our bags with fright.

The commercial bloke put down his Daily Mail.

'Templegate's winner come in,' he said.

The lawyers' clerks were sprouting some learned rot about fee-simple and peppercorns. The other commercial felt in his waistcoat pocket and took out a bent Woodbine. He felt in the other pocket and then leaned across to me.

'Got a match, Tubby?'

I felt for my matches. 'Tubby', you notice. That's interesting, really. For about a couple of minutes I stopped thinking about bombs and began thinking about my figure as I'd studied it in my bath that morning.

It's quite true I'm tubby, in fact my upper half is almost exactly the shape of a tub. But what's interesting, I think, is that merely because you happen to be a little bit fat, almost anyone, even a total, stranger, will take it for granted to give you a nickname that's an insulting comment on your personal appearance. Suppose a chap was a hunchback or had a squint or a hare-lip — would you give him a nickname to remind him of it? But every fat man's labelled as a matter of course. I'm the type that people automatically slap on the back and punch in the ribs, and nearly all of them think I like it. I never go into the saloon bar of the Crown at Pudley (I pass that way once a week on business) without that ass Waters, who travels for the Seafoam Soap people but who's more or less a permanency in the saloon bar of the Crown, prodding me in the ribs and singing out 'Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowling!' which is a joke the bloody fools in the bar never get tired of. Waters has got a finger like a bar of iron. They all think a fat man doesn't have any feelings.

The commercial took another of my matches, to pick his teeth with, and chucked the box back. The train whizzed on to an iron bridge. Down below I got a glimpse of a baker's van and a long string of lorries loaded with cement. The queer thing, I was thinking, is that in a way they're right about fat men. It's a fact that a fat man, particularly a man who's been fat from birth — from childhood, that's to say — isn't quite like other men. He goes through his life on a different plane, a sort of light-comedy plane, though in the case of blokes in side-shows at fairs, or in fact anyone over twenty stone, it isn't so much light comedy as low farce. I've been both fat and thin in my life, and I know the difference fatness makes to your outlook. It kind of prevents you from taking things too hard. I doubt whether a man who's never been anything but fat, a man who's been called Fatty ever since he could walk, even knows of the existence of any really deep emotions. How could he? He's got no experience of such things. He can't ever be present at a tragic scene, because a scene where there's a fat man present isn't tragic, it's comic. Just imagine a fat Hamlet, for instance! Or Oliver Hardy acting Romeo. Funnily enough I'd been thinking something of the kind only a few days earlier when I was reading a novel I'd got out of Boots. Wasted Passion, it was called. The chap in the story finds out that his girl has

gone off with another chap. He's one of these chaps you read about in novels, that have pale sensitive faces and dark hair and a private income. I remember more or less how the passage went:

David paced up and down the room, his hands pressed to his forehead. The news seemed to have stunned him. For a long time he could not believe it. Sheila untrue to him! It could not be! Suddenly realization rushed over him, and he saw the fact in all its stark horror. It was too much. He flung himself down in a paroxysm of weeping.

Anyway, it went something like that. And even at the time it started me thinking. There you have it, you see. That's how people — some people — are expected to behave. But how about a chap like me? Suppose Hilda went off for a week-end with somebody else--not that I'd care a damn, in fact it would rather please me to find that she'd still got that much kick left in her — but suppose I did care, would I fling myself down in a paroxysm of weeping? Would anyone expect me to? You couldn't, with a figure like mine. It would be downright obscene.

The train was running along an embankment. A little below us you could see the roofs of the houses stretching on and on, the little red roofs where the bombs are going to drop, a bit lighted up at this moment because a ray of sunshine was catching them. Funny how we keep on thinking about bombs. Of course there's no question that it's coming soon. You can tell how close it is by the cheer- up stuff they're talking about it in the newspaper. I was reading a piece in the News Chronicle the other day where it said that bombing planes can't do any damage nowadays. The anti-aircraft guns have got so good that the bomber has to stay at twenty thousand feet. The chap thinks, you notice, that if an aeroplane's high enough the bombs don't reach the ground. Or more likely what he really meant was that they'll miss Woolwich Arsenal and only hit places like Ellesmere Road.

But taking it by and large, I thought, it's not so bad to be fat. One thing about a fat man is that he's always popular. There's really no kind of company, from bookies to bishops, where a fat man doesn't fit in and feel at home. As for women, fat men have more luck with them than people seem to think. It's all bunk to imagine, as some people do, that a woman looks on a fat man as just a joke. The truth

is that a woman doesn't look on ANY man as a joke if he can kid her that he's in love with her.

Mind you, I haven't always been fat. I've been fat for eight or nine years, and I suppose I've developed most of the characteristics. But it's also a fact that internally, mentally, I'm not altogether fat. No! Don't mistake me. I'm not trying to put myself over as a kind of tender flower, the aching heart behind the smiling face and so forth. You couldn't get on in the insurance business if you were anything like that. I'm vulgar, I'm insensitive, and I fit in with my environment. So long as anywhere in the world things are being sold on commission and livings are picked up by sheer brass and lack of finer feelings, chaps like me will be doing it. In almost all circumstances I'd manage to make a living — always a living and never a fortune — and even in war, revolution, plague, and famine I'd back myself to stay alive longer than most people. I'm that type. But also I've got something else inside me, chiefly a hangover from the past. I'll tell you about that later. I'm fat, but I'm thin inside. Has it ever struck you that there's a thin man inside every fat man, just as they say there's a statue inside every block of stone?

The chap who'd borrowed my matches was having a good pick at his teeth over the Express.

'Legs case don't seem to get much forrader,' he said.

'They'll never get 'im,' said the other. ''Ow could you identify a pair of legs? They're all the bleeding same, aren't they?'

'Might trace 'im through the piece of paper 'e wrapped 'em up in,' said the first.

Down below you could see the roofs of the houses stretching on and on, twisting this way and that with the streets, but stretching on and on, like an enormous plain that you could have ridden over. Whichever way you cross London it's twenty miles of houses almost without a break. Christ! how can the bombers miss us when they come? We're just one great big bull's-eye. And no warning, probably. Because who's going to be such a bloody fool as to declare war nowadays? If I was Hitler I'd send my bombers across in the middle of a disarmament conference. Some quiet morning, when the clerks are streaming across London Bridge, and the canary's singing, and the old woman's pegging the bloomers on the line — zoom,

whizz, plonk! Houses going up into the air, bloomers soaked with blood, canary singing on above the corpses.

Seems a pity somehow, I thought. I looked at the great sea of roofs stretching on and on. Miles and miles of streets, fried-fish shops, tin chapels, picture houses, little printing-shops up back alleys, factories, blocks of flats, whelk stalls, dairies, power stations — on and on and on. Enormous! And the peacefulness of it! Like a great wilderness with no wild beasts. No guns firing, nobody chucking pineapples, nobody beating anybody else up with a rubber truncheon. If you come to think of it, in the whole of England at this moment there probably isn't a single bedroom window from which anyone's firing a machine-gun.

But how about five years from now? Or two years? Or one year?

4

I'd dropped my papers at the office. Warner is one of these cheap American dentists, and he has his consulting-room, or 'parlour' as he likes to call it, halfway up a big block of offices, between a photographer and a rubber-goods wholesaler. I was early for my appointment, but it was time for a bit of grub. I don't know what put it into my head to go into a milk-bar. They're places I generally avoid. We five-to-ten-pound-a-weekers aren't well served in the way of eating-places in London. If your idea of the amount to spend on a meal is one and threepence, it's either Lyons, the Express Dairy, or the A.B.C., or else it's the kind of funeral snack they serve you in the saloon bar, a pint of bitter and a slab of cold pie, so cold that it's colder than the beer. Outside the milk-bar the boys were yelling the first editions of the evening papers.

Behind the bright red counter a girl in a tall white cap was fiddling with an ice-box, and somewhere at the back a radio was playing, plonk-tiddle-tiddle-plonk, a kind of tinny sound. Why the hell am I coming here? I thought to myself as I went in. There's a kind of atmosphere about these places that gets me down. Everything slick and shiny and streamlined; mirrors, enamel, and chromium plate whichever direction you look in. Everything spent on the decorations and nothing on the food. No real food at all. Just lists of stuff with American names, sort of phantom stuff that you can't taste and can hardly believe in the existence of. Everything comes out of a carton or a tin, or it's hauled out of a refrigerator or squirted out of a tap or squeezed out of a tube. No comfort, no privacy. Tall stools to sit on, a kind of narrow ledge to eat off, mirrors all round you. A sort of propaganda floating round, mixed up with the noise of the radio, to the effect that food doesn't matter, comfort doesn't matter, nothing matters except slickness and shininess and streamlining. Everything's streamlined nowadays, even the bullet Hitler's keeping for you. I ordered a large coffee and a couple of frankfurters. The girl in the white cap jerked them at me with about as much interest as you'd throw ants' eggs to a goldfish.

Outside the door a newsboy yelled 'StarnoosstanNERD!' I saw

the poster flapping against his knees: LEGS. FRESH DISCOVERIES. Just 'legs', you notice. It had got down to that. Two days earlier they'd found a woman's legs in a railway waiting-room, done up in a brown-paper parcel, and what with successive editions of the papers, the whole nation was supposed to be so passionately interested in these blasted legs that they didn't need any further introduction. They were the only legs that were news at the moment. It's queer, I thought, as I ate a bit of roll, how dull the murders are getting nowadays. All this cutting people up and leaving bits of them about the countryside. Not a patch on the old domestic poisoning dramas, Crippen, Seddon, Mrs Maybrick; the truth being, I suppose, that you can't do a good murder unless you believe you're going to roast in hell for it.

At this moment I bit into one of my frankfurters, and — Christ!

I can't honestly say that I'd expected the thing to have a pleasant taste. I'd expected it to taste of nothing, like the roll. But this — well, it was quite an experience. Let me try and describe it to you.

The frankfurter had a rubber skin, of course, and my temporary teeth weren't much of a fit. I had to do a kind of sawing movement before I could get my teeth through the skin. And then suddenly — pop! The thing burst in my mouth like a rotten pear. A sort of horrible soft stuff was oozing all over my tongue. But the taste! For a moment I just couldn't believe it. Then I rolled my tongue round it again and had another try. It was FISH! A sausage, a thing calling itself a frankfurter, filled with fish! I got up and walked straight out without touching my coffee. God knows what that might have tasted of.

Outside the newsboy shoved the Standard into my face and yelled, 'Legs! 'Orrible revelations! All the winners! Legs! Legs!' I was still rolling the stuff round my tongue, wondering where I could spit it out. I remembered a bit I'd read in the paper somewhere about these food-factories in Germany where everything's made out of something else. Ersatz, they call it. I remembered reading that THEY were making sausages out of fish, and fish, no doubt, out of something different. It gave me the feeling that I'd bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. That's the way we're going nowadays. Everything slick and streamlined,

everything made out of something else. Celluloid, rubber, chromium-steel everywhere, arc-lamps blazing all night, glass roofs over your head, radios all playing the same tune, no vegetation left, everything cemented over, mock-turtles grazing under the neutral fruit-trees. But when you come down to brass tacks and get your teeth into something solid, a sausage for instance, that's what you get. Rotten fish in a rubber skin. Bombs of filth bursting inside your mouth.

When I'd got the new teeth in I felt a lot better. They sat nice and smooth over the gums, and though very likely it sounds absurd to say that false teeth can make you feel younger, it's a fact that they did so. I tried a smile at myself in a shop window. They weren't half bad. Warner, though cheap, is a bit of an artist and doesn't aim at making you look like a toothpaste advert. He's got huge cabinets full of false teeth — he showed them to me once — all graded according to size and colour, and he picks them out like a jeweller choosing stones for a necklace. Nine people out of ten would have taken my teeth for natural.

I caught a full-length glimpse of myself in another window I was passing, and it struck me that really I wasn't such a bad figure of a man. A bit on the fat side, admittedly, but nothing offensive, only what the tailors call a 'full figure', and some women like a man to have a red face. There's life in the old dog yet, I thought. I remembered my seventeen quid, and definitely made up my mind that I'd spend it on a woman. There was time to have a pint before the pubs shut, just to baptize the teeth, and feeling rich because of my seventeen quid I stopped at a tobacconist's and bought myself a sixpenny cigar of a kind I'm rather partial to. They're eight inches long and guaranteed pure Havana leaf all through. I suppose cabbages grow in Havana the same as anywhere else.

When I came out of the pub I felt quite different.

I'd had a couple of pints, they'd warmed me up inside, and the cigar smoke oozing round my new teeth gave me a fresh, clean, peaceful sort of feeling. All of a sudden I felt kind of thoughtful and philosophic. It was partly because I didn't have any work to do. My mind went back to the thoughts of war I'd been having earlier that morning, when the bomber flew over the train. I felt in a kind of prophetic mood, the mood in which you foresee the end of the world

and get a certain kick out of it.

I was walking westward up the Strand, and though it was coldish I went slowly to get the pleasure of my cigar. The usual crowd that you can hardly fight your way through was streaming up the pavement, all of them with that insane fixed expression on their faces that people have in London streets, and there was the usual jam of traffic with the great red buses nosing their way between the cars, and the engines roaring and horns tooting. Enough noise to waken the dead, but not to waken this lot, I thought. I felt as if I was the only person awake in a city of sleep-walkers. That's an illusion, of course. When you walk through a crowd of strangers it's next door to impossible not to imagine that they're all waxworks, but probably they're thinking just the same about you. And this kind of prophetic feeling that keeps coming over me nowadays, the feeling that war's just round the corner and that war's the end of all things, isn't peculiar to me. We've all got it, more or less. I suppose even among the people passing at that moment there must have been chaps who were seeing mental pictures of the shellbursts and the mud. Whatever thought you think there's always a million people thinking it at the same moment. But that was how I felt. We're all on the burning deck and nobody knows it except me. I looked at the dumb-bell faces streaming past. Like turkeys in November, I thought. Not a notion of what's coming to them. It was as if I'd got X-rays in my eyes and could see the skeletons walking.

I looked forward a few years. I saw this street as it'll be in five years' time, say, or three years' time (1941 they say it's booked for), after the fighting's started.

No, not all smashed to pieces. Only a little altered, kind of chipped and dirty-looking, the shop-windows almost empty and so dusty that you can't see into them. Down a side street there's an enormous bomb-crater and a block of buildings burnt out so that it looks like a hollow tooth. Thermite. It's all curiously quiet, and everyone's very thin. A platoon of soldiers comes marching up the street. They're all as thin as rakes and their boots are dragging. The sergeant's got corkscrew moustaches and holds himself like a ramrod, but he's thin too and he's got a cough that almost tears him open. Between his coughs he's trying to bawl at them in the old

parade-ground style. ‘Nah then, Jones! Lift yer ‘ed up! What yer keep starin’ at the ground for? All them fag- ends was picked up years ago.’ Suddenly a fit of coughing catches him. He tries to stop it, can’t, doubles up like a ruler, and almost coughs his guts out. His face turns pink and purple, his moustache goes limp, and the water runs out of his eyes.

I can hear the air-raid sirens blowing and the loud-speakers bellowing that our glorious troops have taken a hundred thousand prisoners. I see a top-floor-back in Birmingham and a child of five howling and howling for a bit of bread. And suddenly the mother can’t stand it any longer, and she yells at it, ‘Shut your trap, you little bastard!’ and then she ups the child’s frock and smacks its bottom hard, because there isn’t any bread and isn’t going to be any bread. I see it all. I see the posters and the food-queues, and the castor oil and the rubber truncheons and the machine-guns squirting out of bedroom windows.

Is it going to happen? No knowing. Some days it’s impossible to believe it. Some days I say to myself that it’s just a scare got up by the newspapers. Some days I know in my bones there’s no escaping it.

When I got down near Charing Cross the boys were yelling a later edition of the evening papers. There was some more drivel about the murder. LEGS. FAMOUS SURGEON’S STATEMENT. Then another poster caught my eye: KING ZOG’S WEDDING POSTPONED. King Zog! What a name! It’s next door to impossible to believe a chap with a name like that isn’t a jet-black Negro.

But just at that moment a queer thing happened. King Zog’s name — but I suppose, as I’d already seen the name several times that day, it was mixed up with some sound in the traffic or the smell of horse-dung or something — had started memories in me.

The past is a curious thing. It’s with you all the time. I suppose an hour never passes without your thinking of things that happened ten or twenty years ago, and yet most of the time it’s got no reality, it’s just a set of facts that you’ve learned, like a lot of stuff in a history book. Then some chance sight or sound or smell, especially smell, sets you going, and the past doesn’t merely come back to you, you’re actually IN the past. It was like that at this moment.

I was back in the parish church at Lower Binfield, and it was thirty-eight years ago. To outward appearances, I suppose, I was still walking down the Strand, fat and forty-five, with false teeth and a bowler hat, but inside me I was Georgie Bowling, aged seven, younger son of Samuel Bowling, corn and seed merchant, of 57 High Street, Lower Binfield. And it was Sunday morning, and I could smell the church. How I could smell it! You know the smell churches have, a peculiar, dank, dusty, decaying, sweetish sort of smell. There's a touch of candle-grease in it, and perhaps a whiff of incense and a suspicion of mice, and on Sunday mornings it's a bit overlaid by yellow soap and serge dresses, but predominantly it's that sweet, dusty, musty smell that's like the smell of death and life mixed up together. It's powdered corpses, really.

In those days I was about four feet high. I was standing on the hassock so as to see over the pew in front, and I could feel Mother's black serge dress under my hand. I could also feel my stockings pulled up over my knees — we used to wear them like that then — and the saw edge of the Eton collar they used to buckle me into on Sunday mornings. And I could hear the organ wheezing and two enormous voices bellowing out the psalm. In our church there were two men who led the singing, in fact they did so much of the singing that nobody else got much of a chance. One was Shooter, the fishmonger, and the other was old Wetherall, the joiner and undertaker. They used to sit opposite one another on either side of the nave, in the pews nearest the pulpit. Shooter was a short fat man with a very pink, smooth face, a big nose, drooping moustache, and a chin that kind of fell away beneath his mouth. Wetherall was quite different. He was a great, gaunt, powerful old devil of about sixty, with a face like a death's-head and stiff grey hair half an inch long all over his head. I've never seen a living man who looked so exactly like a skeleton. You could see every line of the skull in his face, his skin was like parchment, and his great lantern jaw full of yellow teeth worked up and down just like the jaw of a skeleton in an anatomical museum. And yet with all his leanness he looked as strong as iron, as though he'd live to be a hundred and make coffins for everyone in that church before he'd finished. Their voices were quite different, too. Shooter had a kind of desperate, agonized

bellow, as though someone had a knife at his throat and he was just letting out his last yell for help. But Wetherall had a tremendous, churning, rumbling noise that happened deep down inside him, like enormous barrels being rolled to and fro underground. However much noise he let out, you always knew he'd got plenty more in reserve. The kids nicknamed him Rumbletummy.

They used to get up a kind of antiphonal effect, especially in the psalms. It was always Wetherall who had the last word. I suppose really they were friends in private life, but in my kid's way I used to imagine that they were deadly enemies and trying to shout one another down. Shooter would roar out 'The Lord is my shepherd', and then Wetherall would come in with 'Therefore can I lack nothing', drowning him completely. You always knew which of the two was master. I used especially to look forward to that psalm that has the bit about Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan (this was what King Zog's name had reminded me of). Shooter would start off with 'Sihon king of the Amorites', then perhaps for half a second you could hear the rest of the congregation singing the 'and', and then Wetherall's enormous bass would come in like a tidal wave and swallow everybody up with 'Og the king of Bashan'. I wish I could make you hear the tremendous, rumbling, subterranean barrel-noise that he could get into that word 'Og'. He even used to clip off the end of the 'and', so that when I was a very small kid I used to think it was Dog the king of Bashan. But later, when I got the names right, I formed a picture in my mind's eye of Sihon and Og. I saw them as a couple of those great Egyptian statues that I'd seen pictures of in the penny encyclopedia, enormous stone statues thirty feet high, sitting on their thrones opposite one another, with their hands on their knees and a faint mysterious smile on their faces.

How it came back to me! That peculiar feeling — it was only a feeling, you couldn't describe it as an activity — that we used to call 'Church'. The sweet corpsy smell, the rustle of Sunday dresses, the wheeze of the organ and the roaring voices, the spot of light from the hole in the window creeping slowly up the nave. In some way the grown-ups could put it across that this extraordinary performance

was necessary. You took it for granted, just as you took the Bible, which you got in big doses in those days. There were texts on every wall and you knew whole chapters of the O.T. by heart. Even now my head's stuffed full of bits out of the Bible. And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord. And Asher abode in his breeches. Followed them from Dan until thou come unto Beersheba. Smote him under the fifth rib, so that he died. You never understood it, you didn't try to or want to, it was just a kind of medicine, a queer-tasting stuff that you had to swallow and knew to be in some way necessary. An extraordinary rigmarole about people with names like Shimei and Nebuchadnezzar and Ahithophel and Hashbadada; people with long stiff garments and Assyrian beards, riding up and down on camels among temples and cedar trees and doing extraordinary things. Sacrificing burnt offerings, walking about in fiery furnaces, getting nailed on crosses, getting swallowed by whales. And all mixed up with the sweet graveyard smell and the serge dresses and the wheeze of the organ.

That was the world I went back to when I saw the poster about King Zog. For a moment I didn't merely remember it, I was IN it. Of course such impressions don't last more than a few seconds. A moment later it was as though I'd opened my eyes again, and I was forty-five and there was a traffic jam in the Strand. But it had left a kind of after-effect behind. Sometimes when you come out of a train of thought you feel as if you were coming up from deep water, but this time it was the other way about, it was as though it was back in 1900 that I'd been breathing real air. Even now, with my eyes open, so to speak, all those bloody fools hustling to and fro, and the posters and the petrol-stink and the roar of the engines, seemed to me less real than Sunday morning in Lower Binfield thirty-eight years ago.

I chucked away my cigar and walked on slowly. I could smell the corpse-smell. In a manner of speaking I can smell it now. I'm back in Lower Binfield, and the year's 1900. Beside the horse- trough in the market-place the carrier's horse is having its nose- bag. At the sweet-shop on the corner Mother Wheeler is weighing out a ha'porth of brandy balls. Lady Rampling's carriage is driving by, with the tiger sitting behind in his pipeclayed breeches with his arms folded. Uncle Ezekiel is cursing Joe Chamberlain. The recruiting-sergeant in his

scarlet jacket, tight blue overalls, and pillbox hat, is strutting up and down twisting his moustache. The drunks are puking in the yard behind the George. Vicky's at Windsor, God's in heaven, Christ's on the cross, Jonah's in the whale, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are in the fiery furnace, and Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan are sitting on their thrones looking at one another — not doing anything exactly, just existing, keeping their appointed place, like a couple of fire-dogs, or the Lion and the Unicorn.

Is it gone for ever? I'm not certain. But I tell you it was a good world to live in. I belong to it. So do you.

Part II

1

The world I momentarily remembered when I saw King Zog's name on the poster was so different from the world I live in now that you might have a bit of difficulty in believing I ever belonged to it.

I suppose by this time you've got a kind of picture of me in your mind — a fat middle-aged bloke with false teeth and a red face — and subconsciously you've been imagining that I was just the same even when I was in my cradle. But forty-five years is a long time, and though some people don't change and develop, others do. I've changed a great deal, and I've had my ups and downs, mostly ups. It may seem queer, but my father would probably be rather proud of me if he could see me now. He'd think it a wonderful thing that a son of his should own a motor-car and live in a house with a bathroom. Even now I'm a little above my origin, and at other times I've touched levels that we should never have dreamed of in those old days before the war.

Before the war! How long shall we go on saying that, I wonder? How long before the answer will be 'Which war?' In my case the never-never land that people are thinking of when they say 'before the war' might almost be before the Boer War. I was born in '93, and I can actually remember the outbreak of the Boer War, because of the first-class row that Father and Uncle Ezekiel had about it. I've several other memories that would date from about a year earlier than that.

The very first thing I remember is the smell of sainfoin chaff. You went up the stone passage that led from the kitchen to the shop, and the smell of sainfoin got stronger all the way. Mother had fixed a wooden gate in the doorway to prevent Joe and myself (Joe was my elder brother) from getting into the shop. I can still remember standing there clutching the bars, and the smell of sainfoin mixed up with the damp plastery smell that belonged to the passage. It wasn't till years later that I somehow managed to crash the gate and get into the shop when nobody was there. A mouse that had been having a go at one of the meal-bins suddenly plopped out and ran between my feet. It was quite white with meal. This must have happened when I

was about six.

When you're very young you seem to suddenly become conscious of things that have been under your nose for a long time past. The things round about you swim into your mind one at a time, rather as they do when you're waking from sleep. For instance, it was only when I was nearly four that I suddenly realized that we owned a dog. Nailer, his name was, an old white English terrier of the breed that's gone out nowadays. I met him under the kitchen table and in some way seemed to grasp, having only learnt it that moment, that he belonged to us and that his name was Nailer. In the same way, a bit earlier, I'd discovered that beyond the gate at the end of the passage there was a place where the smell of sainfoin came from. And the shop itself, with the huge scales and the wooden measures and the tin shovel, and the white lettering on the window, and the bullfinch in its cage — which you couldn't see very well even from the pavement, because the window was always dusty — all these things dropped into place in my mind one by one, like bits of a jig-saw puzzle.

Time goes on, you get stronger on your legs, and by degrees you begin to get a grasp of geography. I suppose Lower Binfield was just like any other market town of about two thousand inhabitants. It was in Oxfordshire — I keep saying WAS, you notice, though after all the place still exists — about five miles from the Thames. It lay in a bit of a valley, with a low ripple of hills between itself and the Thames, and higher hills behind. On top of the hills there were woods in sort of dim blue masses among which you could see a great white house with a colonnade. This was Binfield House ('The Hall', everybody called it), and the top of the hill was known as Upper Binfield, though there was no village there and hadn't been for a hundred years or more. I must have been nearly seven before I noticed the existence of Binfield House. When you're very small you don't look into the distance. But by that time I knew every inch of the town, which was shaped roughly like a cross with the market-place in the middle. Our shop was in the High Street a little before you got to the market-place, and on the corner there was Mrs Wheeler's sweet-shop where you spent a halfpenny when you had one. Mother Wheeler was a dirty old witch and people suspected her of sucking the bull's-eyes and putting them back in the bottle, though

this was never proved. Farther down there was the barber's shop with the advert for Abdulla cigarettes — the one with the Egyptian soldiers on it, and curiously enough they're using the same advert to this day — and the rich boozy smell of bay rum and latakia. Behind the houses you could see the chimneys of the brewery. In the middle of the market-place there was the stone horse-trough, and on top of the water there was always a fine film of dust and chaff.

Before the war, and especially before the Boer War, it was summer all the year round. I'm quite aware that that's a delusion. I'm merely trying to tell you how things come back to me. If I shut my eyes and think of Lower Binfield any time before I was, say, eight, it's always in summer weather that I remember it. Either it's the market-place at dinner-time, with a sort of sleepy dusty hush over everything and the carrier's horse with his nose dug well into his nose-bag, munching away, or it's a hot afternoon in the great green juicy meadows round the town, or it's about dusk in the lane behind the allotments, and there's a smell of pipe-tobacco and night- stocks floating through the hedge. But in a sense I do remember different seasons, because all my memories are bound up with things to eat, which varied at different times of the year. Especially the things you used to find in the hedges. In July there were dewberries — but they're very rare — and the blackberries were getting red enough to eat. In September there were sloes and hazel-nuts. The best hazelnuts were always out of reach. Later on there were beech-nuts and crab-apples. Then there were the kind of minor foods that you used to eat when there was nothing better going. Haws — but they're not much good — and hips, which have a nice sharp taste if you clean the hairs out of them. Angelica is good in early summer, especially when you're thirsty, and so are the stems of various grasses. Then there's sorrel, which is good with bread and butter, and pig-nuts, and a kind of wood shamrock which has a sour taste. Even plantain seeds are better than nothing when you're a long way from home and very hungry.

Joe was two years older than myself. When we were very small Mother used to pay Katie Simmons eighteen pence a week to take us out for walks in the afternoons. Katie's father worked in the brewery and had fourteen children, so that the family were always on the

lookout for odd jobs. She was only twelve when Joe was seven and I was five, and her mental level wasn't very different from ours. She used to drag me by the arm and call me 'Baby', and she had just enough authority over us to prevent us from being run over by dogcarts or chased by bulls, but so far as conversation went we were almost on equal terms. We used to go for long, trailing kind of walks — always, of course, picking and eating things all the way — down the lane past the allotments, across Roper's Meadows, and down to the Mill Farm, where there was a pool with newts and tiny carp in it (Joe and I used to go fishing there when we were a bit older), and back by the Upper Binfield Road so as to pass the sweet-shop that stood on the edge of the town. This shop was in such a bad position that anyone who took it went bankrupt, and to my own knowledge it was three times a sweet-shop, once a grocer's, and once a bicycle-repair shop, but it had a peculiar fascination for children. Even when we had no money, we'd go that way so as to glue our noses against the window. Katie wasn't in the least above sharing a farthing's worth of sweets and quarrelling over her share. You could buy things worth having for a farthing in those days. Most sweets were four ounces a penny, and there was even some stuff called Paradise Mixture, mostly broken sweets from other bottles, which was six. Then there were Farthing Everlastings, which were a yard long and couldn't be finished inside half an hour. Sugar mice and sugar pigs were eight a penny, and so were liquorice pistols, popcorn was a halfpenny for a large bag, and a prize packet which contained several different kinds of sweets, a gold ring, and sometimes a whistle, was a penny. You don't see prize packets nowadays. A whole lot of the kinds of sweets we had in those days have gone out. There was a kind of flat white sweet with mottoes printed on them, and also a kind of sticky pink stuff in an oval matchwood box with a tiny tin spoon to eat it with, which cost a halfpenny. Both of those have disappeared. So have Caraway Comfits, and so have chocolate pipes and sugar matches, and even Hundreds and Thousands you hardly ever see. Hundreds and Thousands were a great standby when you'd only a farthing. And what about Penny Monsters? Does one ever see a Penny Monster nowadays? It was a huge bottle, holding more than a quart of fizzy lemonade, all for a penny. That's another thing that

the war killed stone dead.

It always seems to be summer when I look back. I can feel the grass round me as tall as myself, and the heat coming out of the earth. And the dust in the lane, and the warm greeny light coming through the hazel boughs. I can see the three of us trailing along, eating stuff out of the hedge, with Katie dragging at my arm and saying 'Come on, Baby!' and sometimes yelling ahead to Joe, 'Joe! You come back 'ere this minute! You'll catch it!' Joe was a hefty boy with a big, lumpy sort of head and tremendous calves, the kind of boy who's always doing something dangerous. At seven he'd already got into short trousers, with the thick black stockings drawn up over the knee and the great clumping boots that boys had to wear in those days. I was still in frocks — a kind of holland overall that Mother used to make for me. Katie used to wear a dreadful ragged parody of a grown-up dress that descended from sister to sister in her family. She had a ridiculous great hat with her pigtails hanging down behind it, and a long, draggled skirt which trailed on the ground, and button boots with the heels trodden down. She was a tiny thing, not much taller than Joe, but not bad at 'minding' children. In a family like that a child is 'minding' other children about as soon as it's weaned. At times she'd try to be grown-up and ladylike, and she had a way of cutting you short with a proverb, which to her mind was something unanswerable. If you said 'Don't care', she'd answer immediately:

'Don't care was made to care, Don't care was hung, Don't care was put in a pot And boiled till he was done.'

Or if you called her names it would be 'Hard words break no bones', or, when you'd been boasting, 'Pride comes before a fall'. This came very true one day when I was strutting along pretending to be a soldier and fell into a cowpat. Her family lived in a filthy little rat-hole of a place in the slummy street behind the brewery. The place swarmed with children like a kind of vermin. The whole family had managed to dodge going to school, which was fairly easy to do in those days, and started running errands and doing other odd jobs as soon as they could walk. One of the elder brothers got a month for stealing turnips. She stopped taking us out for walks a year later when Joe was eight and getting too tough for a girl to handle. He'd

discovered that in Katie's home they slept five in a bed, and used to tease the life out of her about it.

Poor Katie! She had her first baby when she was fifteen. No one knew who was the father, and probably Katie wasn't too certain herself. Most people believe it was one of her brothers. The workhouse people took the baby, and Katie went into service in Walton. Some time afterwards she married a tinker, which even by the standards of her family was a come-down. The last time I saw her was in 1913. I was biking through Walton, and I passed some dreadful wooden shacks beside the railway line, with fences round them made out of barrel-staves, where the gypsies used to camp at certain times of the year, when the police would let them. A wrinkled-up hag of a woman, with her hair coming down and a smoky face, looking at least fifty years old, came out of one of the huts and began shaking out a rag mat. It was Katie, who must have been twenty-seven.

2

Thursday was market day. Chaps with round red faces like pumpkins and dirty smocks and huge boots covered with dry cow-dung, carrying long hazel switches, used to drive their brutes into the market- place early in the morning. For hours there'd be a terrific hullabaloo: dogs barking, pigs squealing, chaps in tradesmen's vans who wanted to get through the crush cracking their whips and cursing, and everyone who had anything to do with the cattle shouting and throwing sticks. The big noise was always when they brought a bull to market. Even at that age it struck me that most of the bulls were harmless law-abiding brutes that only wanted to get to their stalls in peace, but a bull wouldn't have been regarded as a bull if half the town hadn't had to turn out and chase it. Sometimes some terrified brute, generally a half-grown heifer, used to break loose and charge down a side street, and then anyone who happened to be in the way would stand in the middle of the road and swing his arms backwards like the sails of a windmill, shouting, 'Woo! Woo!' This was supposed to have a kind of hypnotic effect on an animal and certainly it did frighten them.

Half-way through the morning some of the farmers would come into the shop and run samples of seed through their fingers. Actually Father did very little business with the farmers, because he had no delivery van and couldn't afford to give long credits. Mostly he did a rather petty class of business, poultry food and fodder for the tradesmen's horses and so forth. Old Brewer, of the Mill Farm, who was a stingy old bastard with a grey chin-beard, used to stand there for half an hour, fingering samples of chicken corn and letting them drop into his pocket in an absent-minded manner, after which, of course, he finally used to make off without buying anything. In the evenings the pubs were full of drunken men. In those days beer cost twopence a pint, and unlike the beer nowadays it had some guts in it. All through the Boer War the recruiting sergeant used to be in the four-ale bar of the George every Thursday and Saturday night, dressed up to the nines and very free with his money. Sometimes next morning you'd see him leading off some great sheepish, red-

faced lump of a farm lad who'd taken the shilling when he was too drunk to see and found in the morning that it would cost him twenty pounds to get out of it. People used to stand in their doorways and shake their heads when they saw them go past, almost as if it had been a funeral. 'Well now! Listed for a soldier! Just think of it! A fine young fellow like that!' It just shocked them. Listing for a soldier, in their eyes, was the exact equivalent of a girl's going on the streets. Their attitude to the war, and to the Army, was very curious. They had the good old English notions that the red-coats are the scum of the earth and anyone who joins the Army will die of drink and go straight to hell, but at the same time they were good patriots, stuck Union Jacks in their windows, and held it as an article of faith that the English had never been beaten in battle and never could be. At that time everyone, even the Nonconformists, used to sing sentimental songs about the thin red line and the soldier boy who died on the battlefield far away. These soldier boys always used to die 'when the shot and shell were flying', I remember. It puzzled me as a kid. Shot I could understand, but it produced a queer picture in my mind to think of cockle-shells flying through the air. When Mafeking was relieved the people nearly yelled the roof off, and there were at any rate times when they believed the tales about the Boers chucking babies into the air and skewering them on their bayonets. Old Brewer got so fed up with the kids yelling 'Krooger!' after him that towards the end of the war he shaved his beard off. The people's attitude towards the Government was really the same. They were all true-blue Englishmen and swore that Vicky was the best queen that ever lived and foreigners were dirt, but at the same time nobody ever thought of paying a tax, not even a dog-licence, if there was any way of dodging it.

Before and after the war Lower Binfield was a Liberal constituency. During the war there was a by-election which the Conservatives won. I was too young to grasp what it was all about, I only knew that I was a Conservative because I liked the blue streamers better than the red ones, and I chiefly remember it because of a drunken man who fell on his nose on the pavement outside the George. In the general excitement nobody took any notice of him, and he lay there for hours in the hot sun with his blood drying round

him, and when it dried it was purple. By the time the 1906 election came along I was old enough to understand it, more or less, and this time I was a Liberal because everybody else was. The people chased the Conservative candidate half a mile and threw him into a pond full of duckweed. People took politics seriously in those days. They used to begin storing up rotten eggs weeks before an election.

Very early in life, when the Boer War broke out, I remember the big row between Father and Uncle Ezekiel. Uncle Ezekiel had a little boot-shop in one of the streets off the High Street, and also did some cobbling. It was a small business and tended to get smaller, which didn't matter greatly because Uncle Ezekiel wasn't married. He was only a half-brother and much older than Father, twenty years older at least, and for the fifteen years or so that I knew him he always looked exactly the same. He was a fine-looking old chap, rather tall, with white hair and the whitest whiskers I ever saw — white as thistledown. He had a way of slapping his leather apron and standing up very straight — a reaction from bending over the last, I suppose — after which he'd bark his opinions straight in your face, ending up with a sort of ghostly cackle. He was a real old nineteenth-century Liberal, the kind that not only used to ask you what Gladstone said in '78 but could tell you the answer, and one of the very few people in Lower Binfield who stuck to the same opinions all through the war. He was always denouncing Joe Chamberlain and some gang of people that he referred to as 'the Park Lane riff-raff'. I can hear him now, having one of his arguments with Father. 'Them and their far-flung Empire! Can't fling it too far for me. He-he-he!' And then Father's voice, a quiet, worried, conscientious kind of voice, coming back at him with the white man's burden and our dooty to the pore blacks whom these here Boars treated something shameful. For a week or so after Uncle Ezekiel gave it out that he was a pro-Boer and a Little Englander they were hardly on speaking terms. They had another row when the atrocity stories started. Father was very worried by the tales he'd heard, and he tackled Uncle Ezekiel about it. Little Englander or no, surely he couldn't think it right for these here Boars to throw babies in the air and catch them on their bayonets, even if they WERE only nigger babies? But Uncle Ezekiel just laughed in his face. Father had got it all wrong! It wasn't the

Boars who threw babies in the air, it was the British soldiers! He kept grabbing hold of me — I must have been about five — to illustrate. 'Throw them in the air and skewer them like frogs, I tell you! Same as I might throw this youngster here!' And then he'd swing me up and almost let go of me, and I had a vivid picture of myself flying through the air and landing plonk on the end of a bayonet.

Father was quite different from Uncle Ezekiel. I don't know much about my grandparents, they were dead before I was born, I only know that my grandfather had been a cobbler and late in life he married the widow of a seedsman, which was how we came to have the shop. It was a job that didn't really suit Father, though he knew the business inside out and was everlastingly working. Except on Sunday and very occasionally on week-day evenings I never remember him without meal on the backs of his hands and in the lines of his face and in what was left of his hair. He'd married when he was in his thirties and must have been nearly forty when I first remember him. He was a small man, a sort of grey, quiet little man, always in shirtsleeves and white apron and always dusty-looking because of the meal. He had a round head, a blunt nose, a rather bushy moustache, spectacles, and butter-coloured hair, the same colour as mine, but he'd lost most of it and it was always mealy. My grandfather had bettered himself a good deal by marrying the seedsman's widow, and Father had been educated at Walton Grammar School, where the farmers and the better-off tradesmen sent their sons, whereas Uncle Ezekiel liked to boast that he'd never been to school in his life and had taught himself to read by a tallow candle after working hours. But he was a much quicker-witted man than Father, he could argue with anybody, and he used to quote Carlyle and Spencer by the yard. Father had a slow sort of mind, he'd never taken to 'book-learning', as he called it, and his English wasn't good. On Sunday afternoons, the only time when he really took things easy, he'd settle down by the parlour fireplace to have what he called a 'good read' at the Sunday paper. His favourite paper was The People — Mother preferred the News of the World, which she considered had more murders in it. I can see them now. A Sunday afternoon — summer, of course, always summer — a smell of roast pork and greens still floating in the air, and Mother on one side of the

fireplace, starting off to read the latest murder but gradually falling asleep with her mouth open, and Father on the other, in slippers and spectacles, working his way slowly through the yards of smudgy print. And the soft feeling of summer all round you, the geranium in the window, a starling cooing somewhere, and myself under the table with the B.O.P., making believe that the tablecloth is a tent. Afterwards, at tea, as he chewed his way through the radishes and spring onions, Father would talk in a ruminative kind of way about the stuff he'd been reading, the fires and shipwrecks and scandals in high society, and these here new flying machines and the chap (I notice that to this day he turns up in the Sunday papers about once in three years) who was swallowed by a whale in the Red Sea and taken out three days later, alive but bleached white by the whale's gastric juice. Father was always a bit sceptical of this story, and of the new flying machines, otherwise he believed everything he read. Until 1909 no one in Lower Binfield believed that human beings would ever learn to fly. The official doctrine was that if God had meant us to fly He'd have given us wings. Uncle Ezekiel couldn't help retorting that if God had meant us to ride He'd have given us wheels, but even he didn't believe in the new flying machines.

It was only on Sunday afternoons, and perhaps on the one evening a week when he looked in at the George for a half-pint, that Father turned his mind to such things. At other times he was always more or less overwhelmed by business. There wasn't really such a lot to do, but he seemed to be always busy, either in the loft behind the yard, struggling about with sacks and bales, or in the kind of dusty little cubby-hole behind the counter in the shop, adding figures up in a notebook with a stump of pencil. He was a very honest man and a very obliging man, very anxious to provide good stuff and swindle nobody, which even in those days wasn't the best way to get on in business. He would have been just the man for some small official job, a postmaster, for instance, or station- master of a country station. But he hadn't either the cheek and enterprise to borrow money and expand the business, or the imagination to think of new selling-lines. It was characteristic of him that the only streak of imagination he ever showed, the invention of a new seed mixture for cage-birds (Bowling's Mixture it was called, and it was famous over a radius of

nearly five miles) was really due to Uncle Ezekiel. Uncle Ezekiel was a bit of a bird-fancier and had quantities of goldfinches in his dark little shop. It was his theory that cage-birds lose their colour because of lack of variation in their diet. In the yard behind the shop Father had a tiny plot of ground in which he used to grow about twenty kinds of weed under wire-netting, and he used to dry them and mix their seeds with ordinary canary seed. Jackie, the bullfinch who hung in the shop-window, was supposed to be an advertisement for Bowling's Mixture. Certainly, unlike most bullfinches in cages, Jackie never turned black.

Mother was fat ever since I remember her. No doubt it's from her that I inherit my pituitary deficiency, or whatever it is that makes you get fat.

She was a largish woman, a bit taller than Father, with hair a good deal fairer than his and a tendency to wear black dresses. But except on Sundays I never remember her without an apron. It would be an exaggeration, but not a very big one, to say that I never remember her when she wasn't cooking. When you look back over a long period you seem to see human beings always fixed in some special place and some characteristic attitude. It seems to you that they were always doing exactly the same thing. Well, just as when I think of Father I remember him always behind the counter, with his hair all mealy, adding up figures with a stump of pencil which he moistens between his lips, and just as I remember Uncle Ezekiel, with his ghostly white whiskers, straightening himself out and slapping his leather apron, so when I think of Mother I remember her at the kitchen table, with her forearms covered with flour, rolling out a lump of dough.

You know the kind of kitchen people had in those days. A huge place, rather dark and low, with a great beam across the ceiling and a stone floor and cellars underneath. Everything enormous, or so it seemed to me when I was a kid. A vast stone sink which didn't have a tap but an iron pump, a dresser covering one wall and going right up to the ceiling, a gigantic range which burned half a ton a month and took God knows how long to blacklead. Mother at the table rolling out a huge flap of dough. And myself crawling round, messing about with bundles of firewood and lumps of coal and tin

beetle-traps (we had them in all the dark corners and they used to be baited with beer) and now and again coming up to the table to try and cadge a bit of food. Mother 'didn't hold with' eating between meals. You generally got the same answer: 'Get along with you, now! I'm not going to have you spoiling your dinner. Your eye's bigger than your belly.' Very occasionally, however, she'd cut you off a thin strip of candied peel.

I used to like to watch Mother rolling pastry. There's always a fascination in watching anybody do a job which he really understands. Watch a woman — a woman who really knows how to cook, I mean — rolling dough. She's got a peculiar, solemn, indrawn air, a satisfied kind of air, like a priestess celebrating a sacred rite. And in her own mind, of course, that's exactly what she is. Mother had thick, pink, strong forearms which were generally mottled with flour. When she was cooking, all her movements were wonderfully precise and firm. In her hands egg-whisks and mincers and rolling-pins did exactly what they were meant to do. When you saw her cooking you knew that she was in a world where she belonged, among things she really understood. Except through the Sunday papers and an occasional bit of gossip the outside world didn't really exist for her. Although she read more easily than Father, and unlike him used to read novelettes as well as newspapers, she was unbelievably ignorant. I realized this even by the time I was ten years old. She certainly couldn't have told you whether Ireland was east or west of England, and I doubt whether any time up to the outbreak of the Great War she could have told you who was Prime Minister. Moreover she hadn't the smallest wish to know such things. Later on when I read books about Eastern countries where they practise polygamy, and the secret harems where the women are locked up with black eunuchs mounting guard over them, I used to think how shocked Mother would have been if she'd heard of it. I can almost hear her voice— 'Well, now! Shutting their wives up like that! The IDEA!' Not that she'd have known what a eunuch was. But in reality she lived her life in a space that must have been as small and almost as private as the average zenana. Even in our own house there were parts where she never set foot. She never went into the loft behind the yard and very seldom into the shop. I don't think I ever

remember her serving a customer. She wouldn't have known where any of the things were kept, and until they were milled into flour she probably didn't know the difference between wheat and oats. Why should she? The shop was Father's business, it was 'the man's work', and even about the money side of it she hadn't very much curiosity. Her job, 'the woman's work', was to look after the house and the meals and the laundry and the children. She'd have had a fit if she'd seen Father or anyone else of the male sex trying to sew on a button for himself.

So far as the meals and so forth went, ours was one of those houses where everything goes like clockwork. Or no, not like clockwork, which suggests something mechanical. It was more like some kind of natural process. You knew that breakfast would be on the table tomorrow morning in much the same way as you knew the sun would rise. All through her life Mother went to bed at nine and got up at five, and she'd have thought it vaguely wicked — sort of decadent and foreign and aristocratic — to keep later hours. Although she didn't mind paying Katie Simmons to take Joe and me out for walks, she would never tolerate the idea of having a woman in to help with the housework. It was her firm belief that a hired woman always sweeps the dirt under the dresser. Our meals were always ready on the tick. Enormous meals — boiled beef and dumplings, roast beef and Yorkshire, boiled mutton and capers, pig's head, apple pie, spotted dog, and jam roly-poly — with grace before and after. The old ideas about bringing up children still held good, though they were going out fast. In theory children were still thrashed and put to bed on bread and water, and certainly you were liable to be sent away from table if you made too much noise eating, or choked, or refused something that was 'good for you', or 'answered back'. In practice there wasn't much discipline in our family, and of the two Mother was the firmer. Father, though he was always quoting 'Spare the rod and spoil the child', was really much too weak with us, especially with Joe, who was a hard case from the start. He was always 'going to' give Joe a good hiding, and he used to tell us stories, which I now believe were lies, about the frightful thrashings his own father used to give him with a leather strap, but nothing ever came of it. By the time Joe was twelve he was too

strong for Mother to get him across her knee, and after that there was no doing anything with him.

At that time it was still thought proper for parents to say 'don't' to their children all day long. You'd often hear a man boasting that he'd 'thrash the life out of' his son if he caught him smoking, or stealing apples, or robbing a bird's nest. In some families these thrashings actually took place. Old Lovegrove, the saddler, caught his two sons, great lumps aged sixteen and fifteen, smoking in the garden shed and walloped them so that you could hear it all over the town. Lovegrove was a very heavy smoker. The thrashings never seemed to have any effect, all boys stole apples, robbed birds' nests, and learned to smoke sooner or later, but the idea was still knocking around that children should be treated rough. Practically everything worth doing was forbidden, in theory anyway. According to Mother, everything that a boy ever wants to do was 'dangerous'. Swimming was dangerous, climbing trees was dangerous, and so were sliding, snowballing, hanging on behind carts, using catapults and squailers, and even fishing. All animals were dangerous, except Nailer, the two cats, and Jackie the bullfinch. Every animal had its special recognized methods of attacking you. Horses bit, bats got into your hair, earwigs got into your ears, swans broke your leg with a blow of their wings, bulls tossed you, and snakes 'stung'. All snakes stung, according to Mother, and when I quoted the penny encyclopedia to the effect that they didn't sting but bit, she only told me not to answer back. Lizards, slow-worms, toads, frogs, and newts also stung. All insects stung, except flies and blackbeetles. Practically all kinds of food, except the food you had at meals, were either poisonous or 'bad for you'. Raw potatoes were deadly poison, and so were mushrooms unless you bought them at the greengrocer's. Raw gooseberries gave you colic and raw raspberries gave you a skin-rash. If you had a bath after a meal you died of cramp, if you cut yourself between the thumb and forefinger you got lockjaw, and if you washed your hands in the water eggs were boiled in you got warts. Nearly everything in the shop was poisonous, which was why Mother had put the gate in the doorway. Cowcake was poisonous, and so was chicken corn, and so were mustard seed and Karswood poultry spice. Sweets were bad for you and eating between meals

was bad for you, though curiously enough there were certain kinds of eating between meals that Mother always allowed. When she was making plum jam she used to let us eat the syrupy stuff that was skimmed off the top, and we used to gorge ourselves with it till we were sick. Although nearly everything in the world was either dangerous or poisonous, there were certain things that had mysterious virtues. Raw onions were a cure for almost everything. A stocking tied round your neck was a cure for a sore throat. Sulphur in a dog's drinking water acted as a tonic, and old Nailer's bowl behind the back door always had a lump of sulphur in it which stayed there year after year, never dissolving.

We used to have tea at six. By four Mother had generally finished the housework, and between four and six she used to have a quiet cup of tea and 'read her paper', as she called it. As a matter of fact she didn't often read the newspaper except on Sundays. The week-day papers only had the day's news, and it was only occasionally that there was a murder. But the editors of the Sunday papers had grasped that people don't really mind whether their murders are up to date and when there was no new murder on hand they'd hash up an old one, sometimes going as far back as Dr Palmer and Mrs Manning. I think Mother thought of the world outside Lower Binfleld chiefly as a place where murders were committed. Murders had a terrible fascination for her, because, as she often said, she just didn't know how people could BE so wicked. Cutting their wives' throats, burying their fathers under cement floors, throwing babies down wells! How anyone could DO such things! The Jack the Ripper scare had happened about the time when Father and Mother were married, and the big wooden shutters we used to draw over the shop windows every night dated from then. Shutters for shop windows were going out, most of the shops in the High Street didn't have them, but Mother felt safe behind them. All along, she said, she'd had a dreadful feeling that Jack the Ripper was hiding in Lower Binfield. The Crippen case — but that was years later, when I was almost grown up — upset her badly. I can hear her voice now. 'Gutting his poor wife up and burying her in the coal cellar! The IDEA! What I'd do to that man if I got hold of him!' And curiously enough, when she thought of the dreadful wickedness of that little American doctor

who dismembered his wife (and made a very neat job of it by taking all the bones out and chucking the head into the sea, if I remember rightly) the tears actually came into her eyes.

But what she mostly read on week-days was Hilda's Home Companion. In those days it was part of the regular furnishing of any home like ours, and as a matter of fact it still exists, though it's been a bit crowded out by the more streamlined women's papers that have come up since the war. I had a look at a copy only the other day. It's changed, but less than most things. There are still the same enormous serial stories that go on for six months (and it all comes right in the end with orange blossoms to follow), and the same Household Hints, and the same ads for sewing-machines and remedies for bad legs. It's chiefly the print and the illustrations that have changed. In those days the heroine had to look like an egg-timer and now she has to look like a cylinder. Mother was a slow reader and believed in getting her threepennyworth out of Hilda's Home Companion. Sitting in the old yellow armchair beside the hearth, with her feet on the iron fender and the little pot of strong tea stewing on the hob, she'd work her way steadily from cover to cover, right through the serial, the two short stories, the Household Hints, the ads for Zam-Buk, and the answers to correspondents. Hilda's Home Companion generally lasted her the week out, and some weeks she didn't even finish it. Sometimes the heat of the fire, or the buzzing of the bluebottles on summer afternoons, would send her off into a doze, and at about a quarter to six she'd wake up with a tremendous start, glance at the clock on the mantelpiece, and then get into a stew because tea was going to be late. But tea was never late.

In those days — till 1909, to be exact — Father could still afford an errand boy, and he used to leave the shop to him and come in to tea with the backs of his hands all mealy. Then Mother would stop cutting slices of bread for a moment and say, 'If you'll give us grace, Father', and Father, while we all bent our heads on our chests, would mumble reverently, 'Fwat we bout to receive — Lord make us truly thankful — Amen.' Later on, when Joe was a bit older, it would be 'YOU give us grace today, Joe', and Joe would pipe it out. Mother never said grace: it had to be someone of the male sex.

There were always bluebottles buzzing on summer afternoons.

Ours wasn't a sanitary house, precious few houses in Lower Binfield were. I suppose the town must have contained five hundred houses and there certainly can't have been more than ten with bathrooms or fifty with what we should now describe as a W.C. In summer our backyard always smelt of dustbins. And all houses had insects in them. We had blackbeetles in the wainscoting and crickets somewhere behind the kitchen range, besides, of course, the meal-worms in the shop. In those days even a house-proud woman like Mother didn't see anything to object to in blackbeetles. They were as much a part of the kitchen as the dresser or the rolling-pin. But there were insects and insects. The houses in the bad street behind the brewery, where Katie Simmons lived, were overrun by bugs. Mother or any of the shopkeepers' wives would have died of shame if they'd had bugs in the house. In fact it was considered proper to say that you didn't even know a bug by sight.

The great blue flies used to come sailing into the larder and sit longingly on the wire covers over the meat. 'Drat the flies!' people used to say, but the flies were an act of God and apart from meat-covers and fly-papers you couldn't do much about them. I said a little while back that the first thing I remember is the smell of sainfoin, but the smell of dustbins is also a pretty early memory. When I think of Mother's kitchen, with the stone floor and the beetle-traps and the steel fender and the blackleaded range, I always seem to hear the bluebottles buzzing and smell the dustbin, and also old Nailer, who carried a pretty powerful smell of dog. And God knows there are worse smells and sounds. Which would you sooner listen to, a bluebottle or a bombing plane?

3

Joe started going to Walton Grammar School two years before I did. Neither us went there till we were nine. It meant a four-mile bike ride morning and evening, and Mother was scared of allowing us among the traffic, which by that time included a very few motor- cars.

For several years we went to the dame-school kept by old Mrs Howlett. Most of the shopkeepers' children went there, to save them from the shame and come-down of going to the board school, though everyone knew that Mother Howlett was an old imposter and worse than useless as a teacher. She was over seventy, she was very deaf, she could hardly see through her spectacles, and all she owned in the way of equipment was a cane, a blackboard, a few dog- eared grammar books, and a couple of dozen smelly slates. She could just manage the girls, but the boys simply laughed at her and played truant as often as they felt like it. Once there was a frightful scandal cause a boy put his hand up a girl's dress, a thing I didn't understand at the time. Mother Howlett succeeded in hushing it up. When you did something particularly bad her formula was 'I'll tell your father', and on very rare occasions she did so. But we were quite sharp enough to see that she daren't do it too often, and even when she let out at you with the cane she was so old and clumsy that it was easy to dodge.

Joe was only eight when he got in with a tough gang of boys who called themselves the Black Hand. The leader was Sid Lovegrove, the saddler's younger son, who was about thirteen, and there were two other shopkeepers' sons, an errand boy from the brewery, and two farm lads who sometimes managed to cut work and go off with the gang for a couple of hours. The farm lads were great lumps bursting out of corduroy breeches, with very broad accents and rather looked down on by the rest of the gang, but they were tolerated because they knew twice as much about animals as any of the others. One of them, nicknamed Ginger, would even catch a rabbit in his hands occasionally. If he saw one lying in the grass he used to fling himself on it like a spread-eagle. There was a big social distinction between the shopkeepers' sons and the sons of labourers and farm-

hands, but the local boys didn't usually pay much attention to it till they were about sixteen. The gang had a secret password and an 'ordeal' which included cutting your finger and eating an earthworm, and they gave themselves out to be frightful desperadoes. Certainly they managed to make a nuisance of themselves, broke windows chased cows, tore the knockers off doors, and stole fruit by the hundredweight. Sometimes in winter they managed to borrow a couple of ferrets and go ratting, when the farmers would let them. They all had catapults and squailers, and they were always saving up to buy a saloon pistol, which in those days cost five shillings, but the savings never amounted to more than about threepence. In summer they used to go fishing and bird- nesting. When Joe was at Mrs Howlett's he used to cut school at least once a week, and even at the Grammar School he managed it about once a fortnight. There was a boy at the Grammar School, an auctioneer's son, who could copy any handwriting and for a penny he'd forge a letter from your mother saying you'd been ill yesterday. Of course I was wild to join the Black Hand, but Joe always choked me off and said they didn't want any blasted kids hanging round.

It was the thought of going fishing that really appealed to me. At eight years old I hadn't yet been fishing, except with a penny net, with which you can sometimes catch a stickleback. Mother was always terrified of letting us go anywhere near water. She 'forbade' fishing, in the way in which parents in those days 'forbade' almost everything, and I hadn't yet grasped that grownups can't see round corners. But the thought of fishing sent me wild with excitement. Many a time I'd been past the pool at the Mill Farm and watched the small carp basking on the surface, and sometimes under the willow tree at the corner a great diamond- shaped carp that to my eyes looked enormous — six inches long, I suppose — would suddenly rise to the surface, gulp down a grub, and sink again. I'd spent hours gluing my nose against the window of Wallace's in the High Street, where fishing tackle and guns and bicycles were sold. I used to lie awake on summer mornings thinking of the tales Joe had told me about fishing, how you mixed bread paste, how your float gives a bob and plunges under and you feel the rod bending and the fish tugging at the line. Is it any use talking about it, I wonder — the sort of fairy

light that fish and fishing tackle have in a kid's eyes? Some kids feel the same about guns and shooting, some feel it about motor-bikes or aeroplanes or horses. It's not a thing that you can explain or rationalize, it's merely magic. One morning — it was in June and I must have been eight — I knew that Joe was going to cut school and go out fishing, and I made up my mind to follow. In some way Joe guessed what I was thinking about, and he started on me while we were dressing.

'Now then, young George! Don't you get thinking you're coming with the gang today. You stay back home.'

'No, I didn't. I didn't think nothing about it.'

'Yes, you did! You thought you were coming with the gang.'

'No, I didn't!'

'Yes, you did!'

'No, I didn't!'

'Yes, you did! You stay back home. We don't want any bloody kids along.'

Joe had just learned the word 'bloody' and was always using it. Father overheard him once and swore that he'd thrash the life out of Joe, but as usual he didn't do so. After breakfast Joe started off on his bike, with his satchel and his Grammar School cap, five minutes early as he always did when he meant to cut school, and when it was time for me to leave for Mother Howlett's I sneaked off and hid in the lane behind the allotments. I knew the gang were going to the pond at the Mill Farm, and I was going to follow them if they murdered me for it. Probably they'd give me a hiding, and probably I wouldn't get home to dinner, and then Mother would know that I'd cut school and I'd get another hiding, but I didn't care. I was just desperate to go fishing with the gang. I was cunning, too. I allowed Joe plenty of time to make a circuit round and get to the Mill Farm by road, and then I followed down the lane and skirted round the meadows on the far side of the hedge, so as to get almost to the pond before the gang saw me. It was a wonderful June morning. The buttercups were up to my knees. There was a breath of wind just stirring the tops of the elms, and the great green clouds of leaves were sort of soft and rich like silk. And it was nine in the morning and I was eight years old, and all round me it was early summer, with

great tangled hedges where the wild roses were still in bloom, and bits of soft white cloud drifting overhead, and in the distance the low hills and the dim blue masses of the woods round Upper Binfield. And I didn't give a damn for any of it. All I was thinking of was the green pool and the carp and the gang with their hooks and lines and bread paste. It was as though they were in paradise and I'd got to join them. Presently I managed to sneak up on them — four of them, Joe and Sid Lovegrove and the errand boy and another shopkeeper's son, Harry Barnes I think his name was.

Joe turned and saw me. 'Christ!' he said. 'It's the kid.' He walked up to me like a tom-cat that's going to start a fight. 'Now then, you! What'd I tell you? You get back 'ome double quick.'

Both Joe and I were inclined to drop our aitches if we were at all excited. I backed away from him.

'I'm not going back 'ome.'

'Yes you are.'

'Clip his ear, Joe,' said Sid. 'We don't want no kids along.'

'ARE you going back 'ome?' said Joe.

'No.'

'Righto, my boy! Right-HO!'

Then he started on me. The next minute he was chasing me round, catching me one clip after another. But I didn't run away from the pool, I ran in circles. Presently he'd caught me and got me down, and then he knelt on my upper arms and began screwing my ears, which was his favourite torture and one I couldn't stand. I was blubbing by this time, but still I wouldn't give in and promise to go home. I wanted to stay and go fishing with the gang. And suddenly the others swung round in my favour and told Joe to get up off my chest and let me stay if I wanted to. So I stayed after all.

The others had some hooks and lines and floats and a lump of bread paste in a rag, and we all cut ourselves willow switches from the tree at the corner of the pool. The farmhouse was only about two hundred yards away, and you had to keep out of sight because old Brewer was very down on fishing. Not that it made any difference to him, he only used the pool for watering his cattle, but he hated boys. The others were still jealous of me and kept telling me to get out of the light and reminding me that I was only a kid and knew nothing

about fishing. They said that I was making such a noise I'd scare all the fish away, though actually I was making about half as much noise as anyone else there. Finally they wouldn't let me sit beside them and sent me to another part of the pool where the water was shallower and there wasn't so much shade. They said a kid like me was sure to keep splashing the water and frighten the fish away. It was a rotten part of the pool, a part where no fish would ordinarily come. I knew that. I seemed to know by a kind of instinct the places where a fish would lie. Still, I was fishing at last. I was sitting on the grass bank with the rod in my hands, with the flies buzzing round, and the smell of wild peppermint fit to knock you down, watching the red float on the green water, and I was happy as a tinker although the tear- marks mixed up with dirt were still all over my face.

Lord knows how long we sat there. The morning stretched out and out, and the sun got higher and higher, and nobody had a bite. It was a hot still day, too clear for fishing. The floats lay on the water with never a quiver. You could see deep down into the water as though you were looking into a kind of dark green glass. Out in the middle of the pool you could see the fish lying just under the surface, sunning themselves, and sometimes in the weeds near the side a newt would come gliding upwards and rest there with his fingers on the weeds and his nose just out of the water. But the fish weren't biting. The others kept shouting that they'd got a nibble, but it was always a lie. And the time stretched out and out and it got hotter and hotter, and the flies ate you alive, and the wild peppermint under the bank smelt like Mother Wheeler's sweet-shop. I was getting hungrier and hungrier, all the more because I didn't know for certain where my dinner was coming from. But I sat as still as a mouse and never took my eyes off the float. The others had given me a lump of bait about the size of a marble, telling me that would have to do for me, but for a long time I didn't even dare to re-bait my hook, because every time I pulled my line up they swore I was making enough noise to frighten every fish within five miles.

I suppose we must have been there about two hours when suddenly my float gave a quiver. I knew it was a fish. It must have been a fish that was just passing accidentally and saw my bait. There's no mistaking the movement your float gives when it's a real

bite. It's quite different from the way it moves when you twitch your line accidentally. The next moment it gave a sharp bob and almost went under. I couldn't hold myself in any longer. I yelled to the others:

'I've got a bite!'

'Rats!' yelled Sid Lovegrove instantly.

But the next moment there wasn't any doubt about it. The float dived straight down, I could still see it under the water, kind of dim red, and I felt the rod tighten in my hand. Christ, that feeling! The line jerking and straining and a fish on the other end of it! The others saw my rod bending, and the next moment they'd all flung their rods down and rushed round to me. I gave a terrific haul and the fish — a great huge silvery fish — came flying up through the air. The same moment all of us gave a yell of agony. The fish had slipped off the hook and fallen into the wild peppermint under the bank. But he'd fallen into shallow water where he couldn't turn over, and for perhaps a second he lay there on his side helpless. Joe flung himself into the water, splashing us all over, and grabbed him in both hands. 'I got 'im!' he yelled. The next moment he'd flung the fish on to the grass and we were all kneeling round it. How we gloated! The poor dying brute flapped up and down and his scales glistened all the colours of the rainbow. It was a huge carp, seven inches long at least, and must have weighed a quarter of a pound. How we shouted to see him! But the next moment it was as though a shadow had fallen across us. We looked up, and there was old Brewer standing over us, with his tall billycock hat — one of those hats they used to wear that were a cross between a top hat and a bowler — and his cowhide gaiters and a thick hazel stick in his hand.

We suddenly cowered like partridges when there's a hawk overhead. He looked from one to other of us. He had a wicked old mouth with no teeth in it, and since he'd shaved his beard off his chin looked like a nutcracker.

'What are you boys doing here?' he said.

There wasn't much doubt about what we were doing. Nobody answered.

'I'll learn 'ee come fishing in my pool!' he suddenly roared, and the next moment he was on us, whacking out in all directions.

The Black Hand broke and fled. We left all the rods behind and also the fish. Old Brewer chased us half across the meadow. His legs were stiff and he couldn't move fast, but he got in some good swipes before we were out of his reach. We left him in the middle of the field, yelling after us that he knew all our names and was going to tell our fathers. I'd been at the back and most of the wallops had landed on me. I had some nasty red weals on the calves of my legs when we got to the other side of the hedge.

I spent the rest of the day with the gang. They hadn't made up their mind whether I was really a member yet, but for the time being they tolerated me. The errand boy, who'd had the morning off on some lying pretext or other, had to go back to the brewery. The rest of us went for a long, meandering, scrounging kind of walk, the sort of walk that boys go for when they're away from home all day, and especially when they're away without permission. It was the first real boy's walk I'd had, quite different from the walks we used to go with Katie Simmons. We had our dinner in a dry ditch on the edge of the town, full of rusty cans and wild fennel. The others gave me bits of their dinner, and Sid Lovegrove had a penny, so someone fetched a Penny Monster which we had between us. It was very hot, and the fennel smelt very strong, and the gas of the Penny Monster made us belch. Afterwards we wandered up the dusty white road to Upper Binfield, the first time I'd been that way, I believe, and into the beech woods with the carpets of dead leaves and the great smooth trunks that soar up into the sky so that the birds in the upper branches look like dots. You could go wherever you liked in the woods in those days. Binfield House, was shut up, they didn't preserve the pheasants any longer, and at the worst you'd only meet a carter with a load of wood. There was a tree that had been sawn down, and the rings of the trunk looked like a target, and we had shots at it with stones. Then the others had shots at birds with their catapults, and Sid Lovegrove swore he'd hit a chaffinch and it had stuck in a fork in the tree. Joe said he was lying, and they argued and almost fought. Then we went down into a chalk hollow full of beds of dead leaves and shouted to hear the echo. Someone shouted a dirty word, and then we said over all the dirty words we knew, and the others jeered at me

because I only knew three. Sid Lovegrove said he knew how babies were born and it was just the same as rabbits except that the baby came out of the woman's navel. Harry Barnes started to carve the word —— on a beech tree, but got fed up with it after the first two letters. Then we went round by the lodge of Binfield House. There was a rumour that somewhere in the grounds there was a pond with enormous fish in it, but no one ever dared go inside because old Hodges, the lodge-keeper who acted as a kind of caretaker, was 'down' on boys. He was digging in his vegetable garden by the lodge when we passed. We cheeked him over the fence until he chased us off, and then we went down to the Walton Road and cheeked the carters, keeping on the other side of the hedge so that they couldn't reach us with their whips. Beside the Walton Road there was a place that had been a quarry and then a rubbish dump, and finally had got overgrown with blackberry bushes. There were great mounds of rusty old tin cans and bicycle frames and saucepans with holes in them and broken bottles with weeds growing all over them, and we spent nearly an hour and got ourselves filthy from head to foot routing out iron fence posts, because Harry Barnes swore that the blacksmith in Lower Binfield would pay sixpence a hundredweight for old iron. Then Joe found a late thrush's nest with half-fledged chicks in it in a blackberry bush. After a lot of argument about what to do with them we took the chicks out, had shots at them with stones, and finally stamped on them. There were four of them, and we each had one to stamp on. It was getting on towards tea-time now. We knew that old Brewer would be as good as his word and there was a hiding ahead of us, but we were getting too hungry to stay out much longer. Finally we trailed home, with one more row on the way, because when we were passing the allotments we saw a rat and chased it with sticks, and old Bennet the station-master, who worked at his allotment every night and was very proud of it, came after us in a tearing rage because we'd trampled on his onion- bed.

I'd walked ten miles and I wasn't tired. All day I'd trailed after the gang and tried to do everything they did, and they'd called me 'the kid' and snubbed me as much as they could, but I'd more or less kept my end up. I had a wonderful feeling inside me, a feeling you can't know about unless you've had it — but if you're a man you'll

have had it some time. I knew that I wasn't a kid any longer, I was a boy at last. And it's a wonderful thing to be a boy, to go roaming where grown-ups can't catch you, and to chase rats and kill birds and shy stones and cheek carters and shout dirty words. It's a kind of strong, rank feeling, a feeling of knowing everything and fearing nothing, and it's all bound up with breaking rules and killing things. The white dusty roads, the hot sweaty feeling of one's clothes, the smell of fennel and wild peppermint, the dirty words, the sour stink of the rubbish dump, the taste of fizzy lemonade and the gas that made one belch, the stamping on the young birds, the feel of the fish straining on the line — it was all part of it. Thank God I'm a man, because no woman ever has that feeling.

Sure enough, old Brewer had sent round and told everybody. Father looked very glum, fetched a strap out of the shop, and said he was going to 'thrash the life out of' Joe. But Joe struggled and yelled and kicked, and in the end Father didn't get in more than a couple of whacks at him. However, he got a caning from the headmaster of the Grammar School next day. I tried to struggle too, but I was small enough for Mother to get me across her knee, and she gave me what-for with the strap. So I'd had three hidings that day, one from Joe, one from old Brewer, and one from Mother. Next day the gang decided that I wasn't really a member yet and that I'd got to go through the 'ordeal' (a word they'd got out of the Red Indian stories) after all. They were very strict in insisting that you had to bite the worm before you swallowed it. Moreover, because I was the youngest and they were jealous of me for being the only one to catch anything, they all made out afterwards that the fish I'd caught wasn't really a big one. In a general way the tendency of fish, when people talk about them, is to get bigger and bigger, but this one got smaller and smaller, until to hear the others talk you'd have thought it was no bigger than a minnow.

But it didn't matter. I'd been fishing. I'd seen the float dive under the water and felt the fish tugging at the line, and however many lies they told they couldn't take that away from me.

4

For the next seven years, from when I was eight to when I was fifteen, what I chiefly remember is fishing.

Don't think that I did nothing else. It's only that when you look back over a long period of time, certain things seem to swell up till they overshadow everything else. I left Mother Howlett's and went to the Grammar School, with a leather satchel and a black cap with yellow stripes, and got my first bicycle and a long time afterwards my first long trousers. My first bike was a fixed- wheel — free-wheel bikes were very expensive then. When you went downhill you put your feet up on the front rests and let the pedals go whizzing round. That was one of the characteristic sights of the early nineteen-hundreds — a boy sailing downhill with his head back and his feet up in the air. I went to the Grammar School in fear and trembling, because of the frightful tales Joe had told me about old Whiskers (his name was Wicksey) the headmaster, who was certainly a dreadful-looking little man, with a face just like a wolf, and at the end of the big schoolroom he had a glass case with canes in it, which he'd sometimes take out and swish through the air in a terrifying manner. But to my surprise I did rather well at school. It had never occurred to me that I might be cleverer than Joe, who was two years older than me and had bullied me ever since he could walk. Actually Joe was an utter dunce, got the cane about once a week, and stayed somewhere near the bottom of the school till he was sixteen. My second term I took a prize in arithmetic and another in some queer stuff that was mostly concerned with pressed flowers and went by the name of Science, and by the time I was fourteen Whiskers was talking about scholarships and Reading University. Father, who had ambitions for Joe and me in those days, was very anxious that I should go to 'college'. There was an idea floating round that I was to be a schoolteacher and Joe was to be an auctioneer.

But I haven't many memories connected with school. When I've mixed with chaps from the upper classes, as I did during the war, I've been struck by the fact that they never really get over that frightful drilling they go through at public schools. Either it flattens

them out into half-wits or they spend the rest of their lives kicking against it. It wasn't so with boys of our class, the sons of shopkeepers and farmers. You went to the Grammar School and you stayed there till you were sixteen, just to show that you weren't a prole, but school was chiefly a place that you wanted to get away from. You'd no sentiment of loyalty, no goofy feeling about the old grey stones (and they WERE old, right enough, the school had been founded by Cardinal Wolsey), and there was no Old Boy's tie and not even a school song. You had your half-holidays to yourself, because games weren't compulsory and as often as not you cut them. We played football in braces, and though it was considered proper to play cricket in a belt, you wore your ordinary shirt and trousers. The only game I really cared about was the stump cricket we used to play in the gravel yard during the break, with a bat made out of a bit of packing case and a compo ball.

But I remember the smell of the big schoolroom, a smell of ink and dust and boots, and the stone in the yard that had been a mounting block and was used for sharpening knives on, and the little baker's shop opposite where they sold a kind of Chelsea bun, twice the size of the Chelsea buns you get nowadays, which were called Lardy Busters and cost a halfpenny. I did all the things you do at school. I carved my name on a desk and got the cane for it — you were always caned for it if you were caught, but it was the etiquette that you had to carve your name. And I got inky fingers and bit my nails and made darts out of penholders and played conkers and passed round dirty stories and learned to masturbate and cheeked old Blowers, the English master, and bullied the life out of little Willy Simeon, the undertaker's son, who was half- witted and believed everything you told him. Our favourite trick was to send him to shops to buy things that didn't exist. All the old gags — the ha'porth of penny stamps, the rubber hammer, the left-handed screwdriver, the pot of striped paint — poor Willy fell for all of them. We had grand sport one afternoon, putting him in a tub and telling him to lift himself up by the handles. He ended up in an asylum, poor Willy. But it was in the holidays that one really lived.

There were good things to do in those days. In winter we used to borrow a couple of ferrets — Mother would never let Joe and me

keep them at home, ‘nasty smelly things’ she called them — and go round the farms and ask leave to do a bit of ratting. Sometimes they let us, sometimes they told us to hook it and said we were more trouble than the rats. Later in winter we’d follow the threshing machine and help kill the rats when they threshed the stacks. One winter, 1908 it must have been, the Thames flooded and then froze and there was skating for weeks on end, and Harry Barnes broke his collar- bone on the ice. In early spring we went after squirrels with squailers, and later on we went birdnesting. We had a theory that birds can’t count and it’s all right if you leave one egg, but we were cruel little beasts and sometimes we’d just knock the nest down and trample on the eggs or chicks. There was another game we had when the toads were spawning. We used to catch toads, ram the nozzle of a bicycle pump up their backsides, and blow them up till they burst. That’s what boys are like, I don’t know why. In summer we used to bike over the Burford Weir and bathe. Wally Lovegrove, Sid’s young cousin, was drowned in 1906. He got tangled in the weeds at the bottom, and when the drag-hooks brought his body to the surface his face was jet black.

But fishing was the real thing. We went many a time to old Brewer’s pool, and took tiny carp and tench out of it, and once a whopping eel, and there were other cow-ponds that had fish in them and were within walking distance on Saturday afternoons. But after we got bicycles we started fishing in the Thames below Burford Weir. It seemed more grown-up than fishing in cow-ponds. There were no farmers chasing you away, and there are thumping fish in the Thames — though, so far as I know, nobody’s ever been known to catch one.

It’s queer, the feeling I had for fishing — and still have, really. I can’t call myself a fisherman. I’ve never in my life caught a fish two feet long, and it’s thirty years now since I’ve had a rod in my hands. And yet when I look back the whole of my boyhood from eight to fifteen seems to have revolved round the days when we went fishing. Every detail has stuck clear in my memory. I can remember individual days and individual fish, there isn’t a cow- pond or a backwater that I can’t see a picture of if I shut my eyes and think. I could write a book on the technique of fishing. When we were kids

we didn't have much in the way of tackle, it cost too much and most of our threepence a week (which was the usual pocket- money in those days) went on sweets and Lardy Busters. Very small kids generally fish with a bent pin, which is too blunt to be much use, but you can make a pretty good hook (though of course it's got no barb) by bending a needle in a candle flame with a pair of pliers. The farm lads knew how to plait horsehair so that it was almost as good as gut, and you can take a small fish on a single horsehair. Later we got to having two-shilling fishing-rods and even reels of sorts. God, what hours I've spent gazing into Wallace's window! Even the .410 guns and saloon pistols didn't thrill me so much as the fishing tackle. And the copy of Gamage's catalogue that I picked up somewhere, on a rubbish dump I think, and studied as though it had been the Bible! Even now I could give you all the details about gut-substitute and gimp and Limerick hooks and priests and disgorgers and Nottingham reels and God knows how many other technicalities.

Then there were the kinds of bait we used to use. In our shop there were always plenty of mealworms, which were good but not very good. Gentles were better. You had to beg them off old Gravitt, the butcher, and the gang used to draw lots or do enamena-mina-mo to decide who should go and ask, because Gravitt wasn't usually too pleasant about it. He was a big, rough-faced old devil with a voice like a mastiff, and when he barked, as he generally did when speaking to boys, all the knives and steels on his blue apron would give a jingle. You'd go in with an empty treacle-tin in your hand, hang round till any customers had disappeared and then say very humbly:

'Please, Mr Gravitt, y'got any gentles today?'

Generally he'd roar out: 'What! Gentles! Gentles in my shop! Ain't seen such a thing in years. Think I got blow-flies in my shop?'

He had, of course. They were everywhere. He used to deal with them with a strip of leather on the end of a stick, with which he could reach out to enormous distances and smack a fly into paste. Sometimes you had to go away without any gentles, but as a rule he'd shout after you just as you were going:

''Ere! Go round the backyard an' 'ave a look. P'raps you might find one or two if you looked careful.'

You used to find them in little clusters everywhere. Gravitt's backyard smelt like a battlefield. Butchers didn't have refrigerators in those days. Gentles live longer if you keep them in sawdust.

Wasp grubs are good, though it's hard to make them stick on the hook, unless you bake them first. When someone found a wasps' nest we'd go out at night and pour turpentine down it and plug up the hole with mud. Next day the wasps would all be dead and you could dig out the nest and take the grubs. Once something went wrong, the turps missed the hole or something, and when we took the plug out the wasps, which had been shut up all night, came out all together with a zoom. We weren't very badly stung, but it was a pity there was no one standing by with a stopwatch. Grasshoppers are about the best bait there is, especially for chub. You stick them on the hook without any shot and just flick them to and fro on the surface—'dapping', they call it. But you can never get more than two or three grasshoppers at a time. Greenbottle flies, which are also damned difficult to catch, are the best bait for dace, especially on clear days. You want to put them on the hook alive, so that they wriggle. A chub will even take a wasp, but it's a ticklish job to put a live wasp on the hook.

God knows how many other baits there were. Bread paste you make by squeezing water through white bread in a rag. Then there are cheese paste and honey paste and paste with aniseed in it. Boiled wheat isn't bad for roach. Redworms are good for gudgeon. You find them in very old manure heaps. And you also find another kind of worm called a brandling, which is striped and smells like an earwig, and which is very good bait for perch. Ordinary earthworms are good for perch. You have to put them in moss to keep them fresh and lively. If you try to keep them in earth they die. Those brown flies you find on cowdung are pretty good for roach. You can take a chub on a cherry, so they say, and I've seen a roach taken with a currant out of a bun.

In those days, from the sixteenth of June (when the coarse-fishing season starts) till midwinter I wasn't often without a tin of worms or gentles in my pocket. I had some fights with Mother about it, but in the end she gave in, fishing came off the list of forbidden things and Father even gave me a two-shilling fishing-rod for Christmas in

1903. Joe was barely fifteen when he started going after girls, and from then on he seldom came out fishing, which he said was a kid's game. But there were about half a dozen others who were as mad on fishing as I was. Christ, those fishing days! The hot sticky afternoons in the schoolroom when I've sprawled across my desk, with old Blowers's voice grating away about predicates and subjunctives and relative clauses, and all that's in my mind is the backwater near Burford Weir and the green pool under the willows with the dace gliding to and fro. And then the terrific rush on bicycles after tea, to Chamford Hill and down to the river to get in an hour's fishing before dark. The still summer evening, the faint splash of the weir, the rings on the water where the fish are rising, the midges eating you alive, the shoals of dace swarming round your hook and never biting. And the kind of passion with which you'd watch the black backs of the fish swarming round, hoping and praying (yes, literally praying) that one of them would change his mind and grab your bait before it got too dark. And then it was always 'Let's have five minutes more', and then 'Just five minutes more', until in the end you had to walk your bike into the town because Towler, the copper, was prowling round and you could be 'had up' for riding without a light. And the times in the summer holidays when we went out to make a day of it with boiled eggs and bread and butter and a bottle of lemonade, and fished and bathed and then fished again and did occasionally catch something. At night you'd come home with filthy hands so hungry that you'd eaten what was left of your bread paste, with three or four smelly dace wrapped up in your handkerchief. Mother always refused to cook the fish I brought home. She would never allow that river fish were edible, except trout and salmon. 'Nasty muddy things', she called them. The fish I remember best of all are the ones I didn't catch. Especially the monstrous fish you always used to see when you went for a walk along the towpath on Sunday afternoons and hadn't a rod with you. There was no fishing on Sundays, even the Thames Conservancy Board didn't allow it. On Sundays you had to go for what was called a 'nice walk' in your thick black suit and the Eton collar that sawed your head off. It was on a Sunday that I saw a pike a yard long asleep in shallow water by the bank and nearly got him with a stone. And sometimes in the green pools on the

edge of the reeds you'd see a huge Thames trout go sailing past. The trout grow to vast sizes in the Thames, but they're practically never caught. They say that one of the real Thames fishermen, the old bottle-nosed blokes that you see muffled up in overcoats on camp-stools with twenty-foot roach-poles at all seasons of the year, will willingly give up a year of his life to catching a Thames trout. I don't blame them, I see their point entirely, and still better I saw it then.

Of course other things were happening. I grew three inches in a year, got my long trousers, won some prizes at school, went to Confirmation classes, told dirty stories, took to reading, and had crazes for white mice, fretwork, and postage stamps. But it's always fishing that I remember. Summer days, and the flat water- meadows and the blue hills in the distance, and the willows up the backwater and the pools underneath like a kind of deep green glass. Summer evenings, the fish breaking the water, the nightjars hawking round your head, the smell of nightstocks and latakia. Don't mistake what I'm talking about. It's not that I'm trying to put across any of that poetry of childhood stuff. I know that's all baloney. Old Porteous (a friend of mine, a retired schoolmaster, I'll tell you about him later) is great on the poetry of childhood. Sometimes he reads me stuff about it out of books. Wordsworth. Lucy Gray. There was a time when meadow, grove, and all that. Needless to say he's got no kids of his own. The truth is that kids aren't in any way poetic, they're merely savage little animals, except that no animal is a quarter as selfish. A boy isn't interested in meadows, groves, and so forth. He never looks at a landscape, doesn't give a damn for flowers, and unless they affect him in some way, such as being good to eat, he doesn't know one plant from another. Killing things — that's about as near to poetry as a boy gets. And yet all the while there's that peculiar intensity, the power of longing for things as you can't long when you're grown up, and the feeling that time stretches out and out in front of you and that whatever you're doing you could go on for ever.

I was rather an ugly little boy, with butter-coloured hair which was always cropped short except for a quiff in front. I don't idealize my childhood, and unlike many people I've no wish to be young again. Most of the things I used to care for would leave me

something more than cold. I don't care if I never see a cricket ball again, and I wouldn't give you threepence for a hundredweight of sweets. But I've still got, I've always had, that peculiar feeling for fishing. You'll think it damned silly, no doubt, but I've actually half a wish to go fishing even now, when I'm fat and forty-five and got two kids and a house in the suburbs. Why? Because in a manner of speaking I AM sentimental about my childhood — not my own particular childhood, but the civilization which I grew up in and which is now, I suppose, just about at its last kick. And fishing is somehow typical of that civilization. As soon as you think of fishing you think of things that don't belong to the modern world. The very idea of sitting all day under a willow tree beside a quiet pool — and being able to find a quiet pool to sit beside — belongs to the time before the war, before the radio, before aeroplanes, before Hitler. There's a kind of peacefulness even in the names of English coarse fish. Roach, rudd, dace, bleak, barbel, bream, gudgeon, pike, chub, carp, tench. They're solid kind of names. The people who made them up hadn't heard of machine-guns, they didn't live in terror of the sack or spend their time eating aspirins, going to the pictures, and wondering how to keep out of the concentration camp.

Does anyone go fishing nowadays, I wonder? Anywhere within a hundred miles of London there are no fish left to catch. A few dismal fishing-clubs plant themselves in rows along the banks of canals, and millionaires go trout-fishing in private waters round Scotch hotels, a sort of snobbish game of catching hand-reared fish with artificial flies. But who fishes in mill-streams or moats or cow-ponds any longer? Where are the English coarse fish now? When I was a kid every pond and stream had fish in it. Now all the ponds are drained, and when the streams aren't poisoned with chemicals from factories they're full of rusty tins and motor-bike tyres.

My best fishing-memory is about some fish that I never caught. That's usual enough, I suppose.

When I was about fourteen Father did a good turn of some kind to old Hodges, the caretaker at Binfield House. I forget what it was — gave him some medicine that cured his fowls of the worms, or something. Hodges was a crabby old devil, but he didn't forget a good turn. One day a little while afterwards when he'd been down to

the shop to buy chicken-corn he met me outside the door and stopped me in his surly way. He had a face like something carved out of a bit of root, and only two teeth, which were dark brown and very long.

'Hey, young 'un! Fisherman, ain't you?'

'Yes.'

'Thought you was. You listen, then. If so be you wanted to, you could bring your line and have a try in that they pool up ahind the Hall. There's plenty bream and jack in there. But don't you tell no one as I told you. And don't you go for to bring any of them other young whelps, or I'll beat the skin off their backs.'

Having said this he hobbled off with his sack of corn over his shoulder, as though feeling that he'd said too much already. The next Saturday afternoon I biked up to Binfield House with my pockets full of worms and gentles, and looked for old Hodges at the lodge. At that time Binfield House had already been empty for ten or twenty years. Mr Farrel, the owner, couldn't afford to live in it and either couldn't or wouldn't let it. He lived in London on the rent of his farms and let the house and grounds go to the devil. All the fences were green and rotting, the park was a mass of nettles, the plantations were like a jungle, and even the gardens had gone back to meadow, with only a few old gnarled rose- bushes to show you where the beds had been. But it was a very beautiful house, especially from a distance. It was a great white place with colonnades and long-shaped windows, which had been built, I suppose, about Queen Anne's time by someone who'd travelled in Italy. If I went there now I'd probably get a certain kick out of wandering round the general desolation and thinking about the life that used to go on there, and the people who built such places because they imagined that the good days would last for ever. As a boy I didn't give either the house or the grounds a second look. I dug out old Hodges, who'd just finished his dinner and was a bit surly, and got him to show me the way down to the pool. It was several hundred yards behind the house and completely hidden in the beech woods, but it was a good-sized pool, almost a lake, about a hundred and fifty yards across. It was astonishing, and even at that age it astonished me, that there, a dozen miles from Reading and not fifty from London, you could have such solitude. You felt as much alone as if you'd been on the banks of the Amazon. The pool

was ringed completely round by the enormous beech trees, which in one place came down to the edge and were reflected in the water. On the other side there was a patch of grass where there was a hollow with beds of wild peppermint, and up at one end of the pool an old wooden boathouse was rotting among the bulrushes.

The pool was swarming with bream, small ones, about four to six inches long. Every now and again you'd see one of them turn half over and gleam reddy brown under the water. There were pike there too, and they must have been big ones. You never saw them, but sometimes one that was basking among the weeds would turn over and plunge with a splash that was like a brick being bunged into the water. It was no use trying to catch them, though of course I always tried every time I went there. I tried them with dace and minnows I'd caught in the Thames and kept alive in a jam-jar, and even with a spinner made out of a bit of tin. But they were gorged with fish and wouldn't bite, and in any case they'd have broken any tackle I possessed. I never came back from the pool without at least a dozen small bream. Sometimes in the summer holidays I went there for a whole day, with my fishing-rod and a copy of Chums or the Union Jack or something, and a hunk of bread and cheese which Mother had wrapped up for me. And I've fished for hours and then lain in the grass hollow and read the Union Jack, and then the smell of my bread paste and the plop of a fish jumping somewhere would send me wild again, and I'd go back to the water and have another go, and so on all through a summer's day. And the best of all was to be alone, utterly alone, though the road wasn't a quarter of a mile away. I was just old enough to know that it's good to be alone occasionally. With the trees all round you it was as though the pool belonged to you, and nothing ever stirred except the fish ringing the water and the pigeons passing overhead. And yet, in the two years or so that I went fishing there, how many times did I really go, I wonder? Not more than a dozen. It was a three-mile bike ride from home and took up a whole afternoon at least. And sometimes other things turned up, and sometimes when I'd meant to go it rained. You know the way things happen.

One afternoon the fish weren't biting and I began to explore at the end of the pool farthest from Binfield House. There was a bit of an

overflow of water and the ground was boggy, and you had to fight your way through a sort of jungle of blackberry bushes and rotten boughs that had fallen off the trees. I struggled through it for about fifty yards, and then suddenly there was a clearing and I came to another pool which I had never known existed. It was a small pool not more than twenty yards wide, and rather dark because of the boughs that overhung it. But it was very clear water and immensely deep. I could see ten or fifteen feet down into it. I hung about for a bit, enjoying the dampness and the rotten boggy smell, the way a boy does. And then I saw something that almost made me jump out of my skin.

It was an enormous fish. I don't exaggerate when I say it was enormous. It was almost the length of my arm. It glided across the pool, deep under water, and then became a shadow and disappeared into the darker water on the other side. I felt as if a sword had gone through me. It was far the biggest fish I'd ever seen, dead or alive. I stood there without breathing, and in a moment another huge thick shape glided through the water, and then another and then two more close together. The pool was full of them. They were carp, I suppose. Just possibly they were bream or tench, but more probably carp. Bream or tench wouldn't grow so huge. I knew what had happened. At some time this pool had been connected with the other, and then the stream had dried up and the woods had closed round the small pool and it had just been forgotten. It's a thing that happens occasionally. A pool gets forgotten somehow, nobody fishes in it for years and decades and the fish grow to monstrous sizes. The brutes that I was watching might be a hundred years old. And not a soul in the world knew about them except me. Very likely it was twenty years since anyone had so much as looked at the pool, and probably even old Hodges and Mr Farrel's bailiff had forgotten its existence.

Well, you can imagine what I felt. After a bit I couldn't even bear the tantalization of watching. I hurried back to the other pool and got my fishing things together. It was no use trying for those colossal brutes with the tackle I had. They'd snap it as if it had been a hair. And I couldn't go on fishing any longer for the tiny bream. The sight of the big carp had given me a feeling in my stomach almost as if I was going to be sick. I got on to my bike and whizzed down the hill

and home. It was a wonderful secret for a boy to have. There was the dark pool hidden away in the woods and the monstrous fish sailing round it — fish that had never been fished for and would grab the first bait you offered them. It was only a question of getting hold of a line strong enough to hold them. Already I'd made all the arrangements. I'd buy the tackle that would hold them if I had to steal the money out of the till. Somehow, God knew how, I'd get hold of half a crown and buy a length of silk salmon line and some thick gut or gimp and Number 5 hooks, and come back with cheese and gentles and paste and mealworms and brandlings and grasshoppers and every mortal bait a carp might look at. The very next Saturday afternoon I'd come back and try for them.

But as it happened I never went back. One never does go back. I never stole the money out of the till or bought the bit of salmon line or had a try for those carp. Almost immediately afterwards something turned up to prevent me, but if it hadn't been that it would have been something else. It's the way things happen.

I know, of course, that you think I'm exaggerating about the size of those fish. You think, probably, that they were just medium- sized fish (a foot long, say) and that they've swollen gradually in my memory. But it isn't so. People tell lies about the fish they've caught and still more about the fish that are hooked and get away, but I never caught any of these or even tried to catch them, and I've no motive for lying. I tell you they were enormous.

5

Fishing!

Here I'll make a confession, or rather two. The first is that when I look back through my life I can't honestly say that anything I've ever done has given me quite such a kick as fishing. Everything else has been a bit of a flop in comparison, even women. I don't set up to be one of those men that don't care about women. I've spent plenty of time chasing them, and I would even now if I had the chance. Still, if you gave me the choice of having any woman you care to name, but I mean ANY woman, or catching a ten-pound carp, the carp would win every time. And the other confession is that after I was sixteen I never fished again.

Why? Because that's how things happen. Because in this life we lead — I don't mean human life in general, I mean life in this particular age and this particular country — we don't do the things we want to do. It isn't because we're always working. Even a farm-hand or a Jew tailor isn't always working. It's because there's some devil in us that drives us to and fro on everlasting idiocies. There's time for everything except the things worth doing. Think of something you really care about. Then add hour to hour and calculate the fraction of your life that you've actually spent in doing it. And then calculate the time you've spent on things like shaving, riding to and fro on buses, waiting in railway, junctions, swapping dirty stories, and reading the newspapers.

After I was sixteen I didn't go fishing again. There never seemed to be time. I was at work, I was chasing girls, I was wearing my first button boots and my first high collars (and for the collars of 1909 you needed a neck like a giraffe), I was doing correspondence courses in salesmanship and accountancy and 'improving my mind'. The great fish were gliding round in the pool behind Binfield House. Nobody knew about them except me. They were stored away in my mind; some day, some bank holiday perhaps, I'd go back and catch them. But I never went back. There was time for everything except that. Curiously enough, the only time between then and now when I did very nearly go fishing was during the war.

It was in the autumn of 1916, just before I was wounded. We'd come out of trenches to a village behind the line, and though it was only September we were covered with mud from head to foot. As usual we didn't know for certain how long we were going to stay there or where we were going afterwards. Luckily the C.O. was a bit off-colour, a touch of bronchitis or something, and so didn't bother about driving us through the usual parades, kit-inspections, football matches, and so forth which were supposed to keep up the spirits of the troops when they were out of the line. We spent the first day sprawling about on piles of chaff in the barns where we were billeted and scraping the mud off our putties, and in the evening some of the chaps started queueing up for a couple of wretched worn-out whores who were established in a house at the end of the village. In the morning, although it was against orders to leave the village, I managed to sneak off and wander round the ghastly desolation that had once been fields. It was a damp, wintry kind of morning. All round, of course, were the awful muck and litter of war, the sort of filthy sordid mess that's actually worse than a battlefield of corpses. Trees with boughs torn off them, old shell-holes that had partly filled up again, tin cans, turds, mud, weeds, clumps of rusty barbed wire with weeds growing through them. You know the feeling you had when you came out of the line. A stiffened feeling in all your joints, and inside you a kind of emptiness, a feeling that you'd never again have any interest in anything. It was partly fear and exhaustion but mainly boredom. At that time no one saw any reason why the war shouldn't go on for ever. Today or tomorrow or the day after you were going back to the line, and maybe next week a shell would blow you to potted meat, but that wasn't so bad as the ghastly boredom of the war stretching out for ever.

I was wandering up the side of a hedge when I ran into a chap in our company whose surname I don't remember but who was nicknamed Nobby. He was a dark, slouching, gypsy-looking chap, a chap who even in uniform always gave the impression that he was carrying a couple of stolen rabbits. By trade he was a coster and he was a real Cockney, but one of those Cockneys that make part of their living by hop-picking, bird-catching, poaching, and fruit-stealing in Kent and Essex. He was a great expert on dogs, ferrets,

cage- birds, fighting-cocks, and that kind of thing. As soon as he saw me he beckoned to me with his head. He had a sly, vicious way of talking:

‘‘Ere, George!’ (The chaps still called me George — I hadn’t got fat in those days.) ‘George! Ja see that clump of poplars acrost the field?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, there’s a pool on t’other side of it, and it’s full of bleeding great fish.’

‘Fish? Garn!’

‘I tell you it’s bleeding full of ‘em. Perch, they are. As good fish as ever I got my thumbs on. Com’n see f’yerself, then.’

We trudged over the mud together. Sure enough, Nobby was right. On the other side of the poplars there was a dirty-looking pool with sandy banks. Obviously it had been a quarry and had got filled up with water. And it was swarming with perch. You could see their dark blue stripy backs gliding everywhere just under water, and some of them must have weighed a pound. I suppose in two years of war they hadn’t been disturbed and had had time to multiply. Probably you can’t imagine what the sight of those perch had done to me. It was as though they’d suddenly brought me to life. Of course there was only one thought in both our minds — how to get hold of a rod and line.

‘Christ!’ I said. ‘We’ll have some of those.’

‘You bet we f — well will. C’mon back to the village and let’s get ‘old of some tackle.’

‘O.K. You want to watch out, though. If the sergeant gets to know we’ll cop it.’

‘Oh, f — the sergeant. They can ‘ang, drore, and quarter me if they want to. I’m going to ‘ave some of them bleeding fish.’

You can’t know how wild we were to catch those fish. Or perhaps you can, if you’ve ever been at war. You know the frantic boredom of war and the way you’ll clutch at almost any kind of amusement. I’ve seen two chaps in a dugout fight like devils over half a threepenny magazine. But there was more to it than that. It was the thought of escaping, for perhaps a whole day, right out of the atmosphere of war. To be sitting under the poplar trees, fishing for

perch, away from the Company, away from the noise and the stink and the uniforms and the officers and the saluting and the sergeant's voice! Fishing is the opposite of war. But it wasn't at all certain that we could bring it off. That was the thought that sent us into a kind of fever. If the sergeant found out he'd stop us as sure as fate, and so would any of the officers, and the worst of all was that there was no knowing how long we were going to stay at the village. We might stay there a week, we might march off in two hours. Meanwhile we'd no fishing tackle of any kind, not even a pin or a bit of string. We had to start from scratch. And the pool was swarming with fish! The first thing was a rod. A willow wand is best, but of course there wasn't a willow tree anywhere this side of the horizon. Nobby shinned up one of the poplars and cut off a small bough which wasn't actually good but was better than nothing. He trimmed it down with his jack-knife till it looked something like a fishing-rod, and then we hid it in the weeds near the bank and managed to sneak back into the village without being seen.

The next thing was a needle to make a hook. Nobody had a needle. One chap had some darning needles, but they were too thick and had blunt ends. We daren't let anyone know what we wanted it for, for fear the sergeant should hear about it. At last we thought of the whores at the end of the village. They were pretty sure to have a needle. When we got there — you had to go round to the back door through a mucky courtyard — the house was shut up and the whores were having a sleep which they'd no doubt earned. We stamped and yelled and banged on the door until after about ten minutes a fat ugly woman in a wrapper came down and screamed at us in French. Nobby shouted at her:

'Needle! Needle! You got a needle!'

Of course she didn't know what he was talking about. Then Nobby tried pidgin English, which he expected her as a foreigner to understand:

'Wantee needle! Sewee clothee! Likee thisee!'

He made gestures which were supposed to represent sewing. The whore misunderstood him and opened the door a bit wider to let us in. Finally we made her understand and got a needle from her. By this time it was dinner time.

After dinner the sergeant came round the barn where we were billeted looking for men for a fatigue. We managed to dodge him just in time by getting under a pile of chaff. When he was gone we got a candle alight, made the needle red-hot, and managed to bend it into a kind of hook. We didn't have any tools except jack- knives, and we burned our fingers badly. The next thing was a line. Nobody had any string except thick stuff, but at last we came across a fellow who had a reel of sewing thread. He didn't want to part with it and we had to give him a whole packet of fags for it. The thread was much too thin, but Nobby cut it into three lengths, tied them to a nail in the wall, and carefully plaited them. Meanwhile after searching all over the village I'd managed to find a cork, and I cut it in half and stuck a match through it to make afloat. By this time it was evening and getting on towards dark.

We'd got the essentials now, but we could do with some gut. There didn't seem much hope of getting any until we thought of the hospital orderly. Surgical gut wasn't part of his equipment, but it was just possible that he might have some. Sure enough, when we asked him, we found he'd a whole hank of medical gut in his haversack. It had taken his fancy in some hospital or other and he'd pinched it. We swapped another packet of fags for ten lengths of gut. It was rotten brittle stuff, in pieces about six inches long. After dark Nobby soaked them till they were pliable and tied them end to end. So now we'd got everything — hook, rod, line, float, and gut. We could dig up worms anywhere. And the pool was swarming with fish! Huge great stripy perch crying out to be caught! We lay down to kip in such a fever that we didn't even take our boots off. Tomorrow! If we could just have tomorrow! If the war would forget about us for just a day! We made up our minds that as soon as roll-call was over we'd hook it and stay away all day, even if they gave us Field Punishment No. 1 for it when we came back.

Well, I expect you can guess the rest. At roll-call orders were to pack all kits and be ready to march in twenty minutes. We marched nine miles down the road and then got on to lorries and were off to another part of the line. As for the pool under the poplar trees, I never saw or heard of it again. I expect it got poisoned with mustard gas later on.

Since then I've never fished. I never seemed to get the chance. There was the rest of the war, and then like everyone else I was fighting for a job, and then I'd got a job and the job had got me. I was a promising young fellow in an insurance office — one of those keen young businessmen with firm jaws and good prospects that you used to read about in the Clark's College adverts — and then I was the usual down-trodden five-to-ten-pounds-a-weeker in a semidetached villa in the inner-outer suburbs. Such people don't go fishing, any more than stockbrokers go out picking primroses. It wouldn't be suitable. Other recreations are provided for them.

Of course I have my fortnight's holiday every summer. You know the kind of holiday. Margate, Yarmouth, Eastbourne, Hastings, Bournemouth, Brighton. There's a slight variation according to whether or not we're flush that year. With a woman like Hilda along, the chief feature of a holiday is endless mental arithmetic to decide how much the boarding-house keeper is swindling you. That and telling the kids, No, they can't have a new sandbucket. A few years back we were at Bournemouth. One fine afternoon we loitered down the pier, which must be about half a mile long, and all the way along it chaps were fishing with stumpy sea-rods with little bells on the end and their lines stretching fifty yards out to sea. It's a dull kind of fishing, and they weren't catching anything. Still, they were fishing. The kids soon got bored and clamoured to go back to the beach, and Hilda saw a chap sticking a lobworm on his hook and said it made her feel sick, but I kept loitering up and down for a little while longer. And suddenly there was a tremendous ringing from a bell and a chap was winding in his line. Everyone stopped to watch. And sure enough, in it came, the wet line and the lump of lead and on the end a great flat-fish (a flounder, I think) dangling and wriggling. The chap dumped it on to the planks of the pier, and it flapped up and down, all wet and gleaming, with its grey warty back and its white belly and the fresh salty smell of the sea. And something kind of moved inside me.

As we moved off I said casually, just to test Hilda's reaction:

'I've half a mind to do a bit of fishing myself while we're here.'

'What! YOU go fishing, George? But you don't even know how, do you?'

‘Oh, I used to be a great fisherman,’ I told her.

She was vaguely against it, as usual, but didn’t have many ideas one way or the other, except that if I went fishing she wasn’t coming with me to watch me put those nasty squashy things on the hook. Then suddenly she got on to the fact that if I was to go fishing the set-out-that I’d need, rod and reel and so forth, would cost round about a quid. The rod alone would cost ten bob. Instantly she flew into a temper. You haven’t seen old Hilda when there’s talk of wasting ten bob. She burst out at me:

‘The IDEA of wasting all that money on a thing like that! Absurd! And how they DARE charge ten shillings for one of those silly little fishing-rods! It’s disgraceful. And fancy you going fishing at your age! A great big grown-up man like you. Don’t be such a BABY, George.’

Then the kids got on to it. Lorna sidled up to me and asked in that silly pert way she has, ‘Are you a baby, Daddy?’ and little Billy, who at that time didn’t speak quite plain, announced to the world in general, ‘Farver’s a baby.’ Then suddenly they were both dancing round me, rattling their sandbuckets and chanting:

‘Farver’s a baby! Farver’s a baby!’

Unnatural little bastards!

6

And besides fishing there was reading.

I've exaggerated if I've given the impression that fishing was the ONLY thing I cared about. Fishing certainly came first, but reading was a good second. I must have been either ten or eleven when I started reading — reading voluntarily, I mean. At that age it's like discovering a new world. I'm a considerable reader even now, in fact there aren't many weeks in which I don't get through a couple of novels. I'm what you might call the typical Boots Library subscriber, I always fall for the best-seller of the moment (The Good Companions, Bengal Lancer, Hatter's Castle — I fell for every one of them), and I've been a member of the Left Book Club for a year or more. And in 1918, when I was twenty-five, I had a sort of debauch of reading that made a certain difference to my outlook. But nothing is ever like those first years when you suddenly discover that you can open a penny weekly paper and plunge straight into thieves' kitchens and Chinese opium dens and Polynesian islands and the forests of Brazil.

It was from when I was eleven to when I was about sixteen that I got my biggest kick out of reading. At first it was always the boys' penny weeklies — little thin papers with vile print and an illustration in three colours on the cover — and a bit later it was books. Sherlock Holmes, Dr Nikola, The Iron Pirate, Dracula, Raffles. And Nat Gould and Ranger Gull and a chap whose name I forget who wrote boxing stories almost as rapidly as Nat Gould wrote racing ones. I suppose if my parents had been a little better educated I'd have had 'good' books shoved down my throat, Dickens and Thackeray and so forth, and in fact they did drive us through Quentin Durward at school and Uncle Ezekiel sometimes tried to incite me to read Ruskin and Carlyle. But there were practically no books in our house. Father had never read a book in his life, except the Bible and Smiles's Self Help, and I didn't of my own accord read a 'good' book till much later. I'm not sorry it happened that way. I read the things I wanted to read, and I got more out of them than I ever got out of the stuff they taught me at school.

The old penny dreadfuls were already going out when I was a kid, and I can barely remember them, but there was a regular line of boys' weeklies, some of which still exist. The Buffalo Bill stories have gone out, I think, and Nat Gould probably isn't read any longer, but Nick Carter and Sexton Blake seem to be still the same as ever. The Gem and the Magnet, if I'm remembering rightly, started about 1905. The B.O.P. was still rather pi in those days, but Chums, which I think must have started about 1903, was splendid. Then there was an encyclopedia — I don't remember its exact name — which was issued in penny numbers. It never seemed quite worth buying, but a boy at school used to give away back numbers sometimes. If I now know the length of the Mississippi or the difference between an octopus and a cuttle-fish or the exact composition of bell-metal, that's where I learned it from.

Joe never read. He was one of those boys who can go through years of schooling and at the end of it are unable to read ten lines consecutively. The sight of print made him feel sick. I've seen him pick up one of my numbers of Chums, read a paragraph or two and then turn away with just the same movement of disgust as a horse when it smells stale hay. He tried to kick me out of reading, but Mother and Father, who had decided that I was 'the clever one', backed me up. They were rather proud that I showed a taste for 'book-learning', as they called it. But it was typical of both of them that they were vaguely upset by my reading things like Chums and the Union Jack, thought that I ought to read something 'improving' but didn't know enough about books to be sure which books were 'improving'. Finally Mother got hold of a second-hand copy of Foxe's Book of Martyrs, which I didn't read, though the illustrations weren't half bad.

All through the winter of 1905 I spent a penny on Chums every week. I was following up their serial story, 'Donovan the Dauntless'. Donovan the Dauntless was an explorer who was employed by an American millionaire to fetch incredible things from various corners of the earth. Sometimes it was diamonds the size of golf balls from the craters of volcanoes in Africa, sometimes it was petrified mammoths' tusks from the frozen forests of Siberia, sometimes it was buried Inca treasures from the lost cities of Peru. Donovan went

on a new journey every week, and he always made good. My favourite place for reading was the loft behind the yard. Except when Father was getting out fresh sacks of grain it was the quietest place in the house. There were huge piles of sacks to lie on, and a sort of plastery smell mixed up with the smell of sainfoin, and bunches of cobwebs in all the corners, and just over the place where I used to lie there was a hole in the ceiling and a lath sticking out of the plaster. I can feel the feeling of it now. A winter day, just warm enough to lie still. I'm lying on my belly with Chums open in front of me. A mouse runs up the side of a sack like a clockwork toy, then suddenly stops dead and watches me with his little eyes like tiny jet beads. I'm twelve years old, but I'm Donovan the Dauntless. Two thousand miles up the Amazon I've just pitched my tent, and the roots of the mysterious orchid that blooms once in a hundred years are safe in the tin box under my camp bed. In the forests all round Hopi-Hopi Indians, who paint their teeth scarlet and skin white men alive, are beating their war-drums. I'm watching the mouse and the mouse is watching me, and I can smell the dust and sainfoin and the cool plastery smell, and I'm up the Amazon, and it's bliss, pure bliss.

7

That's all, really.

I've tried to tell you something about the world before the war, the world I got a sniff of when I saw King Zog's name on the poster, and the chances are that I've told you nothing. Either you remember before the war and don't need to be told about it, or you don't remember, and it's no use telling you. So far I've only spoken about the things that happened to me before I was sixteen. Up to that time things had gone pretty well with the family. It was a bit before my sixteenth birthday that I began to get glimpses of what people call 'real life', meaning unpleasantness.

About three days after I'd seen the big carp at Binfield House, Father came in to tea looking very worried and even more grey and mealy than usual. He ate his way solemnly through his tea and didn't talk much. In those days he had a rather preoccupied way of eating, and his moustache used to work up and down with a sidelong movement, because he hadn't many back teeth left. I was just getting up from table when he called me back.

'Wait a minute, George, my boy. I got suthing to say to you. Sit down jest a minute. Mother, you heard what I got to say last night.'

Mother, behind the huge brown teapot, folded her hands in her lap and looked solemn. Father went on, speaking very seriously but rather spoiling the effect by trying to deal with a crumb that lodged somewhere in what was left of his back teeth:

'George, my boy, I got suthing to say to you. I been thinking it over, and it's about time you left school. 'Fraid you'll have to get to work now and start earning a bit to bring home to your mother. I wrote to Mr Wicksey last night and told him as I should have to take you away.'

Of course this was quite according to precedent — his writing to Mr Wicksey before telling me, I mean. Parents in those days, as a matter of course, always arranged everything over their children's heads.

Father went on to make some rather mumbling and worried explanations. He'd 'had bad times lately', things had 'been a bit

difficult', and the upshot was that Joe and I would have to start earning our living. At that time I didn't either know or greatly care whether the business was really in a bad way or not. I hadn't even enough commercial instinct to see the reason why things were 'difficult'. The fact was that Father had been hit by competition. Sarazins', the big retail seedsmen who had branches all over the home counties, had stuck a tentacle into Lower Binfield. Six months earlier they'd taken the lease of a shop in the market-place and dolled it up until what with bright green paint, gilt lettering, gardening tools painted red and green, and huge advertisements for sweet peas, it hit you in the eye at a hundred yards' distance. Sarazins', besides selling flower seeds, described themselves as 'universal poultry and livestock providers', and apart from wheat and oats and so forth they went in for patent poultry mixtures, bird-seed done up in fancy packets, dog-biscuits of all shapes and colours, medicines, embrocations, and conditioning powders, and branched off into such things as rat- traps, dog-chains, incubators, sanitary eggs, bird-nesting, bulbs, weed-killer, insecticide, and even, in some branches, into what they called a 'livestock department', meaning rabbits and day-old chicks. Father, with his dusty old shop and his refusal to stock new lines, couldn't compete with that kind of thing and didn't want to. The tradesmen with their van-horses, and such of the farmers as dealt with the retail seedsmen, fought shy of Sarazins', but in six months they'd gathered in the petty gentry of the neighbourhood, who in those days had carriages or dogcarts and therefore horses. This meant a big loss of trade for Father and the other corn merchant, Winkle. I didn't grasp any of this at the time. I had a boy's attitude towards it all. I'd never taken any interest in the business. I'd never or hardly ever served in the shop, and when, as occasionally happened, Father wanted me to run an errand or give a hand with something, such as hoisting sacks of grain up to the loft or down again, I'd always dodged it whenever possible. Boys in our class aren't such complete babies as public schoolboys, they know that work is work and sixpence is sixpence, but it seems natural for a boy to regard his father's business as a bore. Up till that time fishing-rods, bicycles, fizzy lemonade, and so forth had seemed to me a good deal more real than anything that happened in the grown-up world.

Father had already spoken to old Grimmett, the grocer, who wanted a smart lad and was willing to take me into the shop immediately. Meanwhile Father was going to get rid of the errand boy, and Joe was to come home and help with the shop till he got a regular job. Joe had left school some time back and had been more or less loafing ever since. Father had sometimes talked of 'getting him into' the accounts department at the brewery, and earlier had even had thoughts of making him into an auctioneer. Both were completely hopeless because Joe, at seventeen, wrote a hand like a ploughboy and couldn't repeat the multiplication table. At present he was supposed to be 'learning the trade' at a big bicycle shop on the outskirts of Walton. Tinkering with bicycles suited Joe, who, like most half-wits, had a slight mechanical turn, but he was quite incapable of working steadily and spent all his time loafing about in greasy overalls, smoking Woodbines, getting into fights, drinking (he's started that already), getting 'talked of' with one girl after another, and sticking Father for money. Father was worried, puzzled, and vaguely resentful. I can see him yet, with the meal on his bald head, and the bit of grey hair over his ears, and his spectacles and his grey moustache. He couldn't understand what was happening to him. For years his profits had gone up, slowly and steadily, ten pounds this year, twenty pounds that year, and now suddenly they'd gone down with a bump. He couldn't understand it. He'd inherited the business from his father, he'd done an honest trade, worked hard, sold sound goods, swindled nobody — and his profits were going down. He said a number of times, between sucking at his teeth to get the crumb out, that times were very bad, trade seemed very slack, he couldn't think what had come over people, it wasn't as if the horses didn't have to eat. Perhaps it was these here motors, he decided finally. 'Nasty smelly things!' Mother put in. She was a little worried, and knew that she ought to be more so. Once or twice while Father was talking there was a far-away look in her eyes and I could see her lips moving. She was trying to decide whether it should be a round of beef and carrots tomorrow or another leg of mutton. Except when there was something in her own line that needed foresight, such as buying linen or saucepans, she wasn't really capable of thinking beyond tomorrow's meals. The shop was giving trouble and

Father was worried — that was about as far as she saw into it. None of us had any grasp of what was happening. Father had had a bad year and lost money, but was he really frightened by the future? I don't think so. This was 1909, remember. He didn't know what was happening to him, he wasn't capable of foreseeing that these Sarazin people would systematically under-sell him, ruin him, and eat him up. How could he? Things hadn't happened like that when he was a young man. All he knew was that times were bad, trade was very 'slack', very 'slow' (he kept repeating these phrases), but probably things would 'look up presently'.

It would be nice if I could tell you that I was a great help to my father in his time of trouble, suddenly proved myself a man, and developed qualities which no one had suspected in me — and so on and so forth, like the stuff you used to read in the uplift novels of thirty years ago. Or alternatively I'd like to be able to record that I bitterly resented having to leave school, my eager young mind, yearning for knowledge and refinement, recoiled from the soulless mechanical job into which they were thrusting me — and so on and so forth, like the stuff you read in the uplift novels today. Both would be complete bunkum. The truth is that I was pleased and excited at the idea of going to work, especially when I grasped that Old Grimmett was going to pay me real wages, twelve shillings a week, of which I could keep four for myself. The big carp at Binfield House, which had filled my mind for three days past, faded right out of it. I'd no objection to leaving school a few terms early. It generally happened the same way with boys at our school. A boy was always 'going to' go to Reading University, or study to be an engineer, or 'go into business' in London, or run away to sea — and then suddenly, at two days' notice, he'd disappear from school, and a fortnight later you'd meet him on a bicycle, delivering vegetables. Within five minutes of Father telling me that I should have to leave school I was wondering about the new suit I should wear to go to work in. I instantly started demanding a 'grown-up suit', with a kind of coat that was fashionable at that time, a 'cutaway', I think it was called. Of course both Mother and Father were scandalized and said they'd 'never heard of such a thing'. For some reason that I've never fully fathomed, parents in those days always tried to prevent their

children wearing grown-up clothes as long as possible. In every family there was a stand-up fight before a boy had his first tall collars or a girl put her hair up.

So the conversation veered away from Father's business troubles and degenerated into a long, nagging kind of argument, with Father gradually getting angry and repeating over and over — dropping an aitch now and again, as he was apt to do when he got angry— 'Well, you can't 'ave it. Make up your mind to that — you can't 'ave it.' So I didn't have my 'cutaway', but went to work for the first time in a ready-made black suit and a broad collar in which I looked an overgrown lout. Any distress I felt over the whole business really arose from that. Joe was even more selfish about it. He was furious at having to leave the bicycle shop, and for the short time that he remained at home he merely loafed about, made a nuisance of himself and was no help to Father whatever.

I worked in old Grimmett's shop for nearly six years. Grimmett was a fine, upstanding, white-whiskered old chap, like a rather stouter version of Uncle Ezekiel, and like Uncle Ezekiel a good Liberal. But he was less of a firebrand and more respected in the town. He'd trimmed his sails during the Boer War, he was a bitter enemy of trade unions and once sacked an assistant for possessing a photograph of Keir Hardie, and he was 'chapel' — in fact he was a big noise, literally, in the Baptist Chapel, known locally as the Tin Tab — whereas my family were 'church' and Uncle Ezekiel was an infidel at that. Old Grimmett was a town councillor and an official at the local Liberal Party. With his white whiskers, his canting talk about liberty of conscience and the Grand Old Man, his thumping bank balance, and the extempore prayers you could sometimes hear him letting loose when you passed the Tin Tab, he was a little like a legendary Nonconformist grocer in the story — you've heard it, I expect:

'James!'

'Yessir?'

'Have you sanded the sugar?'

'Yessir!'

'Have you watered the treacle?'

'Yessir!'

‘Then come up to prayers.’

God knows how often I heard that story whispered in the shop. We did actually start the day with a prayer before we put up the shutters. Not that old Grimmett sanded the sugar. He knew that that doesn’t pay. But he was a sharp man in business, he did all the high-class grocery trade of Lower Binfield and the country round, and he had three assistants in the shop besides the errand boy, the van-man, and his own daughter (he was a widower) who acted as cashier. I was the errand boy for my first six months. Then one of the assistants left to ‘set up’ in Reading and I moved into the shop and wore my first white apron. I learned to tie a parcel, pack a bag of currants, grind coffee, work the bacon-slicer, carve ham, put an edge on a knife, sweep the floor, dust eggs without breaking them, pass off an inferior article as a good one, clean a window, judge a pound of cheese by eye, open a packing-case, whack a slab of butter into shape, and — what was a good deal the hardest — remember where the stock was kept. I haven’t such detailed memories of grocering as I have of fishing, but I remember a good deal. To this day I know the trick of snapping a bit of string in my fingers. If you put me in front of a bacon-slicer I could work it better than I can a typewriter. I could spin you some pretty fair technicalities about grades of China tea and what margarine is made of and the average weight of eggs and the price of paper bags per thousand.

Well, for more than five years that was me — an alert young chap with a round, pink, snubby kind of face and butter-coloured hair (no longer cut short but carefully greased and slicked back in what people used to call a ‘smarm’), hustling about behind the counter in a white apron with a pencil behind my ear, tying up bags of coffee like lightning and jockeying the customer along with ‘Yes, ma’am! Certainly, ma’am! AND the next order, ma’am!’ in a voice with just a trace of a Cockney accent. Old Grimmett worked us pretty hard, it was an eleven-hour day except on Thursdays and Sundays, and Christmas week was a nightmare. Yet it’s a good time to look back on. Don’t think that I had no ambitions. I knew I wasn’t going to remain a grocer’s assistant for ever, I was merely ‘learning the trade’. Some time, somehow or other, there’d be enough money for me to ‘set up’ on my own. That was how people felt in those days. This

was before the war, remember, and before the slumps and before the dole. The world was big enough for everyone. Anyone could 'set up in trade', there was always room for another shop. And time was slipping on. 1909, 1910, 1911. King Edward died and the papers came out with a black border round the edge. Two cinemas opened in Walton. The cars got commoner on the roads and cross-country motor-buses began to run. An aeroplane — a flimsy, rickety-looking thing with a chap sitting in the middle on a kind of chair — flew over Lower Binfield and the whole town rushed out of their houses to yell at it. People began to say rather vaguely that this here German Emperor was getting too big for his boots and 'it' (meaning war with Germany) was 'coming some time'. My wages went gradually up, until finally, just before the war, they were twenty-eight shillings a week. I paid Mother ten shillings a week for my board, and later, when times got worse, fifteen shillings, and even that left me feeling richer than I've felt since. I grew another inch, my moustache began to sprout, I wore button boots and collars three inches high. In church on Sundays, in my natty dark grey suit, with my bowler hat and black dogskin gloves on the pew beside me, I looked the perfect gent, so that Mother could hardly contain her pride in me. In between work and 'walking out' on Thursdays, and thinking about clothes and girls, I had fits of ambition and saw myself developing into a Big Business Man like Lever or William Whiteley. Between sixteen and eighteen I made serious efforts to 'improve my mind' and train myself for a business career. I cured myself of dropping aitches and got rid of most of my Cockney accent. (In the Thames Valley the country accents were going out. Except for the farm lads, nearly everyone who was born later than 1890 talked Cockney.) I did a correspondence course with Littleburns' Commercial Academy, learnt bookkeeping and business English, read solemnly through a book of frightful blah called The Art of Salesmanship, and improved my arithmetic and even my handwriting. When I was as old as seventeen I've sat up late at night with my tongue hanging out of my mouth, practising copperplate by the little oil-lamp on the bedroom table. At times I read enormously, generally crime and adventure stories, and sometimes paper-covered books which were furtively passed round by the chaps at the shop and described as 'hot'. (They

were translations of Maupassant and Paul de Kock.) But when I was eighteen I suddenly turned highbrow, got a ticket for the County Library, and began to stodge through books by Marie Corelli and Hall Caine and Anthony Hope. It was at about that time that I joined the Lower Binfield Reading Circle, which was run by the vicar and met one evening a week all through the winter for what was called 'literary discussion'. Under pressure from the vicar I read bits of Sesame and Lilies and even had a go at Browning.

And time was slipping away. 1910, 1911, 1912. And Father's business was going down — not slumping suddenly into the gutter, but it was going down. Neither Father nor Mother was ever quite the same after Joe ran away from home. This happened not long after I went to work at Grimmett's.

Joe, at eighteen, had grown into an ugly ruffian. He was a hefty chap, much bigger than the rest of the family, with tremendous shoulders, a big head, and a sulky, lowering kind of face on which he already had a respectable moustache. When he wasn't in the tap-room of the George he was loafing in the shop doorway, with his hands dug deep into his pockets, scowling at the people who passed, except when they happened to be girls, as though he'd like to knock them down. If anyone came into the shop he'd move aside just enough to let them pass, and, without taking his hands out of his pockets, yell over his shoulders 'Da-ad! Shop!' This was as near as he ever got to helping. Father and Mother said despairingly that they 'didn't know what to do with him', and he was costing the devil of a lot with his drinking and endless smoking. Late one night he walked out of the house and was never heard of again. He'd prised open the till and taken all the money that was in it, luckily not much, about eight pounds. That was enough to get him a steerage passage to America. He'd always wanted to go to America, and I think he probably did so, though we never knew for certain. It made a bit of a scandal in the town. The official theory was that Joe had bolted because he'd put a girl in the family way. There was a girl named Sally Chivers who lived in the same street as the Simmonses and was going to have a baby, and Joe had certainly been with her, but so had about a dozen others, and nobody knew whose baby it was. Mother and Father accepted the baby theory and even, in private, used it to

excuse their ‘poor boy’ for stealing the eight pounds and running away. They weren’t capable of grasping that Joe had cleared out because he couldn’t stand a decent respectable life in a little country town and wanted a life of loafing, fights, and women. We never heard of him again. Perhaps he went utterly to the bad, perhaps he was killed in the war, perhaps he merely didn’t bother to write. Luckily the baby was born dead, so there were no complications. As for the fact that Joe had stolen the eight pounds, Mother and Father managed to keep it a secret till they died. In their eyes it was a much worse disgrace than Sally Chivers’s baby.

The trouble over Joe aged Father a great deal. To lose Joe was merely to cut a loss, but it hurt him and made him ashamed. From that time forward his moustache was much greyer and he seemed to have grown a lot smaller. Perhaps my memory of him as a little grey man, with a round, lined, anxious face and dusty spectacles, really dates from that time. By slow degrees he was getting more and more involved in money worries and less and less interested in other things. He talked less about politics and the Sunday papers, and more about the badness of trade. Mother seemed to have shrunk a little, too. In my childhood I’d known her as something vast and overflowing, with her yellow hair and her beaming face and her enormous bosom, a sort of great opulent creature like the figure-head of a battleship. Now she’d got smaller and more anxious and older than her years. She was less lordly in the kitchen, went in more for neck of mutton, worried over the price of coal, and began to use margarine, a thing which in the old days she’d never have allowed into the house. After Joe had gone Father had to hire an errand boy again, but from then on he employed very young boys whom he only kept for a year or two and who couldn’t lift heavy weights. I sometimes lent him a hand when I was at home. I was too selfish to do it regularly. I can still see him working his way slowly across the yard, bent double and almost hidden under an enormous sack, like a snail under its shell. The huge, monstrous sack, weighing a hundred and fifty pounds, I suppose, pressing his neck and shoulders almost to the ground, and the anxious, spectacled face looking up from underneath it. In 1911 he ruptured himself and had to spend weeks in hospital and hire a temporary manager for the shop, which ate

another hole in his capital. A small shopkeeper going down the hill is a dreadful thing to watch, but it isn't sudden and obvious like the fate of a working man who gets the sack and promptly finds himself on the dole. It's just a gradual chipping away of trade, with little ups and downs, a few shillings to the bad here, a few sixpences to the good there. Somebody who's dealt with you for years suddenly deserts and goes to Sarazins'. Somebody else buys a dozen hens and gives you a weekly order for corn. You can still keep going. You're still 'your own master', always a little more worried and a little shabbier, with your capital shrinking all the time. You can go on like that for years, for a lifetime if you're lucky. Uncle Ezekiel died in 1911, leaving 120 pounds which must have made a lot of difference to Father. It wasn't till 1913 that he had to mortgage his life-insurance policy. That I didn't hear about at the time, or I'd have understood what it meant. As it was I don't think I ever got further than realizing that Father 'wasn't doing well', trade was 'slack', there'd be a bit longer to wait before I had the money to 'set up'. Like Father himself, I looked on the shop as something permanent, and I was a bit inclined to be angry with him for not managing things better. I wasn't capable of seeing, and neither was he nor anyone else, that he was being slowly ruined, that his business would never pick up again and if he lived to be seventy he'd certainly end in the workhouse. Many a time I've passed Sarazins' shop in the market-place and merely thought how much I preferred their slick window-front to Father's dusty old shop, with the 'S. Bowling' which you could hardly read, the chipped white lettering, and the faded packets of bird-seed. It didn't occur to me that Sarazins' were tapeworms who were eating him alive. Sometimes I used to repeat to him some of the stuff I'd been reading in my correspondence-course textbooks, about salesmanship and modern methods. He never paid much attention. He'd inherited an old-established business, he'd always worked hard, done a fair trade, and supplied sound goods, and things would look up presently. It's a fact that very few shopkeepers in those days actually ended in the workhouse. With any luck you died with a few pounds still your own. It was a race between death and bankruptcy, and, thank God, death got Father first, and Mother too.

1911, 1912, 1913. I tell you it was a good time to be alive. It was

late in 1912, through the vicar's Reading Circle, that I first met Elsie Waters. Till then, although, like all the rest of the boys in the town, I'd gone out looking for girls and occasionally managed to connect up with this girl or that and 'walk out' a few Sunday afternoons, I'd never really had a girl of my own. It's a queer business, that chasing of girls when you're about sixteen. At some recognized part of the town the boys stroll up and down in pairs, watching the girls, and the girls stroll up and down in pairs, pretending not to notice the boys, and presently some kind of contact is established and instead of twos they're trailing along in fours, all four utterly speechless. The chief feature of those walks — and it was worse the second time, when you went out with the girl alone — was the ghastly failure to make any kind of conversation. But Elsie Waters seemed different. The truth was that I was growing up.

I don't want to tell the story of myself and Elsie Waters, even if there was any story to tell. It's merely that she's part of the picture, part of 'before the war'. Before the war it was always summer — a delusion, as I've remarked before, but that's how I remember it. the white dusty road stretching out between the chestnut trees, the smell of night-stocks, the green pools under the willows, the splash of Burford Weir — that's what I see when I shut my eyes and think of 'before the war', and towards the end Elsie Waters is part of it.

I don't know whether Elsie would be considered pretty now. She was then. She was tall for a girl, about as tall as I am, with pale gold, heavy kind of hair which she wore somehow plaited and coiled round her head, and a delicate, curiously gentle face. She was one of those girls that always look their best in black, especially the very plain black dresses they made them wear in the drapery — she worked at Lilywhite's, the drapers, though she came originally from London. I suppose she would have been two years older than I was.

I'm grateful to Elsie, because she was the first person who taught me to care about a woman. I don't mean women in general, I mean an individual woman. I'd met her at the Reading Circle and hardly noticed her, and then one day I went into Lilywhite's during working hours, a thing I wouldn't normally have been able to do, but as it happened we'd run out of butter muslin and old Grimmett sent me to buy some. You know the atmosphere of a draper's shop. It's

something peculiarly feminine. There's a hushed feeling, a subdued light, a cool smell of cloth, and a faint whirring from the wooden balls of change rolling to and fro. Elsie was leaning against the counter, cutting off a length of cloth with the big scissors. There was something about her black dress and the curve of her breast against the counter — I can't describe it, something curiously soft, curiously feminine. As soon as you saw her you knew that you could take her in your arms and do what you wanted with her. She was really deeply feminine, very gentle, very submissive, the kind that would always do what a man told her, though she wasn't either small or weak. She wasn't even stupid, only rather silent and, at times, dreadfully refined. But in those days I was rather refined myself.

We were living together for about a year. Of course in a town like Lower Binfield you could only live together in a figurative sense. Officially we were 'walking out', which was a recognized custom and not quite the same as being engaged. There was a road that branched off from the road to Upper Binfield and ran along under the edge of the hills. There was a long stretch of it, nearly a mile, that was quite straight and fringed with enormous horse- chestnut trees, and on the grass at the side there was a footpath under the boughs that was known as Lovers' Lane. We used to go there on the May evenings, when the chestnuts were in blossom. Then the short nights came on, and it was light for hours after we'd left the shop. You know the feeling of a June evening. The kind of blue twilight that goes on and on, and the air brushing against your face like silk. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons we went over Chamford Hill and down to the water-meadows along the Thames. 1913! My God! 1913! The stillness, the green water, the rushing of the weir! It'll never come again. I don't mean that 1913 will never come again. I mean the feeling inside you, the feeling of not being in a hurry and not being frightened, the feeling you've either had and don't need to be told about, or haven't had and won't ever have the chance to learn.

It wasn't till late summer that we began what's called living together. I'd been too shy and clumsy to begin, and too ignorant to realize that there'd been others before me. One Sunday afternoon we went into the beech woods round Upper Binfield. Up there you could

always be alone. I wanted her very badly, and I knew quite well that she was only waiting for me to begin. Something, I don't know what, put it into my head to go into the grounds of Binfield House. Old Hodges, who was past seventy and getting very crusty, was capable of turning us out, but he'd probably be asleep on a Sunday afternoon. We slipped through a gap in the fence and down the footpath between the beeches to the big pool. It was four years or more since I'd been that way. Nothing had changed. Still the utter solitude, the hidden feeling with the great trees all round you, the old boat-house rotting among the bulrushes. We lay down in the little grass hollow beside the wild peppermint, and we were as much alone as if we'd been in Central Africa. I'd kissed her God knows how many times, and then I'd got up and was wandering about again. I wanted her very badly, and wanted to take the plunge, only I was half-frightened. And curiously enough there was another thought in my mind at the same time. It suddenly struck me that for years I'd meant to come back here and had never come. Now I was so near, it seemed a pity not to go down to the other pool and have a look at the big carp. I felt I'd kick myself afterwards if I missed the chance, in fact I couldn't think why I hadn't been back before. The carp were stored away in my mind, nobody knew about them except me, I was going to catch them some time. Practically they were MY carp. I actually started wandering along the bank in that direction, and then when I'd gone about ten yards I turned back. It meant crashing your way through a kind of jungle of brambles and rotten brushwood, and I was dressed up in my Sunday best. Dark-grey suit, bowler hat, button boots, and a collar that almost cut my ears off. That was how people dressed for Sunday afternoon walks in those days. And I wanted Elsie very badly. I went back and stood over her for a moment. She was lying on the grass with her arm over her face, and she didn't stir when she heard me come. In her black dress she looked — I don't know how, kind of soft, kind of yielding, as though her body was a kind of malleable stuff that you could do what you liked with. She was mine and I could have her, this minute if I wanted to. Suddenly I stopped being frightened, I chucked my hat on to the grass (it bounced, I remember), knelt down, and took hold of her. I can smell the wild peppermint yet. It was my first time, but it wasn't hers, and

we didn't make such a mess of it as you might expect. So that was that. The big carp faded out of my mind again, and in fact for years afterwards I hardly thought about them.

1913. 1914. The spring of 1914. First the blackthorn, then the hawthorn, then the chestnuts in blossom. Sunday afternoons along the towpath, and the wind rippling the beds of rushes so that they swayed all together in great thick masses and looked somehow like a woman's hair. The endless June evenings, the path under the chestnut trees, an owl hooting somewhere and Elsie's body against me. It was a hot July that year. How we sweated in the shop, and how the cheese and the ground coffee smelt! And then the cool of the evening outside, the smell of night-stocks and pipe-tobacco in the lane behind the allotments, the soft dust underfoot, and the nightjars hawking after the cockchafers.

Christ! What's the use of saying that one oughtn't to be sentimental about 'before the war'? I AM sentimental about it. So are you if you remember it. It's quite true that if you look back on any special period of time you tend to remember the pleasant bits. That's true even of the war. But it's also true that people then had something that we haven't got now.

What? It was simply that they didn't think of the future as something to be terrified of. It isn't that life was softer then than now. Actually it was harsher. People on the whole worked harder, lived less comfortably, and died more painfully. The farm hands worked frightful hours for fourteen shillings a week and ended up as worn-out cripples with a five-shilling old-age pension and an occasional half-crown from the parish. And what was called 'respectable' poverty was even worse. When little Watson, a small draper at the other end of the High Street, 'failed' after years of struggling, his personal assets were L2 9s. 6d., and he died almost immediately of what was called 'gastric trouble', but the doctor let it out that it was starvation. Yet he'd clung to his frock coat to the last. Old Crimp, the watchmaker's assistant, a skilled workman who'd been at the job, man and boy, for fifty years, got cataract and had to go into the workhouse. His grandchildren were howling in the street when they took him away. His wife went out charing, and by desperate efforts managed to send him a shilling a week for pocket-

money. You saw ghastly things happening sometimes. Small businesses sliding down the hill, solid tradesmen turning gradually into broken-down bankrupts, people dying by inches of cancer and liver disease, drunken husbands signing the pledge every Monday and breaking it every Saturday, girls ruined for life by an illegitimate baby. The houses had no bathrooms, you broke the ice in your basin on winter mornings, the back streets stank like the devil in hot weather, and the churchyard was bang in the middle of the town, so that you never went a day without remembering how you'd got to end. And yet what was it that people had in those days? A feeling of security, even when they weren't secure. More exactly, it was a feeling of continuity. All of them knew they'd got to die, and I suppose a few of them knew they were going to go bankrupt, but what they didn't know was that the order of things could change. Whatever might happen to themselves, things would go on as they'd known them. I don't believe it made very much difference that what's called religious belief was still prevalent in those days. It's true that nearly everyone went to church, at any rate in the country — Elsie and I still went to church as a matter of course, even when we were living in what the vicar would have called sin — and if you asked people whether they believed in a life after death they generally answered that they did. But I've never met anyone who gave me the impression of really believing in a future life. I think that, at most, people believe in that kind of thing in the same way as kids believe in Father Christmas. But it's precisely in a settled period, a period when civilization seems to stand on its four legs like an elephant, that such things as a future life don't matter. It's easy enough to die if the things you care about are going to survive. You've had your life, you're getting tired, it's time to go underground — that's how people used to see it. Individually they were finished, but their way of life would continue. Their good and evil would remain good and evil. They didn't feel the ground they stood on shifting under their feet.

Father was failing, and he didn't know it. It was merely that times were very bad, trade seemed to dwindle and dwindle, his bills were harder and harder to meet. Thank God, he never even knew that he was ruined, never actually went bankrupt, because he died very

suddenly (it was influenza that turned into pneumonia) at the beginning of 1915. To the end he believed that with thrift, hard work, and fair dealing a man can't go wrong. There must have been plenty of small shopkeepers who carried that belief not merely on to bankrupt deathbeds but even into the workhouse. Even Lovegrove the saddler, with cars and motor-vans staring him in the face, didn't realize that he was as out of date as the rhinoceros. And Mother too — Mother never lived to know that the life she'd been brought up to, the life of a decent God-fearing shopkeeper's daughter and a decent God-fearing shopkeeper's wife in the reign of good Queen Vic, was finished for ever. Times were difficult and trade was bad, Father was worried and this and that was 'aggravating', but you carried on much the same as usual. The old English order of life couldn't change. For ever and ever decent God-fearing women would cook Yorkshire pudding and apple dumplings on enormous coal ranges, wear woollen underclothes and sleep on feathers, make plum jam in July and pickles in October, and read Hilda's Home Companion in the afternoons, with the flies buzzing round, in a sort of cosy little underworld of stewed tea, bad legs, and happy endings. I don't say that either Father or Mother was quite the same to the end. They were a bit shaken, and sometimes a little dispirited. But at least they never lived to know that everything they'd believed in was just so much junk. They lived at the end of an epoch, when everything was dissolving into a sort of ghastly flux, and they didn't know it. They thought it was eternity. You couldn't blame them. That was what it felt like.

Then came the end of July, and even Lower Binfield grasped that things were happening. For days there was tremendous vague excitement and endless leading articles in the papers, which Father actually brought in from the shop to read aloud to Mother. And then suddenly the posters everywhere:

GERMAN ULTIMATUM. FRANCE MOBILIZING

For several days (four days, wasn't it? I forget the exact dates) there was a strange stifled feeling, a kind of waiting hush, like the moment before a thunderstorm breaks, as though the whole of England was silent and listening. It was very hot, I remember. In the shop it was as though we couldn't work, though already everyone in

the neighbourhood who had five bob to spare was rushing in to buy quantities of tinned stuff and flour and oatmeal. It was as if we were too feverish to work, we only sweated and waited. In the evenings people went down to the railway station and fought like devils over the evening papers which arrived on the London train. And then one afternoon a boy came rushing down the High Street with an armful of papers, and people were coming into their doorways to shout across the street. Everyone was shouting 'We've come in! We've come in!' The boy grabbed a poster from his bundle and stuck it on the shop-front opposite:

ENGLAND DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY

We rushed out on to the pavement, all three assistants, and cheered. Everybody was cheering. Yes, cheering. But old Grimmett, though he'd already done pretty well out of the war- scare, still held on to a little of his Liberal principles, 'didn't hold' with the war, and said it would be a bad business.

Two months later I was in the Army. Seven months later I was in France.

8

I wasn't wounded till late in 1916.

We'd just come out of the trenches and were marching over a bit of road a mile or so back which was supposed to be safe, but which the Germans must have got the range of some time earlier. Suddenly they started putting a few shells over — it was heavy H.E. stuff, and they were only firing about one a minute. There was the usual zwee-e-e-e! and then BOOM! in a field somewhere over to the right. I think it was the third shell that got me. I knew as soon as I heard it coming that it had my name written on it. They say you always know. It didn't say what an ordinary shell says. It said 'I'm after you, you b — , YOU, you b — , YOU!' — all this in the space of about three seconds. And the last you was the explosion.

I felt as if an enormous hand made of air were sweeping me along. And presently I came down with a sort of burst, shattered feeling among a lot of old tin cans, splinters of wood, rusty barbed wire, turds, empty cartridge cases, and other muck in the ditch at the side of the road. When they'd hauled me out and cleaned some of the dirt off me they found that I wasn't very badly hurt. It was only a lot of small shell-splinters that had lodged in one side of my bottom and down the backs of my legs. But luckily I'd broken a rib in falling, which made it just bad enough to get me back to England. I spent that winter in a hospital camp on the downs near Eastbourne.

Do you remember those war-time hospital camps? The long rows of wooden huts like chicken-houses stuck right on top of those beastly icy downs — the 'south coast', people used to call it, which made me wonder what the north coast could be like — where the wind seems to blow at you from all directions at once. And the droves of blokes in their pale-blue flannel suits and red ties, wandering up and down looking for a place out of the wind and never finding one. Sometimes the kids from the slap-up boys' schools in Eastbourne used to be led round in crocodiles to hand out fags and peppermint creams to the 'wounded Tommies', as they called us. A pink-faced kid of about eight would walk up to a knot of wounded men sitting on the grass, split open a packet of Woodbines

and solemnly hand one fag to each man, just like feeding the monkeys at the zoo. Anyone who was strong enough used to wander for miles over the downs in hopes of meeting girls. There were never enough girls to go round. In the valley below the camp there was a bit of a spinney, and long before dusk you'd see a couple glued against every tree, and sometimes, if it happened to be a thick tree, one on each side of it. My chief memory of that time is sitting against a gorse-bush in the freezing wind, with my fingers so cold I couldn't bend them and the taste of a peppermint cream in my mouth. That's a typical soldier's memory. But I was getting away from a Tommy's life, all the same. The C.O. had sent my name in for a commission a little before I was wounded. By this time they were desperate for officers and anyone who wasn't actually illiterate could have a commission if he wanted one. I went straight from the hospital to an officers' training camp near Colchester.

It's very strange, the things the war did to people. It was less than three years since I'd been a spry young shop-assistant, bending over the counter in my white apron with 'Yes, madam! Certainly, madam! AND the next order, madam?' with a grocer's life ahead of me and about as much notion of becoming an Army officer as of getting a knighthood. And here I was already, swaggering about in a gorblimey hat and a yellow collar and more or less keeping my end up among a crowd of other temporary gents and some who weren't even temporary. And — this is really the point — not feeling it in any way strange. Nothing seemed strange in those days.

It was like an enormous machine that had got hold of you. You'd no sense of acting of your own free will, and at the same time no notion of trying to resist. If people didn't have some such feeling as that, no war could last three months. The armies would just pack up and go home. Why had I joined the Army? Or the million other idiots who joined up before conscription came in? Partly for a lark and partly because of England my England and Britons never never and all that stuff. But how long did that last? Most of the chaps I knew had forgotten all about it long before they got as far as France. The men in the trenches weren't patriotic, didn't hate the Kaiser, didn't care a damn about gallant little Belgium and the Germans raping nuns on tables (it was always 'on tables', as though that made it

worse) in the streets of Brussels. On the other hand it didn't occur to them to try and escape. The machine had got hold of you and it could do what it liked with you. It lifted you up and dumped you down among places and things you'd never dreamed of, and if it had dumped you down on the surface of the moon it wouldn't have seemed particularly strange. The day I joined the Army the old life was finished. It was as though it didn't concern me any longer. I wonder if you'd believe that from that day forward I only once went back to Lower Binfield, and that was to Mother's funeral? It sounds incredible now, but it seemed natural enough at the time. Partly, I admit, it was on account of Elsie, whom, of course, I'd stopped writing to after two or three months. No doubt she'd picked up with someone else, but I didn't want to meet her. Otherwise, perhaps, when I got a bit of leave I'd have gone down and seen Mother, who'd had fits when I joined the Army but would have been proud of a son in uniform.

Father died in 1915. I was in France at the time. I don't exaggerate when I say that Father's death hurts me more now than it did then. At the time it was just a bit of bad news which I accepted almost without interest, in the sort of empty-headed apathetic way in which one accepted everything in the trenches. I remember crawling into the doorway of the dugout to get enough light to read the letter, and I remember Mother's tear-stains on the letter, and the aching feeling in my knees and the smell of mud. Father's life-insurance policy had been mortgaged for most of its value, but there was a little money in the bank and Sarazins' were going to buy up the stock and even pay some tiny amount for the good-will. Anyway, Mother had a bit over two hundred pounds, besides the furniture. She went for the time being to lodge with her cousin, the wife of a small-holder who was doing pretty well out of the war, near Doxley, a few miles the other side of Walton. It was only 'for the time being'. There was a temporary feeling about everything. In the old days, which as a matter of fact were barely a year old, the whole thing would have been an appalling disaster. With Father dead, the shop sold and Mother with two hundred pounds in the world, you'd have seen stretching out in front of you a kind of fifteen-act tragedy, the last act being a pauper's funeral. But now the war and the feeling of not

being one's own master overshadowed everything. People hardly thought in terms of things like bankruptcy and the workhouse any longer. This was the case even with Mother, who, God knows, had only very dim notions about the war. Besides, she was already dying, though neither of us knew it.

She came across to see me in the hospital at Eastbourne. It was over two years since I'd seen her, and her appearance gave me a bit of a shock. She seemed to have faded and somehow to have shrunken. Partly it was because by this time I was grown-up, I'd travelled, and everything looked smaller to me, but there was no question that she'd got thinner, and also yellower. She talked in the old rambling way about Aunt Martha (that was the cousin she was staying with), and the changes in Lower Binfield since the war, and all the boys who'd 'gone' (meaning joined the Army), and her indigestion which was 'aggravating', and poor Father's tombstone and what a lovely corpse he made. It was the old talk, the talk I'd listened to for years, and yet somehow it was like a ghost talking. It didn't concern me any longer. I'd known her as a great splendid protecting kind of creature, a bit like a ship's figure-head and a bit like a broody hen, and after all she was only a little old woman in a black dress. Everything was changing and fading. That was the last time I saw her alive. I got the wire saying she was seriously ill when I was at the training school at Colchester, and put in for a week's urgent leave immediately. But it was too late. She was dead by the time I got to Doxley. What she and everyone else had imagined to be indigestion was some kind of internal growth, and a sudden chill on the stomach put the final touch. The doctor tried to cheer me up by telling me that the growth was 'benevolent', which struck me as a queer thing to call it, seeing that it had killed her.

Well, we buried her next to Father, and that was my last glimpse of Lower Binfield. It had changed a lot, even in three years. Some of the shops were shut, some had different names over them. Nearly all the men I'd known as boys were gone, and some of them were dead. Sid Lovegrove was dead, killed on the Somme. Ginger Watson, the farm lad who'd belonged to the Black Hand years ago, the one who used to catch rabbits alive, was dead in Egypt. One of the chaps who'd worked with me at Grimmett's had lost both legs. Old

Lovegrove had shut up his shop and was living in a cottage near Walton on a tiny annuity. Old Grimmett, on the other hand, was doing well out of the war and had turned patriotic and was a member of the local board which tried conscientious objectors. The thing which more than anything else gave the town an empty, forlorn kind of look was that there were practically no horses left. Every horse worth taking had been commandeered long ago. The station fly still existed, but the brute that pulled it wouldn't have been able to stand up if it hadn't been for the shafts. For the hour or so that I was there before the funeral I wandered round the town, saying how d'you do to people and showing off my uniform. Luckily I didn't run into Elsie. I saw all the changes, and yet it was as though I didn't see them. My mind was on other things, chiefly the pleasure of being seen in my second-loot's uniform, with my black armlet (a thing which looks rather smart on khaki) and my new whipcord breeches. I distinctly remember that I was still thinking about those whipcord breeches when we stood at the graveside. And then they chucked some earth on to the coffin and I suddenly realized what it means for your mother to be lying with seven feet of earth on top of her, and something kind of twitched behind my eyes and nose, but even then the whipcord breeches weren't altogether out of my mind.

Don't think I didn't feel for Mother's death. I did. I wasn't in the trenches any longer, I could feel sorry for a death. But the thing I didn't care a damn about, didn't even grasp to be happening, was the passing-away of the old life I'd known. After the funeral, Aunt Martha, who was rather proud of having a 'real officer' for a nephew and would have made a splash of the funeral if I'd let her, went back to Doxley on the bus and I took the fly down to the station, to get the train to London and then to Colchester. We drove past the shop. No one had taken it since Father died. It was shut up and the window-pane was black with dust, and they'd burned the 'S. Bowling' off the signboard with a plumber's blowflame. Well, there was the house where I'd been a child and a boy and a young man, where I'd crawled about the kitchen floor and smelt the sainfoin and read 'Donovan the Dauntless', where I'd done my homework for the Grammar School, mixed bread paste, mended bicycle punctures, and tried on my first high collar. It had been as permanent to me as the

Pyramids, and now it would be just an accident if I ever set foot in it again. Father, Mother, Joe, the errand boys, old Nailer the terrier, Spot, the one that came after Nailer, Jackie the bullfinch, the cats, the mice in the loft — all gone, nothing left but dust. And I didn't care a damn. I was sorry Mother was dead, I was even sorry Father was dead, but all the time my mind was on other things. I was a bit proud of being seen riding in a cab, a thing I hadn't yet got used to, and I was thinking of the sit of my new whipcord breeches, and my nice smooth officer's putties, so different from the gritty stuff the Tommies had to wear, and of the other chaps at Colchester and the sixty quid Mother had left and the beanos we'd have with it. Also I was thanking God that I hadn't happened to run into Elsie.

The war did extraordinary things to people. And what was more extraordinary than the way it killed people was the way it sometimes didn't kill them. It was like a great flood rushing you along to death, and suddenly it would shoot you up some backwater where you'd find yourself doing incredible and pointless things and drawing extra pay for them. There were labour battalions making roads across the desert that didn't lead anywhere, there were chaps marooned on oceanic islands to look out for German cruisers which had been sunk years earlier, there were Ministries of this and that with armies of clerks and typists which went on existing years after their function had ended, by a kind of inertia. People were shoved into meaningless jobs and then forgotten by the authorities for years on end. This was what happened to myself, or very likely I wouldn't be here. The whole sequence of events is rather interesting.

A little while after I was gazetted there was a call for officers of the A.S.C. As soon as the O.C. of the training camp heard that I knew something about the grocery trade (I didn't let on that I'd actually been behind the counter) he told me to send my name in. That went through all right, and I was just about to leave for another training-school for A.S.C. officers somewhere in the Midlands when there was a demand for a young officer, with knowledge of the grocery trade, to act as some kind of secretary to Sir Joseph Cheam, who was a big noise in the A.S.C. God knows why they picked me out, but at any rate they did so. I've since thought that they probably mixed my name up with somebody else's. Three days later I was

saluting in Sir Joseph's office. He was a lean, upright, rather handsome old boy with grizzled hair and a grave-looking nose which immediately impressed me. He looked the perfect professional soldier, the K.C.M.G., D.S.O. with bar type, and might have been twin brother to the chap in the De Reszke advert, though in private life he was chairman of one of the big chain groceries and famous all over the world for something called the Cheam Wage-Cut System. He stopped writing as I came in and looked me over.

'You a gentleman?'

'No, sir.'

'Good. Then perhaps we'll get some work done.'

In about three minutes he'd wormed out of me that I had no secretarial experience, didn't know shorthand, couldn't use a typewriter, and had worked in a grocery at twenty-eight shillings a week. However, he said that I'd do, there were too many gentlemen in this damned Army and he'd been looking for somebody who could count beyond ten. I liked him and looked forward to working for him, but just at this moment the mysterious powers that seemed to be running the war drove us apart again. Something called the West Coast Defence Force was being formed, or rather was being talked about, and there was some vague idea of establishing dumps of rations and other stores at various points along the coast. Sir Joseph was supposed to be responsible for the dumps in the south-west corner of England. The day after I joined his office he sent me down to check over the stores at a place called Twelve Mile Dump, on the North Cornish Coast. Or rather my job was to find out whether any stores existed. Nobody seemed certain about this. I'd just got there and discovered that the stores consisted of eleven tins of bully beef when a wire arrived from the War Office telling me to take charge of the stores at Twelve Mile Dump and remain there till further notice. I wired back 'No stores at Twelve Mile Dump.' Too late. Next day came the official letter informing me that I was O.C. Twelve Mile Dump. And that's really the end of the story. I remained O.C. Twelve Mile Dump for the rest of the war.

God knows what it was all about. It's no use asking me what the West Coast Defence Force was or what it was supposed to do. Even at that time nobody pretended to know. In any case it didn't exist. It

was just a scheme that had floated through somebody's mind — following on some vague rumour of a German invasion via Ireland, I suppose — and the food dumps which were supposed to exist all along the coast were also imaginary. The whole thing had existed for about three days, like a sort of bubble, and then had been forgotten, and I'd been forgotten with it. My eleven tins of bully beef had been left behind by some officers who had been there earlier on some other mysterious mission. They'd also left behind a very deaf old man called Private Lidgebird. What Lidgebird was supposed to be doing there I never discovered. I wonder whether you'll believe that I remained guarding those eleven tins of bully beef from half-way through 1917 to the beginning of 1919? Probably you won't, but it's the truth. And at the time even that didn't seem particularly strange. By 1918 one had simply got out of the habit of expecting things to happen in a reasonable manner.

Once a month they sent me an enormous official form calling upon me to state the number and condition of pick-axes, entrenching tools, coils of barbed wire, blankets, waterproof groundsheets, first-aid outfits, sheets of corrugated iron, and tins of plum and apple jam under my care. I just entered 'nil' against everything and sent the form back. Nothing ever happened. Up in London someone was quietly filing the forms, and sending out more forms, and filing those, and so on. It was the way things were happening. The mysterious higher-ups who were running the war had forgotten my existence. I didn't jog their memory. I was up a backwater that didn't lead anywhere, and after two years in France I wasn't so burning with patriotism that I wanted to get out of it.

It was a lonely part of the coast where you never saw a soul except a few yokels who'd barely heard there was a war on. A quarter of a mile away, down a little hill, the sea boomed and surged over enormous flats of sand. Nine months of the year it rained, and the other three a raging wind blew off the Atlantic. There was nothing there except Private Lidgebird, myself, two Army huts — one of them a decentish two-roomed hut which I inhabited — and the eleven tins of bully beef. Lidgebird was a surly old devil and I could never get much out of him except the fact that he'd been a market gardener before he joined the Army. It was interesting to see how

rapidly he was reverting to type. Even before I got to Twelve Mile Dump he'd dug a patch round one of the huts and started planting spuds, in the autumn he dug another patch till he'd got about half an acre under cultivation, at the beginning of 1918 he started keeping hens which had got to quite a number by the end of the summer, and towards the end of the year he suddenly produced a pig from God knows where. I don't think it crossed his mind to wonder what the devil we were doing there, or what the West Coast Defence Force was and whether it actually existed. It wouldn't surprise me to hear that he's there still, raising pigs and potatoes on the spot where Twelve Mile Dump used to be. I hope he is. Good luck to him.

Meanwhile I was doing something I'd never before had the chance to do as a full-time job — reading.

The officers who'd been there before had left a few books behind, mostly sevenpenny editions and nearly all of them the kind of tripe that people were reading in those days. Ian Hay and Sapper and the Craig Kennedy stories and so forth. But at some time or other somebody had been there who knew what books are worth reading and what are not. I myself, at the time, didn't know anything of the kind. The only books I'd ever voluntarily read were detective stories and once in a way a smutty sex book. God knows I don't set up to be a highbrow even now, but if you'd asked me THEN for the name of a 'good' book I'd have answered The Woman Thou Gavest Me, or (in memory of the vicar) Sesame and Lilies. In any case a 'good' book was a book one didn't have any intention of reading. But there I was, in a job where there was less than nothing to do, with the sea booming on the beach and the rain streaming down the window-panes — and a whole row of books staring me in the face on the temporary shelf someone had rigged up against the wall of the hut. Naturally I started to read them from end to end, with, at the beginning, about as much attempt to discriminate as a pig working its way through a pail of garbage.

But in among them there were three or four books that were different from the others. No, you've got it wrong! Don't run away with the idea that I suddenly discovered Marcel Proust or Henry James or somebody. I wouldn't have read them even if I had. These books I'm speaking of weren't in the least highbrow. But now and

again it so happens that you strike a book which is exactly at the mental level you've reached at the moment, so much so that it seems to have been written especially for you. One of them was H. G. Wells's The History of Mr Polly, in a cheap shilling edition which was falling to pieces. I wonder if you can imagine the effect it had upon me, to be brought up as I'd been brought up, the son of a shopkeeper in a country town, and then to come across a book like that? Another was Compton Mackenzie's Sinister Street. It had been the scandal of the season a few years back, and I'd even heard vague rumours of it in Lower Binfield. Another was Conrad's Victory, parts of which bored me. But books like that started you thinking. And there was a back number of some magazine with a blue cover which had a short story of D. H. Lawrence's in it. I don't remember the name of it. It was a story about a German conscript who shoves his sergeant-major over the edge of a fortification and then does a bunk and gets caught in his girl's bedroom. It puzzled me a lot. I couldn't make out what it was all about, and yet it left me with a vague feeling that I'd like to read some others like it.

Well, for several months I had an appetite for books that was almost like physical thirst. It was the first real go-in at reading that I'd had since my Dick Donovan days. At the beginning I had no idea how to set about getting hold of books. I thought the only way was to buy them. That's interesting, I think. It shows you the difference upbringing makes. I suppose the children of the middle classes, the 500 pounds a year middle classes, know all about Mudie's and the Times Book Club when they're in their cradles. A bit later I learned of the existence of lending libraries and took out a subscription at Mudie's and another at a library in Bristol. And what I read during the next year or so! Wells, Conrad, Kipling, Galsworthy, Barry Pain, W. W. Jacobs, Pett Ridge, Oliver Onions, Compton Mackenzie, H. Seton Merriman, Maurice Baring, Stephen McKenna, May Sinclair, Arnold Bennett, Anthony Hope, Elinor Glyn, O. Henry, Stephen Leacock, and even Silas Hocking and Jean Stratton Porter. How many of the names in that list are known to you, I wonder? Half the books that people took seriously in those days are forgotten now. But at the beginning I swallowed them all down like a whale that's got in among a shoal of shrimps. I just revelled in them. After a bit, of

course, I grew more highbrow and began to distinguish between tripe and not-tripe. I got hold of Lawrence's Sons and Lovers and sort of half-enjoyed it, and I got a lot of kick out of Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray and Stevenson's New Arabian Nights. Wells was the author who made the biggest impression on me. I read George Moore's Esther Waters and liked it, and I tried several of Hardy's novels and always got stuck about half-way through. I even had a go at Ibsen, who left me with a vague impression that in Norway it's always raining.

It was queer, really. Even at the time it struck me as queer. I was a second-loot with hardly any Cockney accent left, I could already distinguish between Arnold Bennett and Elinor Glyn, and yet it was only four years since I'd been slicing cheese behind the counter in my white apron and looking forward to the days when I'd be a master-grocer. If I tot up the account, I suppose I must admit that the war did me good as well as harm. At any rate that year of reading novels was the only real education, in the sense of book-learning, that I've ever had. It did certain things to my mind. It gave me an attitude, a kind of questioning attitude, which I probably wouldn't have had if I'd gone through life in a normal sensible way. But — I wonder if you can understand this — the thing that really changed me, really made an impression on me, wasn't so much the books I read as the rotten meaninglessness of the life I was leading.

It really was unspeakably meaningless, that time in 1918. Here I was, sitting beside the stove in an Army hut, reading novels, and a few hundred miles away in France the guns were roaring and droves of wretched children, wetting their bags with fright, were being driven into the machine-gun barrage like you'd shoot small coke into a furnace. I was one of the lucky ones. The higher-ups had taken their eye off me, and here I was in a snug little bolt-hole, drawing pay for a job that didn't exist. At times I got into a panic and made sure they'd remember about me and dig me out, but it never happened. The official forms, on gritty grey paper, came in once a month, and I filled them up and sent them back, and more forms came in, and I filled them up and sent them back, and so it went on. The whole thing had about as much sense in it as a lunatic's dream. The effect of all this, plus the books I was reading, was to leave me

with a feeling of disbelief in everything.

I wasn't the only one. The war was full of loose ends and forgotten corners. By this time literally millions of people were stuck up backwaters of one kind and another. Whole armies were rotting away on fronts that people had forgotten the names of. There were huge Ministries with hordes of clerks and typists all drawing two pounds a week and upwards for piling up mounds of paper. Moreover they knew perfectly well that all they were doing was to pile up mounds of paper. Nobody believed the atrocity stories and the gallant little Belgium stuff any longer. The soldiers thought the Germans were good fellows and hated the French like poison. Every junior officer looked on the General Staff as mental defectives. A sort of wave of disbelief was moving across England, and it even got as far as Twelve Mile Dump. It would be an exaggeration to say that the war turned people into highbrows, but it did turn them into nihilists for the time being. People who in a normal way would have gone through life with about as much tendency to think for themselves as a suet pudding were turned into Bolshies just by the war. What should I be now if it hadn't been for the war? I don't know, but something different from what I am. If the war didn't happen to kill you it was bound to start you thinking. After that unspeakable idiotic mess you couldn't go on regarding society as something eternal and unquestionable, like a pyramid. You knew it was just a balls-up.

9

The war had jerked me out of the old life I'd known, but in the queer period that came afterwards I forgot it almost completely.

I know that in a sense one never forgets anything. You remember that piece of orange-peel you saw in the gutter thirteen years ago, and that coloured poster of Torquay that you once got a glimpse of in a railway waiting-room. But I'm speaking of a different kind of memory. In a sense I remembered the old life in Lower Binfield. I remembered my fishing-rod and the smell of sainfoin and Mother behind the brown teapot and Jackie the bullfinch and the horse-trough in the market-place. But none of it was alive in my mind any longer. It was something far away, something that I'd finished with. It would never have occurred to me that some day I might want to go back to it.

It was a queer time, those years just after the war, almost queerer than the war itself, though people don't remember it so vividly. In a rather different form the sense of disbelieving in everything was stronger than ever. Millions of men had suddenly been kicked out of the Army to find that the country they'd fought for didn't want them, and Lloyd George and his pals were giving the works to any illusions that still existed. Bands of ex-service men marched up and down rattling collection boxes, masked women were singing in the streets, and chaps in officers' tunics were grinding barrel- organs. Everybody in England seemed to be scrambling for jobs, myself included. But I came off luckier than most. I got a small wound-gratuity, and what with that and the bit of money I'd put aside during the last year of war (not having had much opportunity to spend it), I came out of the Army with no less than three hundred and fifty quid. It's rather interesting, I think, to notice my reaction. Here I was, with quite enough money to do the thing I'd been brought up to do and the thing I'd dreamed of for years — that is, start a shop. I had plenty of capital. If you bide your time and keep your eyes open you can run across quite nice little businesses for three hundred and fifty quid. And yet, if you'll believe me, the idea never occurred to me. I not only didn't make any move towards starting a shop, but it wasn't till

years later, about 1925 in fact, that it even crossed my mind that I might have done so. The fact was that I'd passed right out of the shopkeeping orbit. That was what the Army did to you. It turned you into an imitation gentleman and gave you a fixed idea that there'd always be a bit of money coming from somewhere. If you'd suggested to me then, in 1919, that I ought to start a shop — a tobacco and sweet shop, say, or a general store in some god-forsaken village — I'd just have laughed. I'd worn pips on my shoulder, and my social standards had risen. At the same time I didn't share the delusion, which was pretty common among ex-officers, that I could spend the rest of my life drinking pink gin. I knew I'd got to have a job. And the job, of course, would be 'in business' — just what kind of job I didn't know, but something high-up and important, something with a car and a telephone and if possible a secretary with a permanent wave. During the last year or so of war a lot of us had had visions like that. The chap who'd been a shop walker saw himself as a travelling salesman, and the chap who'd been a travelling salesman saw himself as a managing director. It was the effect of Army life, the effect of wearing pips and having a cheque-book and calling the evening meal dinner. All the while there'd been an idea floating round — and this applied to the men in the ranks as well as the officers — that when we came out of the Army there'd be jobs waiting for us that would bring in at least as much as our Army pay. Of course, if ideas like that didn't circulate, no war would ever be fought.

Well, I didn't get that job. It seemed that nobody was anxious to pay me 2,000 pounds a year for sitting among streamlined office furniture and dictating letters to a platinum blonde. I was discovering what three-quarters of the blokes who'd been officers were discovering — that from a financial point of view we'd been better off in the Army than we were ever likely to be again. We'd suddenly changed from gentlemen holding His Majesty's commission into miserable out-of-works whom nobody wanted. My ideas soon sank from two thousand a year to three or four pounds a week. But even jobs of the three or four pounds a week kind didn't seem to exist. Every mortal job was filled already, either by men who'd been a few years too old to fight, or by boys who'd been a few months too

young. The poor bastards who'd happened to be born between 1890 and 1900 were left out in the cold. And still it never occurred to me to go back to the grocering business. Probably I could have got a job as a grocer's assistant; old Grimmett, if he was still alive and in business (I wasn't in touch with Lower Binfield and didn't know), would have given me good refs. But I'd passed into a different orbit. Even if my social ideas hadn't risen, I could hardly have imagined, after what I'd seen and learned, going back to the old safe existence behind the counter. I wanted to be travelling about and pulling down the big dough. Chiefly I wanted to be a travelling salesman, which I knew would suit me.

But there were no jobs for travelling salesmen — that's to say, jobs with a salary attached. What there were, however, were on-commission jobs. That racket was just beginning on a big, scale. It's a beautifully simple method of increasing your sales and advertising your stuff without taking any risks, and it always flourishes when times are bad. They keep you on a string by hinting that perhaps there'll be a salaried job going in three months' time, and when you get fed up there's always some other poor devil ready to take over. Naturally it wasn't long before I had an on-commission job, in fact I had quite a number in rapid succession. Thank God, I never came down to peddling vacuum- cleaners, or dictionaries. But I travelled in cutlery, in soap- powder, in a line of patent corkscrews, tin-openers, and similar gadgets, and finally in a line of office accessories — paper-clips, carbon paper, typewriter ribbons, and so forth. I didn't do so badly either. I'm the type that CAN sell things on commission. I've got the temperament and I've got the manner. But I never came anywhere near making a decent living. You can't, in jobs like that — and, of course, you aren't meant to.

I had about a year of it altogether. It was a queer time. The cross-country journeys, the godless places you fetched up in, suburbs of Midland towns that you'd never hear of in a hundred normal lifetimes. The ghastly bed-and-breakfast houses where the sheets always smell faintly of slops and the fried egg at breakfast has a yolk paler than a lemon. And the other poor devils of salesmen that you're always meeting, middle-aged fathers of families in moth-eaten overcoats and bowler hats, who honestly believe that sooner or later

trade will turn the corner and they'll jack their earnings up to five quid a week. And the traipsing from shop to shop, and the arguments with shopkeepers who don't want to listen, and the standing back and making yourself small when a customer comes in. Don't think that it worried me particularly. To some chaps that kind of life is torture. There are chaps who can't even walk into a shop and open their bag of samples without screwing themselves up as though they were going over the top. But I'm not like that. I'm tough, I can talk people into buying things they don't want, and even if they slam the door in my face it doesn't bother me. Selling things on commission is actually what I like doing, provided I can see my way to making a bit of dough out of it. I don't know whether I learned much in that year, but I unlearned a good deal. It knocked the Army nonsense out of me, and it drove into the back of my head the notions that I'd picked up during the idle year when I was reading novels. I don't think I read a single book, barring detective stories, all the time I was on the road. I wasn't a highbrow any longer. I was down among the realities of modern life. And what are the realities of modern life? Well, the chief one is an everlasting, frantic struggle to sell things. With most people it takes the form of selling themselves — that's to say, getting a job and keeping it. I suppose there hasn't been a single month since the war, in any trade you care to name, in which there weren't more men than jobs. It's brought a peculiar, ghastly feeling into life. It's like on a sinking ship when there are nineteen survivors and fourteen lifebelts. But is there anything particularly modern in that, you say? Has it anything to do with the war? Well, it feels as if it had. That feeling that you've got to be everlastingly fighting and hustling, that you'll never get anything unless you grab it from somebody else, that there's always somebody after your job, the next month or the month after they'll be reducing staff and it's you that'll get the bird — THAT, I swear, didn't exist in the old life before the war.

But meanwhile I wasn't badly off. I was earning a bit and I'd still got plenty of money in the bank, nearly two hundred quid, and I wasn't frightened for the future. I knew that sooner or later I'd get a regular job. And sure enough, after about a year, by a stroke of luck it happened. I say by a stroke of luck, but the fact is that I was bound to fall on my feet. I'm not the type that starves. I'm about as likely to

end up in the workhouse as to end up in the House of Lords. I'm the middling type, the type that gravitates by a kind of natural law towards the five-pound-a-week level. So long as there are any jobs at all I'll back myself to get one.

It happened when I was peddling paper-clips and typewriter ribbons. I'd just dodged into a huge block of offices in Fleet Street, a building which canvassers weren't allowed into, as a matter of fact, but I'd managed to give the lift attendant the impression that my bag of samples was merely an attache case. I was walking along one of the corridors looking for the offices of a small toothpaste firm that I'd been recommended to try, when I saw that some very big bug was coming down the corridor in the other direction. I knew immediately that it was a big bug. You know how it is with these big business men, they seem to take up more room and walk more loudly than any ordinary person, and they give off a kind of wave of money that you can feel fifty yards away. When he got nearly up to me I saw that it was Sir Joseph Cheam. He was in civvies, of course, but I had no difficulty in recognizing him. I suppose he'd been there for some business conference or other. A couple of clerks, or secretaries, or something, were following after him, not actually holding up his train, because he wasn't wearing one, but you somehow felt that that was what they were doing. Of course I dodged aside instantly. But curiously enough he recognized me, though he hadn't seen me for years. To my surprise he stopped and spoke to me.

'Hullo, you! I've seen you somewhere before. What's your name? It's on the tip of my tongue.'

'Bowling, sir. Used to be in the A.S.C.'

'Of course. The boy that said he wasn't a gentleman. What are you doing here?'

I might have told him I was selling typewriter ribbons, and there perhaps the whole thing would have ended. But I had one of those sudden inspirations that you get occasionally — a feeling that I might make something out of this if I handled it properly. I said instead:

'Well, sir, as a matter of fact I'm looking for a job.'

'A job, eh? Hm. Not so easy, nowadays.'

He looked me up and down for a second. The two train-bearers

had kind of wafted themselves a little distance away. I saw his rather good-looking old face, with the heavy grey eyebrows and the intelligent nose, looking me over and realized that he'd decided to help me. It's queer, the power of these rich men. He'd been marching past me in his power and glory, with his underlings after him, and then on some whim or other he'd turned aside like an emperor suddenly chucking a coin to a beggar.

'So you want a job? What can you do?'

Again the inspiration. No use, with a bloke like this, cracking up your own merits. Stick to the truth. I said: 'Nothing, sir. But I want a job as a travelling salesman.'

'Salesman? Hm. Not sure that I've got anything for you at present. Let's see.'

He pursed his lips up. For a moment, half a minute perhaps, he was thinking quite deeply. It was curious. Even at the time I realized that it was curious. This important old bloke, who was probably worth at least half a million, was actually taking thought on my behalf. I'd deflected him from his path and wasted at least three minutes of his time, all because of a chance remark I'd happened to make years earlier. I'd stuck in his memory and therefore he was willing to take the tiny bit of trouble that was needed to find me a job. I dare say the same day he gave twenty clerks the sack. Finally he said:

'How'd you like to go into an insurance firm? Always fairly safe, you know. People have got to have insurance, same as they've got to eat.'

Of course I jumped at the idea of going into an insurance firm. Sir Joseph was 'interested' in the Flying Salamander. God knows how many companies he was 'interested' in. One of the underlings wafted himself forward with a scribbling-pad, and there and then, with the gold stylo out of his waistcoat pocket, Sir Joseph scribbled me a note to some higher-up in the Flying Salamander. Then I thanked him, and he marched on, and I sneaked off in the other direction, and we never saw one another again.

Well, I got the job, and, as I said earlier, the job got me. I've been with the Flying Salamander close on eighteen years. I started off in the office, but now I'm what's known as an Inspector, or, when

there's reason to sound particularly impressive, a Representative. A couple of days a week I'm working in the district office, and the rest of the time I'm travelling around, interviewing clients whose names have been sent in by the local agents, making assessments of shops and other property, and now and again snapping up a few orders on my own account. I earn round about seven quid a week. And properly speaking that's the end of my story.

When I look back I realize that my active life, if I ever had one, ended when I was sixteen. Everything that really matters to me had happened before that date. But in a manner of speaking things were still happening — the war, for instance — up to the time when I got the job with the Flying Salamander. After that — well, they say that happy people have no histories, and neither do the blokes who work in insurance offices. From that day forward there was nothing in my life that you could properly describe as an event, except that about two and a half years later, at the beginning of '23, I got married.

10

I was living in a boarding-house in Ealing. The years were rolling on, or crawling on. Lower Binfield had passed almost out of my memory. I was the usual young city worker who scoots for the 8.15 and intrigues for the other fellow's job. I was fairly well thought of in the firm and pretty satisfied with life. The post- war success dope had caught me, more or less. You remember the line of talk. Pep, punch, grit, sand. Get on or get out. There's plenty of room at the top. You can't keep a good man down. And the ads in the magazines about the chap that the boss clapped on the shoulder, and the keen-jawed executive who's pulling down the big dough and attributes his success to so and so's correspondence course. It's funny how we all swallowed it, even blokes like me to whom it hadn't the smallest application. Because I'm neither a go- getter nor a down-and-out, and I'm by nature incapable of being either. But it was the spirit of the time. Get on! Make good! If you see a man down, jump on his guts before he gets up again. Of course this was in the early twenties, when some of the effects of the war had worn off and the slump hadn't yet arrived to knock the stuffing out of us.

I had an 'A' subscription at Boots and went to half-crown dances and belonged to a local tennis club. You know those tennis clubs in the genteel suburbs — little wooden pavilions and high wire- netting enclosures where young chaps in rather badly cut white flannels prance up and down, shouting 'Fifteen forty!' and 'Vantage all!' in voices which are a tolerable imitation of the Upper Crust. I'd learned to play tennis, didn't dance too badly, and got on well with the girls. At nearly thirty I wasn't a bad-looking chap, with my red face and butter-coloured hair, and in those days it was still a point in your favour to have fought in the war. I never, then or at any other time, succeeded in looking like a gentleman, but on the other hand you probably wouldn't have taken me for the son of a small shopkeeper in a country town. I could keep my end up in the rather mixed society of a place like Ealing, where the office-employee class overlaps with the middling-professional class. It was at the tennis club that I first met Hilda.

At that time Hilda was twenty-four. She was a small, slim, rather timid girl, with dark hair, beautiful movements, and — because of having very large eyes — a distinct resemblance to a hare. She was one of those people who never say much, but remain on the edge of any conversation that's going on, and give the impression that they're listening. If she said anything at all, it was usually 'Oh, yes, I think so too', agreeing with whoever had spoken last. At tennis she hopped about very gracefully, and didn't play badly, but somehow had a helpless, childish air. Her surname was Vincent.

If you're married, there'll have been times when you've said to yourself 'Why the hell did I do it?' and God knows I've said it often enough about Hilda. And once again, looking at it across fifteen years, why DID I marry Hilda?

Partly, of course, because she was young and in a way very pretty. Beyond that I can only say that because she came of totally different origins from myself it was very difficult for me to get any grasp of what she was really like. I had to marry her first and find out about her afterwards, whereas if I'd married say, Elsie Waters, I'd have known what I was marrying. Hilda belonged to a class I only knew by hearsay, the poverty-stricken officer class. For generations past her family had been soldiers, sailors, clergymen, Anglo-Indian officials, and that kind of thing. They'd never had any money, but on the other hand none of them had ever done anything that I should recognize as work. Say what you will, there's a kind of snob-appeal in that, if you belong as I do to the God-fearing shopkeeper class, the low church, and high-tea class. It wouldn't make any impression on me now, but it did then. Don't mistake what I'm saying. I don't mean that I married Hilda BECAUSE she belonged to the class I'd once served across the counter, with some notion of jockeying myself up in the social scale. It was merely that I couldn't understand her and therefore was capable of being goofy about her. And one thing I certainly didn't grasp was that the girls in these penniless middle-class families will marry anything in trousers, just to get away from home.

It wasn't long before Hilda took me home to see her family. I hadn't known till then that there was a considerable Anglo-Indian colony in Ealing. Talk about discovering a new world! It was quite a

revelation to me.

Do you know these Anglo-Indian families? It's almost impossible, when you get inside these people's houses, to remember that out in the street it's England and the twentieth century. As soon as you set foot inside the front door you're in India in the eighties. You know the kind of atmosphere. The carved teak furniture, the brass trays, the dusty tiger-skulls on the wall, the Trichinopoly cigars, the red-hot pickles, the yellow photographs of chaps in sun-helmets, the Hindustani words that you're expected to know the meaning of, the everlasting anecdotes about tiger-shoots and what Smith said to Jones in Poona in '87. It's a sort of little world of their own that they've created, like a kind of cyst. To me, of course, it was all quite new and in some ways rather interesting. Old Vincent, Hilda's father, had been not only in India but also in some even more outlandish place, Borneo or Sarawak, I forget which. He was the usual type, completely bald, almost invisible behind his moustache, and full of stories about cobras and cummerbunds and what the district collector said in '93. Hilda's mother was so colourless that she was just like one of the faded photos on the wall. There was also a son, Harold, who had some official job in Ceylon and was home on leave at the time when I first met Hilda. They had a little dark house in one of those buried back-streets that exist in Ealing. It smelt perpetually of Trichinopoly cigars and it was so full of spears, blow-pipes, brass ornaments, and the heads of wild animals that you could hardly move about in it.

Old Vincent had retired in 1910, and since then he and his wife had shown about as much activity, mental or physical, as a couple of shellfish. But at the time I was vaguely impressed by a family which had had majors, colonels, and once even an admiral in it. My attitude towards the Vincents, and theirs towards me, is an interesting illustration of what fools people can be when they get outside their own line. Put me among business people — whether they're company directors or commercial travellers — and I'm a fairly good judge of character. But I had no experience whatever of the officer-rentier-clergyman class, and I was inclined to kow- tow to these decayed throw-outs. I looked on them as my social and intellectual superiors, while they on the other hand mistook me for a rising

young businessman who before long would be pulling down the big dough. To people of that kind, 'business', whether it's marine insurance or selling peanuts, is just a dark mystery. All they know is that it's something rather vulgar out of which you can make money. Old Vincent used to talk impressively about my being 'in business' — once, I remember, he had a slip of the tongue and said 'in trade' — and obviously didn't grasp the difference between being in business as an employee and being there on your own account. He had some vague notion that as I was 'in' the Flying Salamander I should sooner or later rise to the top of it, by a process of promotion. I think it's possible that he also had pictures of himself touching me for fivers at some future date. Harold certainly had. I could see it in his eye. In fact, even with my income being what it is, I'd probably be lending money to Harold at this moment if he were alive. Luckily he died a few years after we were married, of enteric or something, and both the old Vincents are dead too.

Well, Hilda and I were married, and right from the start it was a flop. Why did you marry her? you say. But why did you marry yours? These things happen to us. I wonder whether you'll believe that during the first two or three years I had serious thoughts of killing Hilda. Of course in practice one never does these things, they're only a kind of fantasy that one enjoys thinking about. Besides, chaps who murder their wives always get copped. However cleverly you've faked the alibi, they know perfectly well that it's you who did it, and they'll pin it on to you somehow. When a woman's bumped off, her husband is always the first suspect — which gives you a little side-glimpse of what people really think about marriage.

One gets used to everything in time. After a year or two I stopped wanting to kill her and started wondering about her. Just wondering. For hours, sometimes, on Sunday afternoons or in the evening when I've come home from work, I've lain on my bed with all my clothes on except my shoes, wondering about women. Why they're like that, how they get like that, whether they're doing it on purpose. It seems to be a most frightful thing, the suddenness with which some women go to pieces after they're married. It's as if they were strung up to do just that one thing, and the instant they've done it they wither off like a flower that's set its seed. What really gets me down is the dreary

attitude towards life that it implies. If marriage was just an open swindle — if the woman trapped you into it and then turned round and said, 'Now, you bastard, I've caught you and you're going to work for me while I have a good time!' — I wouldn't mind so much. But not a bit of it. They don't want to have a good time, they merely want to slump into middle age as quickly as possible. After the frightful battle of getting her man to the altar, the woman kind of relaxes, and all her youth, looks, energy, and joy of life just vanish overnight. It was like that with Hilda. Here was this pretty, delicate girl, who'd seemed to me — and in fact when I first knew her she WAS — a finer type of animal than myself, and within only about three years she'd settled down into a depressed, lifeless, middle-aged frump. I'm not denying that I was part of the reason. But whoever she'd married it would have been much the same.

What Hilda lacks — I discovered this about a week after we were married — is any kind of joy in life, any kind of interest in things for their own sake. The idea of doing things because you enjoy them is something she can hardly understand. It was through Hilda that I first got a notion of what these decayed middle-class families are really like. The essential fact about them is that all their vitality has been drained away by lack of money. In families like that, which live on tiny pensions and annuities — that's to say on incomes which never get bigger and generally get smaller — there's more sense of poverty, more crust-wiping, and looking twice at sixpence, than you'd find in any farm-labourer's family, let alone a family like mine. Hilda's often told me that almost the first thing she can remember is a ghastly feeling that there was never enough money for anything. Of course, in that kind of family, the lack of money is always at its worst when the kids are at the school-age. Consequently they grow up, especially the girls, with a fixed idea not only that one always IS hard-up but that it's one's duty to be miserable about it.

At the beginning we lived in a poky little maisonette and had a job to get by on my wages. Later, when I was transferred to the West Bletchley branch, things were better, but Hilda's attitude didn't change. Always that ghastly glooming about money! The milk bill! The coal bill! The rent! The school fees! We've lived all our life together to the tune of 'Next week we'll be in the workhouse.' It's

not that Hilda's mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, and still less that she's selfish. Even when there happens to be a bit of spare cash knocking about I can hardly persuade her to buy herself any decent clothes. But she's got this feeling that you OUGHT to be perpetually working yourself up into a stew about lack of money. Just working up an atmosphere of misery from a sense of duty. I'm not like that. I've got more the prole's attitude towards money. Life's here to be lived, and if we're going to be in the soup next week — well, next week is a long way off. What really shocks her is the fact that I refuse to worry. She's always going for me about it. 'But, George! You don't seem to REALIZE! We've simply got no money at all! It's very SERIOUS!' She loves getting into a panic because something or other is 'serious'. And of late she's got that trick, when she's glooming about something, of kind of hunching her shoulders and folding her arms across her breast. If you made a list of Hilda's remarks throughout the day, you'd find three bracketed together at the top— 'We can't afford it', 'It's a great saving', and 'I don't know where the money's to come from'. She does everything for negative reasons. When she makes a cake she's not thinking about the cake, only about how to save butter and eggs. When I'm in bed with her all she thinks about is how not to have a baby. If she goes to the pictures she's all the time writhing with indignation about the price of the seats. Her methods of housekeeping, with all the emphasis on 'using things up' and 'making things do', would have given Mother convulsions. On the other hand, Hilda isn't in the least a snob. She's never looked down on me because I'm not a gentleman. On the contrary, from her point of view I'm much too lordly in my habits. We never have a meal in a tea-shop without a frightful row in whispers because I'm tipping the waitress too much. And it's a curious thing that in the last few years she's become much more definitely lower-middle-class, in outlook and even in appearance, than I am. Of course all this 'saving' business has never led to anything. It never does. We live just about as well or as badly as the other people in Ellesmere Road. But the everlasting stew about the gas bill and the milk bill and the awful price of butter and the kids' boots and school-fees goes on and on. It's a kind of game with Hilda.

We moved to West Bletchley in '29 and started buying the house

in Ellesmere Road the next year, a little before Billy was born. After I was made an Inspector I was more away from home and had more opportunities with other women. Of course I was unfaithful — I won't say all the time, but as often as I got the chance. Curiously enough, Hilda was jealous. In a way, considering how little that kind of thing means to her, I wouldn't have expected her to mind. And like all jealous women she'll sometimes show a cunning you wouldn't think her capable of. Sometimes the way she's caught me out would have made me believe in telepathy, if it wasn't that she's often been equally suspicious when I didn't happen to be guilty. I'm more or less permanently under suspicion, though, God knows, in the last few years — the last five years, anyway — I've been innocent enough. You have to be, when you're as fat as I am.

Taking it by and large, I suppose Hilda and I don't get on worse than about half the couples in Ellesmere Road. There've been times when I've thought of separation or divorce, but in our walk of life you don't do those things. You can't afford to. And then time goes on, and you kind of give up struggling. When you've lived with a woman for fifteen years, it's difficult to imagine life without her. She's part of the order of things. I dare say you might find things to object to in the sun and the moon, but do you really want to change them? Besides, there were the kids. Kids are a 'link', as they say. Or a 'tie'. Not to say a ball and fetter.

Of late years Hilda has made two great friends called Mrs Wheeler and Miss Minns. Mrs Wheeler is a widow, and I gather she's got very bitter ideas about the male sex. I can feel her kind of quivering with disapproval if I so much as come into the room. She's a faded little woman and gives you a curious impression that she's the same colour all over, a kind of greyish dust-colour, but she's full of energy. She's a bad influence on Hilda, because she's got the same passion for 'saving' and 'making things do', though in a slightly different form. With her it takes the form of thinking that you can have a good time without paying for it. She's for ever nosing out bargains and amusements that don't cost money. With people like that it doesn't matter a damn whether they want a thing or not, it's merely a question of whether they can get it on the cheap. When the big shops have their remnant sales Mrs Wheeler's always at the head

of the queue, and it's her greatest pride, after a day's hard fighting round the counter, to come out without having bought anything. Miss Minns is quite a different sort. She's really a sad case, poor Miss Minns. She's a tall thin woman of about thirty-eight, with black patent-leather hair and a very GOOD, trusting kind of face. She lives on some kind of tiny fixed income, an annuity or something, and I fancy she's a left- over from the old society of West Bletchley, when it was a little country town, before the suburb grew up. It's written all over her that her father was a clergyman and sat on her pretty heavily while he lived. They're a special by-product of the middle classes, these women who turn into withered bags before they even manage to escape from home. Poor old Miss Minns, for all her wrinkles, still looks exactly like a child. It's still a tremendous adventure to her not to go to church. She's always burbling about 'modern progress' and 'the woman's movement', and she's got a vague yearning to do something she calls 'developing her mind', only she doesn't quite know how to start. I think in the beginning she cottoned on to Hilda and Mrs Wheeler out of pure loneliness, but now they take her with them wherever they go.

And the times they've had together, those three! Sometimes I've almost envied them. Mrs Wheeler is the leading spirit. You couldn't name a kind of idiocy that she hasn't dragged them into at one time or another. Anything from theosophy to cat's-cradle, provided you can do it on the cheap. For months they went in for the food-crank business. Mrs Wheeler had picked up a second-hand copy of some book called Radiant Energy which proved that you should live on lettuces and other things that don't cost money. Of course this appealed to Hilda, who immediately began starving herself. She'd have tried it on me and the kids as well, only I put my foot down. Then they had a go at faith-healing. Then they thought of tackling Pelmanism, but after a lot of correspondence they found that they couldn't get the booklets free, which had been Mrs Wheeler's idea. Then it was hay-box cookery. Then it was some filthy stuff called bee wine, which was supposed to cost nothing at all because you made it out of water. They dropped that after they'd read an article in the paper saying that bee wine gives you cancer. Then they nearly joined one of those women's clubs which go for conducted tours round

factories, but after a lot of arithmetic Mrs Wheeler decided that the free teas the factories gave you didn't quite equal the subscription. Then Mrs Wheeler scraped acquaintance with somebody who gave away free tickets for plays produced by some stage society or other. I've known the three of them sit for hours listening to some highbrow play of which they didn't even pretend to understand a word — couldn't even tell you the name of the play afterwards — but they felt that they were getting something for nothing. Once they even took up spiritualism. Mrs Wheeler had run across some down-and-out medium who was so desperate that he'd give seances for eighteenpence, so that the three of them could have a glimpse beyond the veil for a tanner a time. I saw him once when he came to give a seance at our house. He was a seedy-looking old devil and obviously in mortal terror of D.T.s. He was so shaky that when he was taking his overcoat off in the hall he had a sort of spasm and a hank of butter-muslin dropped out of his trouser-leg. I managed to shove it back to him before the women saw. Butter-muslin is what they make the ectoplasm with, so I'm told. I suppose he was going on to another seance afterwards. You don't get manifestations for eighteen pence. Mrs Wheeler's biggest find of the last few years is the Left Book Club. I think it was in '36 that the news of the Left Book Club got to West Bletchley. I joined it soon afterwards, and it's almost the only time I can remember spending money without Hilda protesting. She can see some sense in buying a book when you're getting it for a third of its proper price. These women's attitude is curious, really. Miss Minns certainly had a try at reading one or two of the books, but this wouldn't even have occurred to the other two. They've never had any direct connexion with the Left Book Club or any notion what it's all about — in fact I believe at the beginning Mrs Wheeler thought it had something to do with books which had been left in railway carriages and were being sold off cheap. But they do know that it means seven and sixpenny books for half a crown, and so they're always saying that it's 'such a good idea'. Now and again the local Left Book Club branch holds meetings and gets people down to speak, and Mrs Wheeler always takes the others along. She's a great one for public meetings of any kind, always provided that it's indoors and admission free. The three of them sit there like lumps of

pudding. They don't know what the meeting's about and they don't care, but they've got a vague feeling, especially Miss Minns, that they're improving their minds, and it isn't costing them anything.

Well, that's Hilda. You see what she's like. Take it by and large, I suppose she's no worse than I am. Sometimes when we were first married I felt I'd like to strangle her, but later I got so that I didn't care. And then I got fat and settled down. It must have been in 1930 that I got fat. It happened so suddenly that it was as if a cannon ball had hit me and got stuck inside. You know how it is. One night you go to bed, still feeling more or less young, with an eye for the girls and so forth, and next morning you wake up in the full consciousness that you're just a poor old fatty with nothing ahead of you this side the grave except sweating your guts out to buy boots for the kids.

And now it's '38, and in every shipyard in the world they're riveting up the battleships for another war, and a name I chanced to see on a poster had stirred up in me a whole lot of stuff which ought to have been buried God knows how many years ago.

Part III

1

When I came home that evening I was still in doubt as to what I'd spend my seventeen quid on.

Hilda said she was going to the Left Book Club meeting. It seemed that there was a chap coming down from London to lecture, though needless to say Hilda didn't know what the lecture was going to be about. I told her I'd go with her. In a general way I'm not much of a one for lectures, but the visions of war I'd had that morning, starting with the bomber flying over the train, had put me into a kind of thoughtful mood. After the usual argument we got the kids to bed early and cleared off in time for the lecture, which was billed for eight o'clock.

It was a misty kind of evening, and the hall was cold and not too well lighted. It's a little wooden hall with a tin roof, the property of some Nonconformist sect or other, and you can hire it for ten bob. The usual crowd of fifteen or sixteen people had rolled up. On the front of the platform there was a yellow placard announcing that the lecture was on 'The Menace of Fascism'. This didn't altogether surprise me. Mr Witchett, who acts as chairman of these meetings and who in private life is something in an architect's office, was taking the lecturer round, introducing him to everyone as Mr So-and-so (I forget his name) 'the well-known anti-Fascist', very much as you might call somebody 'the well-known pianist'. The lecturer was a little chap of about forty, in a dark suit, with a bald head which he'd tried rather unsuccessfully to cover up with wisps of hair.

Meetings of this kind never start on time. There's always a period of hanging about on the pretence that perhaps a few more people are going to turn up. It was about twenty-five past eight when Witchett tapped on the table and did his stuff. Witchett's a mild- looking chap, with a pink, baby's bottom kind of face that's always covered in smiles. I believe he's secretary of the local Liberal Party, and he's also on the Parish Council and acts as M.C. at the magic lantern lectures for the Mothers' Union. He's what you might call a born chairman. When he tells you how delighted we all are to have Mr So-and-so on the platform tonight, you can see that he believes it. I

never look at him without thinking that he's probably a virgin. The little lecturer took out a wad of notes, chiefly newspaper cuttings, and pinned them down with his glass of water. Then he gave a quick lick at his lips and began to shoot.

Do you ever go to lectures, public meetings, and what-not?

When I go to one myself, there's always a moment during the evening when I find myself thinking the same thought: Why the hell are we doing this? Why is it that people will turn out on a winter night for this kind of thing? I looked round the hall. I was sitting in the back row. I don't ever remember going to any kind of public meeting when I didn't sit in the back row if I could manage it. Hilda and the others had planked themselves in front, as usual. It was rather a gloomy little hall. You know the kind of place. Pitch-pine walls, corrugated iron roof, and enough draughts to make you want to keep your overcoat on. The little knot of us were sitting in the light round the platform, with about thirty rows of empty chairs behind us. And the seats of all the chairs were dusty. On the platform behind the lecturer there was a huge square thing draped in dust-cloths which might have been an enormous coffin under a pall. Actually it was a piano.

At the beginning I wasn't exactly listening. The lecturer was rather a mean-looking little chap, but a good speaker. White face, very mobile mouth, and the rather grating voice that they get from constant speaking. Of course he was pitching into Hitler and the Nazis. I wasn't particularly keen to hear what he was saying — get the same stuff in the News Chronicle every morning — but his voice came across to me as a kind of burr-burr-burr, with now and again a phrase that struck out and caught my attention.

'Bestial atrocities. . . . Hideous outbursts of sadism. . . . Rubber truncheons. . . . Concentration camps. . . . Iniquitous persecution of the Jews. . . . Back to the Dark Ages. . . . European civilization. . . . Act before it is too late. . . . Indignation of all decent peoples. . . . Alliance of the democratic nations. . . . Firm stand. . . . Defence of democracy. . . . Democracy. . . . Fascism. . . . Democracy. . . . Fascism. . . . Democracy . . . .'

You know the line of talk. These chaps can churn it out by the hour. Just like a gramophone. Turn the handle, press the button, and

it starts. Democracy, Fascism, Democracy. But somehow it interested me to watch him. A rather mean little man, with a white face and a bald head, standing on a platform, shooting out slogans. What's he doing? Quite deliberately, and quite openly, he's stirring up hatred. Doing his damnedest to make you hate certain foreigners called Fascists. It's a queer thing, I thought, to be known as 'Mr So-and-so, the well-known anti-Fascist'. A queer trade, anti-Fascism. This fellow, I suppose, makes his living by writing books against Hitler. But what did he do before Hitler came along? And what'll he do if Hitler ever disappears? Same question applies to doctors, detectives, rat-catchers, and so forth, of course. But the grating voice went on and on, and another thought struck me. He MEANS it. Not faking at all — feels every word he's saying. He's trying to work up hatred in the audience, but that's nothing to the hatred he feels himself. Every slogan's gospel truth to him. If you cut him open all you'd find inside would be Democracy-Fascism-Democracy. Interesting to know a chap like that in private life. But does he have a private life? Or does he only go round from platform to platform, working up hatred? Perhaps even his dreams are slogans.

As well as I could from the back row I had a look at the audience. I suppose, if you come to think of it, we people who'll turn out on winter nights to sit in draughty halls listening to Left Book Club lectures (and I consider that I'm entitled to the 'we', seeing that I'd done it myself on this occasion) have a certain significance. We're the West Bletchley revolutionaries. Doesn't look hopeful at first sight. It struck me as I looked round the audience that only about half a dozen of them had really grasped what the lecturer was talking about, though by this time he'd been pitching into Hitler and the Nazis for over half an hour. It's always like that with meetings of this kind. Invariably half the people come away without a notion of what it's all about. In his chair beside the table Witchett was watching the lecturer with a delighted smile, and his face looked a little like a pink geranium. You could hear in advance the speech he'd make as soon as the lecturer sat down — same speech as he makes at the end of the magic lantern lecture in aid of trousers for the Melanesians: 'Express our thanks — voicing the opinion of all of us — most interesting — give us all a lot to think about — most stimulating evening!' In the

front row Miss Minns was sitting very upright, with her head cocked a little on one side, like a bird. The lecturer had taken a sheet of paper from under the tumbler and was reading out statistics about the German suicide-rate. You could see by the look of Miss Minns's long thin neck that she wasn't feeling happy. Was this improving her mind, or wasn't it? If only she could make out what it was all about! The other two were sitting there like lumps of pudding. Next to them a little woman with red hair was knitting a jumper. One plain, two purl, drop one, and knit two together. The lecturer was describing how the Nazis chop people's heads off for treason and sometimes the executioner makes a bosh shot. There was one other woman in the audience, a girl with dark hair, one of the teachers at the Council School. Unlike the other she was really listening, sitting forward with her big round eyes fixed on the lecturer and her mouth a little bit open, drinking it all in.

Just behind her two old blokes from the local Labour Party were sitting. One had grey hair cropped very short, the other had a bald head and a droopy moustache. Both wearing their overcoats. You know the type. Been in the Labour Party since the year dot. Lives given up to the movement. Twenty years of being blacklisted by employers, and another ten of badgering the Council to do something about the slums. Suddenly everything's changed, the old Labour Party stuff doesn't matter any longer. Find themselves pitchforked into foreign politics — Hitler, Stalin, bombs, machine- guns, rubber truncheons, Rome-Berlin axis, Popular Front, anti- Comintern pact. Can't make head or tail of it. Immediately in front of me the local Communist Party branch were sitting. All three of them very young. One of them's got money and is something in the Hesperides Estate Company, in fact I believe he's old Crum's nephew. Another's a clerk at one of the banks. He cashes cheques for me occasionally. A nice boy, with a round, very young, eager face, blue eyes like a baby, and hair so fair that you'd think he peroxided it. He only looks about seventeen, though I suppose he's twenty. He was wearing a cheap blue suit and a bright blue tie that went with his hair. Next to these three another Communist was sitting. But this one, it seems, is a different kind of Communist and not-quite, because he's what they call a Trotskyist. The others have got a down on him. He's even

younger, a very thin, very dark, nervous-looking boy. Clever face. Jew, of course. These four were taking the lecture quite differently from the others. You knew they'd be on their feet the moment question-time started. You could see them kind of twitching already. And the little Trotskyist working himself from side to side on his bum in his anxiety to get in ahead of the others.

I'd stopped listening to the actual words of the lecture. But there are more ways than one of listening. I shut my eyes for a moment. The effect of that was curious. I seemed to see the fellow much better when I could only hear his voice.

It was a voice that sounded as if it could go on for a fortnight without stopping. It's a ghastly thing, really, to have a sort of human barrel-organ shooting propaganda at you by the hour. The same thing over and over again. Hate, hate, hate. Let's all get together and have a good hate. Over and over. It gives you the feeling that something has got inside your skull and is hammering down on your brain. But for a moment, with my eyes shut, I managed to turn the tables on him. I got inside HIS skull. It was a peculiar sensation. For about a second I was inside him, you might almost say I WAS him. At any rate, I felt what he was feeling.

I saw the vision that he was seeing. And it wasn't at all the kind of vision that can be talked about. What he's SAYING is merely that Hitler's after us and we must all get together and have a good hate. Doesn't go into details. Leaves it all respectable. But what he's SEEING is something quite different. It's a picture of himself smashing people's faces in with a spanner. Fascist faces, of course. I KNOW that's what he was seeing. It was what I saw myself for the second or two that I was inside him. Smash! Right in the middle! The bones cave in like an eggshell and what was a face a minute ago is just a great big blob of strawberry jam. Smash! There goes another! That's what's in his mind, waking and sleeping, and the more he thinks of it the more he likes it. And it's all O.K. because the smashed faces belong to Fascists. You could hear all that in the tone of his voice.

But why? Likeliest explanation, because he's scared. Every thinking person nowadays is stiff with fright. This is merely a chap who's got sufficient foresight to be a little more frightened than the

others. Hitler's after us! Quick! Let's all grab a spanner and get together, and perhaps if we smash in enough faces they won't smash ours. Gang up, choose your Leader. Hitler's black and Stalin's white. But it might just as well be the other way about, because in the little chap's mind both Hitler and Stalin are the same. Both mean spanners and smashed faces.

War! I started thinking about it again. It's coming soon, that's certain. But who's afraid of war? That's to say, who's afraid of the bombs and the machine-guns? 'You are', you say. Yes, I am, and so's anybody who's ever seen them. But it isn't the war that matters, it's the after-war. The world we're going down into, the kind of hate-world, slogan-world. The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day, and the detectives watching you while you sleep. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces, and the crowds of a million people all cheering for the Leader till they deafen themselves into thinking that they really worship him, and all the time, underneath, they hate him so that they want to puke. It's all going to happen. Or isn't it? Some days I know it's impossible, other days I know it's inevitable. That night, at any rate, I knew it was going to happen. It was all in the sound of the little lecturer's voice.

So perhaps after all there IS a significance in this mingy little crowd that'll turn out on a winter night to listen to a lecture of this kind. Or at any rate in the five or six who can grasp what it's all about. They're simply the outposts of an enormous army. They're the long-sighted ones, the first rats to spot that the ship is sinking. Quick, quick! The Fascists are coming! Spanners ready, boys! Smash others or they'll smash you. So terrified of the future that we're jumping straight into it like a rabbit diving down a boa-constrictor's throat.

And what'll happen to chaps like me when we get Fascism in England? The truth is it probably won't make the slightest difference. As for the lecturer and those four Communists in the audience, yes, it'll make plenty of difference to them. They'll be smashing faces, or having their own smashed, according to who's winning. But the ordinary middling chaps like me will be carrying on just as usual. And yet it frightens me — I tell you it frightens me. I'd just started to wonder why when the lecturer stopped and sat down.

There was the usual hollow little sound of clapping that you get when there are only about fifteen people in the audience, and then old Witchett said his piece, and before you could say Jack Robinson the four Communists were on their feet together. They had a good dog-fight that went on for about ten minutes, full of a lot of stuff that nobody else understood, such as dialectical materialism and the destiny of the proletariat and what Lenin said in 1918. Then the lecturer, who'd had a drink of water, stood up and gave a summing-up that made the Trotskyist wriggle about on his chair but pleased the other three, and the dog-fight went on unofficially for a bit longer. Nobody else did any talking. Hilda and the others had cleared off the moment the lecture ended. Probably they were afraid there was going to be a collection to pay for the hire of the hall. The little woman with red hair was staying to finish her row. You could hear her counting her stitches in a whisper while the others argued. And Witchett sat and beamed at whoever happened to be speaking, and you could see him thinking how interesting it all was and making mental notes, and the girl with black hair looked from one to the other with her mouth a little open, and the old Labour man, looking rather like a seal with his droopy moustache and his overcoat up to his ears, sat looking up at them, wondering what the hell it was all about. And finally I got up and began to put on my overcoat.

The dog-fight had turned into a private row between the little Trotskyist and the boy with fair hair. They were arguing about whether you ought to join the Army if war broke out. As I edged my way along the row of chairs to get out, the fair-haired one appealed to me.

'Mr Bowling! Look here. If war broke out and we had the chance to smash Fascism once and for all, wouldn't you fight? If you were young, I mean.'

I suppose he thinks I'm about sixty.

'You bet I wouldn't,' I said. 'I had enough to go on with last time.'

'But to smash Fascism!'

'Oh, b — Fascism! There's been enough smashing done already, if you ask me.'

The little Trotskyist chips in with social-patriotism and betrayal of

the workers, but the others cut him short:

'But you're thinking of 1914. That was just an ordinary imperialist war. This time it's different. Look here. When you hear about what's going on in Germany, and the concentration camps and the Nazis beating people up with rubber truncheons and making the Jews spit in each other's faces — doesn't it make your blood boil?'

They're always going on about your blood boiling. Just the same phrase during the war, I remember.

'I went off the boil in 1916,' I told him. 'And so'll you when you know what a trench smells like.'

And then all of a sudden I seemed to see him. It was as if I hadn't properly seen him till that moment.

A very young eager face, might have belonged to a good-looking schoolboy, with blue eyes and tow-coloured hair, gazing into mine, and for a moment actually he'd got tears in his eyes! Felt as strongly as all that about the German Jews! But as a matter of fact I knew just what he felt. He's a hefty lad, probably plays rugger for the bank. Got brains, too. And here he is, a bank clerk in a godless suburb, sitting behind the frosted window, entering figures in a ledger, counting piles of notes, bumsucking to the manager. Feels his life rotting away. And all the while, over in Europe, the big stuff's happening. Shells bursting over the trenches and waves of infantry charging through the drifts of smoke. Probably some of his pals are fighting in Spain. Of course he's spoiling for a war. How can you blame him? For a moment I had a peculiar feeling that he was my son, which in point of years he might have been. And I thought of that sweltering hot day in August when the newsboy stuck up the poster ENGLAND DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY, and we all rushed out on to the pavement in our white aprons and cheered.

'Listen son,' I said, 'you've got it all wrong. In 1914 WE thought it was going to be a glorious business. Well, it wasn't. It was just a bloody mess. If it comes again, you keep out of it. Why should you get your body plugged full of lead? Keep it for some girl. You think war's all heroism and V.C. charges, but I tell you it isn't like that. You don't have bayonet-charges nowadays, and when you do it isn't like you imagine. You don't feel like a hero. All you know is that you've had no sleep for three days, and stink like a polecat, you're

pissing your bags with fright, and your hands are so cold you can't hold your rifle. But that doesn't matter a damn, either. It's the things that happen afterwards.'

Makes no impression of course. They just think you're out of date. Might as well stand at the door of a knocking-shop handing out tracts.

The people were beginning to clear off. Witchett was taking the lecturer home. The three Communists and the little Jew went up the road together, and they were going at it again with proletarian solidarity and dialectic of the dialectic and what Trotsky said in 1917. They're all the same, really. It was a damp, still, very black night. The lamps seemed to hang in the darkness like stars and didn't light the road. In the distance you could hear the trains booming along the High Street. I wanted a drink, but it was nearly ten and the nearest pub was half a mile away. Besides, I wanted somebody to talk to, the way you can't talk in a pub. It was funny how my brain had been on the go all day. Partly the result of not working, of course, and partly of the new false teeth, which had kind of freshened me up. All day I'd been brooding on the future and the past. I wanted to talk about the bad time that's either coming or isn't coming, the slogans and the coloured shirts and the streamlined men from eastern Europe who are going to knock old England cock-eyed. Hopeless trying to talk to Hilda. Suddenly it occurred to me to go and look up old Porteous, who's a pal of mine and keeps late hours.

Porteous is a retired public-school master. He lives in rooms, which luckily are in the lower half of the house, in the old part of the town, near the church. He's a bachelor, of course. You can't imagine that kind married. Lives all alone with his books and his pipe and has a woman in to do for him. He's a learned kind of chap, with his Greek and Latin and poetry and all that. I suppose that if the local Left Book Club branch represents Progress, old Porteous stands for Culture. Neither of them cuts much ice in West Bletchley.

The light was burning in the little room where old Porteous sits reading till all hours of the night. As I tapped on the front door he came strolling out as usual, with his pipe between his teeth and his fingers in a book to keep the place. He's rather a striking looking chap, very tall, with curly grey hair and a thin, dreamy kind of face

that's a bit discoloured but might almost belong to a boy, though he must be nearly sixty. It's funny how some of these public-school and university chaps manage to look like boys till their dying day. It's something in their movements. Old Porteous has got a way of strolling up and down, with that handsome head of his, with the grey curls, held a little back that makes you feel that all the while he's dreaming about some poem or other and isn't conscious of what's going on round him. You can't look at him without seeing the way he's lived written all over him. Public School, Oxford, and then back to his old school as a master. Whole life lived in an atmosphere of Latin, Greek, and cricket. He's got all the mannerisms. Always wears an old Harris tweed jacket and old grey flannel bags which he likes you to call 'disgraceful', smokes a pipe and looks down on cigarettes, and though he sits up half the night I bet he has a cold bath every morning. I suppose from his point of view I'm a bit of a bounder. I haven't been to a public school, I don't know any Latin and don't even want to. He tells me sometimes that it's a pity I'm 'insensible to beauty', which I suppose is a polite way of saying that I've got no education. All the same I like him. He's very hospitable in the right kind of way, always ready to have you in and talk at all hours, and always got drinks handy. When you live in a house like ours, more or less infested by women and kids, it does you good to get out of it sometimes into a bachelor atmosphere, a kind of book-pipe-fire atmosphere. And the classy Oxford feeling of nothing mattering except books and poetry and Greek statues, and nothing worth mentioning having happened since the Goths sacked Rome — sometimes that's a comfort too.

He shoved me into the old leather armchair by the fire and dished out whisky and soda. I've never seen his sitting-room when it wasn't dim with pipe-smoke. The ceiling is almost black. It's a smallish room and, except for the door and the window and the space over the fireplace, the walls are covered with books from the floor right up to the ceiling. On the mantelpiece there are all the things you'd expect. A row of old briar pipes, all filthy, a few Greek silver coins, a tobacco jar with the arms of old Porteous's college on it, and a little earthenware lamp which he told me he dug up on some mountain in Sicily. Over the mantelpiece there are photos of Greek statues.

There's a big one in the middle, of a woman with wings and no head who looks as if she was stepping out to catch a bus. I remember how shocked old Porteous was when the first time I saw it, not knowing any better, I asked him why they didn't stick a head on it.

Porteous started refilling his pipe from the jar on the mantelpiece.

'That intolerable woman upstairs has purchased a wireless set,' he said. 'I had been hoping to live the rest of my life out of the sound of those things. I suppose there is nothing one can do? Do you happen to know the legal position?'

I told him there was nothing one could do. I rather like the Oxfordy way he says 'intolerable', and it tickles me, in 1938, to find someone objecting to having a radio in the house. Porteous was strolling up and down in his usual dreamy way, with his hands in his coat pockets and his pipe between his teeth, and almost instantly he'd begun talking about some law against musical instruments that was passed in Athens in the time of Pericles. It's always that way with old Porteous. All his talk is about things that happened centuries ago. Whatever you start off with it always comes back to statues and poetry and the Greeks and Romans. If you mention the Queen Mary he'd start telling you about Phoenician triremes. He never reads a modern book, refuses to know their names, never looks at any newspaper except The Times, and takes a pride in telling you that he's never been to the pictures. Except for a few poets like Keats and Wordsworth he thinks the modern world — and from his point of view the modern world is the last two thousand years — just oughtn't to have happened.

I'm part of the modern world myself, but I like to hear him talk. He'll stroll round the shelves and haul out first one book and then another, and now and again he'll read you a piece between little puffs of smoke, generally having to translate it from the Latin or something as he goes. It's all kind of peaceful, kind of mellow. All a little like a school-master, and yet it soothes you, somehow. While you listen you aren't in the same world as trains and gas bills and insurance companies. It's all temples and olive trees, and peacocks and elephants, and chaps in the arena with their nets and tridents, and winged lions and eunuchs and galleys and catapults, and generals in brass armour galloping their horses over the soldiers' shields. It's

funny that he ever cottoned on to a chap like me. But it's one of the advantages of being fat that you can fit into almost any society. Besides we meet on common ground when it comes to dirty stories. They're the one modern thing he cares about, though, as he's always reminding me, they aren't modern. He's rather old-maidish about it, always tells a story in a veiled kind of way. Sometimes he'll pick out some Latin poet and translate a smutty rhyme, leaving a lot to your imagination, or he'll drop hints about the private lives of the Roman emperors and the things that went on in the temples of Ashtaroth. They seem to have been a bad lot, those Greeks and Romans. Old Porteous has got photographs of wall-paintings somewhere in Italy that would make your hair curl.

When I'm fed up with business and home life it's often done me a lot of good to go and have a talk with Porteous. But tonight it didn't seem to. My mind was still running on the same lines as it had been all day. Just as I'd done with the Left Book Club lecturer, I didn't exactly listen to what Porreous was saying, only to the sound of his voice. But whereas the lecturer's voice had got under my skin, old Porteous's didn't. It was too peaceful, too Oxfordy. Finally, when he was in the middle of saying something, I chipped in and said:

'Tell me, Porteous, what do you think of Hitler?'

Old Porteous was leaning in his lanky, graceful kind of way with his elbows on the mantelpiece and a foot on the fender. He was so surprised that he almost took his pipe out of his mouth.

'Hitler? This German person? My dear fellow! I DON'T think of him.'

'But the trouble is he's going to bloody well make us think about him before he's finished.'

Old Porteous shies a bit at the world 'bloody', which he doesn't like, though of course it's part of his pose never to be shocked. He begins walking up and down again, puffing out smoke.

'I see no reason for paying any attention to him. A mere adventurer. These people come and go. Ephemeral, purely ephemeral.'

I'm not certain what the word 'ephemeral' means, but I stick to my point:

'I think you've got it wrong. Old Hitler's something different.

So's Joe Stalin. They aren't like these chaps in the old days who crucified people and chopped their heads off and so forth, just for the fun of it. They're after something quite new — something that's never been heard of before.'

'My dear fellow! There is nothing new under the sun.'

Of course that's a favourite saying of old Porteous's. He won't hear of the existence of anything new. As soon as you tell him about anything that's happening nowadays he says that exactly the same thing happened in the reign of King So-and-so. Even if you bring up things like aeroplanes he tells you that they probably had them in Crete, or Mycenae, or wherever it was. I tried to explain to him what I'd felt while the little bloke was lecturing and the kind of vision I'd had of the bad time that's coming, but he wouldn't listen. Merely repeated that there's nothing new under the sun. Finally he hauls a book out of the shelves and reads me a passage about some Greek tyrant back in the B.C.s who certainly might have been Hitler's twin brother.

The argument went on for a bit. All day I'd been wanting to talk to somebody about this business. It's funny. I'm not a fool, but I'm not a highbrow either, and God knows at normal times I don't have many interests that you wouldn't expect a middle-aged seven-pound-a-weeker with two kids to have. And yet I've enough sense to see that the old life we're used to is being sawn off at the roots. I can feel it happening. I can see the war that's coming and I can see the after-war, the food-queues and the secret police and the loudspeakers telling you what to think. And I'm not even exceptional in this. There are millions of others like me. Ordinary chaps that I meet everywhere, chaps I run across in pubs, bus drivers, and travelling salesmen for hardware firms, have got a feeling that the world's gone wrong. They can feel things cracking and collapsing under their feet. And yet here's this learned chap, who's lived all his life with books and soaked himself in history till it's running out of his pores, and he can't even see that things are changing. Doesn't think Hitler matters. Refuses to believe there's another war coming. In any case, as he didn't fight in the last war, it doesn't enter much into his thoughts — he thinks it was a poor show compared with the siege of Troy. Doesn't see why one should bother about the slogans and the

loudspeakers and the coloured shirts. What intelligent person would pay any attention to such things? he always says. Hitler and Stalin will pass away, but something which old Porteous calls 'the eternal verities' won't pass away. This, of course, is simply another way of saying that things will always go on exactly as he's known them. For ever and ever, cultivated Oxford blokes will stroll up and down studies full of books, quoting Latin tags and smoking good tobacco out of jars with coats of arms on them. Really it was no use talking to him. I'd have got more change out of the lad with tow- coloured hair. By degrees the conversation twisted off, as it always does, to things that happened B.C. Then it worked round to poetry. Finally old Porteous drags another book out of the shelves and begins reading Keat's 'Ode to a Nightingale' (or maybe it was a skylark — I forget).

So far as I'm concerned a little poetry goes a long way. But it's a curious fact that I rather like hearing old Porteous reading it aloud. There's no question that he reads well. He's got the habit, of course — used to reading to classes of boys. He'll lean up against something in his lounging way, with his pipe between his teeth and little jets of smoke coming out, and his voice goes kind of solemn and rises and falls with the line. You can see that it moves him in some way. I don't know what poetry is or what it's supposed to do. I imagine it has a kind of nervous effect on some people like music has on others. When he's reading I don't actually listen, that's to say I don't take in the words, but sometimes the sound of it brings a kind of peaceful feeling into my mind. On the whole I like it. But somehow tonight it didn't work. It was as if a cold draught had blown into the room. I just felt that this was all bunk. Poetry! What is it? Just a voice, a bit of an eddy in the air. And Gosh! what use would that be against machine-guns?

I watched him leaning up against the bookshelf. Funny, these public-school chaps. Schoolboys all their days. Whole life revolving round the old school and their bits of Latin and Greek and poetry. And suddenly I remembered that almost the first time I was here with Porteous he'd read me the very same poem. Read it in just the same way, and his voice quivered when he got to the same bit — the bit about magic casements, or something. And a curious thought struck me. HE'S DEAD. He's a ghost. All people like that are dead.

It struck me that perhaps a lot of the people you see walking about are dead. We say that a man's dead when his heart stops and not before. It seems a bit arbitrary. After all, parts of your body don't stop working — hair goes on growing for years, for instance. Perhaps a man really dies when his brain stops, when he loses the power to take in a new idea. Old Porteous is like that. Wonderfully learned, wonderfully good taste — but he's not capable of change. Just says the same things and thinks the same thoughts over and over again. There are a lot of people like that. Dead minds, stopped inside. Just keep moving backwards and forwards on the same little track, getting fainter all the time, like ghosts.

Old Porteous's mind, I thought, probably stopped working at about the time of the Russo-Japanese War. And it's a ghastly thing that nearly all the decent people, the people who DON'T want to go round smashing faces in with spanners, are like that. They're decent, but their minds have stopped. They can't defend themselves against what's coming to them, because they can't see it, even when it's under their noses. They think that England will never change and that England's the whole world. Can't grasp that it's just a left- over, a tiny corner that the bombs happen to have missed. But what about the new kind of men from eastern Europe, the streamlined men who think in slogans and talk in bullets? They're on our track. Not long before they catch up with us. No Marquess of Queensbury rules for those boys. And all the decent people are paralysed. Dead men and live gorillas. Doesn't seem to be anything between.

I cleared out about half an hour later, having completely failed to convince old Porteous that Hitler matters. I was still thinking the same thoughts as I walked home through the shivery streets. The trains had stopped running. The house was all dark and Hilda was asleep. I dropped my false teeth into the glass of water in the bathroom, got into my pyjamas, and prised Hilda over to the other side of the bed. She rolled over without waking, and the kind of hump between her shoulders was towards me. It's funny, the tremendous gloom that sometimes gets hold of you late at night. At that moment the destiny of Europe seemed to me more important than the rent and the kids' school-bills and the work I'd have to do tomorrow. For anyone who has to earn his living such thoughts are

just plain foolishness. But they didn't move out of my mind. Still the vision of the coloured shirts and the machine-guns rattling. The last thing I remember wondering before I fell asleep was why the hell a chap like me should care.

2

The primroses had started. I suppose it was some time in March.

I'd driven through Westerham and was making for Pudley. I'd got to do an assessment of an ironmonger's shop, and then, if I could get hold of him, to interview a life-insurance case who was wavering in the balance. His name had been sent in by our local agent, but at the last moment he'd taken fright and begun to doubt whether he could afford it. I'm pretty good at talking people round. It's being fat that does it. It puts people in a cheery kind of mood, makes 'em feel that signing a cheque is almost a pleasure. Of course there are different ways of tackling different people. With some it's better to lay all the stress on the bonuses, others you can scare in a subtle way with hints about what'll happen to their wives if they die uninsured.

The old car switchbacked up and down the curly little hills. And by God, what a day! You know the kind of day that generally comes some time in March when winter suddenly seems to give up fighting. For days past we'd been having the kind of beastly weather that people call 'bright' weather, when the sky's a cold hard blue and the wind scrapes you like a blunt razor-blade. Then suddenly the wind had dropped and the sun got a chance. You know the kind of day. Pale yellow sunshine, not a leaf stirring, a touch of mist in the far distance where you could see the sheep scattered over the hillsides like lumps of chalk. And down in the valleys fires were burning, and the smoke twisted slowly upwards and melted into the mist. I'd got the road to myself. It was so warm you could almost have taken your clothes off.

I got to a spot where the grass beside the road was smothered in primroses. A patch of clayey soil, perhaps. Twenty yards farther on I slowed down and stopped. The weather was too good to miss. I felt I'd got to get out and have a smell at the spring air, and perhaps even pick a few primroses if there was nobody coming. I even had some vague notion of picking a bunch of them to take home to Hilda.

I switched the engine off and got out. I never like leaving the old car running in neutral, I'm always half afraid she'll shake her mudguards off or something. She's a 1927 model, and she's done a

biggish mileage. When you lift the bonnet and look at the engine it reminds you of the old Austrian Empire, all tied together with bits of string but somehow keeps plugging along. You wouldn't believe any machine could vibrate in so many directions at once. It's like the motion of the earth, which has twenty-two different kinds of wobble, or so I remember reading. If you look at her from behind when she's running in neutral it's for all the world like watching one of those Hawaiian girls dancing the hula-hula.

There was a five-barred gate beside the road. I strolled over and leaned across it. Not a soul in sight. I hitched my hat back a bit to get the kind of balmy feeling of the air against my forehead. The grass under the hedge was full of primroses. Just inside the gate a tramp or somebody had left the remains of a fire. A little pile of white embers and a wisp of smoke still oozing out of them. Farther along there was a little bit of a pool, covered over with duck-weed. The field was winter wheat. It sloped up sharply, and then there was a fall of chalk and a little beech spinney. A kind of mist of young leaves on the trees. And utter stillness everywhere. Not even enough wind to stir the ashes of the fire. A lark singing somewhere, otherwise not a sound, not even an aeroplane.

I stayed there for a bit, leaning over the gate. I was alone, quite alone. I was looking at the field, and the field was looking at me. I felt — I wonder whether you'll understand.

What I felt was something that's so unusual nowadays that to say it sounds like foolishness. I felt HAPPY. I felt that though I shan't live for ever, I'd be quite ready to. If you like you can say that that was merely because it was the first day of spring. Seasonal effect on the sex-glands, or something. But there was more to it than that. Curiously enough, the thing that had suddenly convinced me that life was worth living, more than the primroses or the young buds on the hedge, was that bit of fire near the gate. You know the look of a wood fire on a still day. The sticks that have gone all to white ash and still keep the shape of sticks, and under the ash the kind of vivid red that you can see into. It's curious that a red ember looks more alive, gives you more of a feeling of life than any living thing. There's something about it, a kind of intensity, a vibration — I can't think of the exact words. But it lets you know that you're alive

yourself. It's the spot on the picture that makes you notice everything else.

I bent down to pick a primrose. Couldn't reach it — too much belly. I squatted down on my haunches and picked a little bunch of them. Lucky there was no one to see me. The leaves were kind of crinkly and shaped like rabbits' ears. I stood up and put my bunch of primroses on the gatepost. Then on an impulse I slid my false teeth out of my mouth and had a look at them.

If I'd had a mirror I'd have looked at the whole of myself, though, as a matter of fact, I knew what I looked like already. A fat man of forty-five, in a grey herring-bone suit a bit the worse for wear and a bowler hat. Wife, two kids, and a house in the suburbs written all over me. Red face and boiled blue eyes. I know, you don't have to tell me. But the thing that struck me, as I gave my dental plate the once-over before slipping it back into my mouth, was that IT DOESN'T MATTER. Even false teeth don't matter. I'm fat — yes. I look like a bookie's unsuccessful brother — yes. No woman will ever go to bed with me again unless she's paid to. I know all that. But I tell you I don't care. I don't want the women, I don't even want to be young again. I only want to be alive. And I was alive that moment when I stood looking at the primroses and the red embers under the hedge. It's a feeling inside you, a kind of peaceful feeling, and yet it's like a flame.

Farther down the hedge the pool was covered with duck-weed, so like a carpet that if you didn't know what duck-weed was you might think it was solid and step on it. I wondered why it is that we're all such bloody fools. Why don't people, instead of the idiocies they do spend their time on, just walk round LOOKING at things? That pool, for instance — all the stuff that's in it. Newts, water- snails, water-beetles, caddis-flies, leeches, and God knows how many other things that you can only see with a microscope. The mystery of their lives, down there under water. You could spend a lifetime watching them, ten lifetimes, and still you wouldn't have got to the end even of that one pool. And all the while the sort of feeling of wonder, the peculiar flame inside you. It's the only thing worth having, and we don't want it.

But I do want it. At least I thought so at that moment. And don't

mistake what I'm saying. To begin with, unlike most Cockneys, I'm not soppy about 'the country'. I was brought up a damn sight too near to it for that. I don't want to stop people living in towns, or in suburbs for that matter. Let 'em live where they like. And I'm not suggesting that the whole of humanity could spend the whole of their lives wandering round picking primroses and so forth. I know perfectly well that we've got to work. It's only because chaps are coughing their lungs out in mines and girls are hammering at typewriters that anyone ever has time to pick a flower. Besides, if you hadn't a full belly and a warm house you wouldn't want to pick flowers. But that's not the point. Here's this feeling that I get inside me — not often, I admit, but now and again. I know it's a good feeling to have. What's more, so does everybody else, or nearly everybody. It's just round the corner all the time, and we all know it's there. Stop firing that machine-gun! Stop chasing whatever you're chasing! Calm down, get your breath back, let a bit of peace seep into your bones. No use. We don't do it. Just keep on with the same bloody fooleries.

And the next war coming over the horizon, 1941, they say. Three more circles of the sun, and then we whizz straight into it. The bombs diving down on you like black cigars, and the streamlined bullets streaming from the Bren machine-guns. Not that that worries me particularly. I'm too old to fight. There'll be air- raids, of course, but they won't hit everybody. Besides, even if that kind of danger exists, it doesn't really enter into one's thoughts beforehand. As I've said several times already, I'm not frightened of the war, only the after-war. And even that isn't likely to affect me personally. Because who'd bother about a chap like me? I'm too fat to be a political suspect. No one would bump me off or cosh me with a rubber truncheon. I'm the ordinary middling kind that moves on when the policeman tells him. As for Hilda and the kids, they'd probably never notice the difference. And yet it frightens me. The barbed wire! The slogans! The enormous faces! The cork-lined cellars where the executioner plugs you from behind! For that matter it frightens other chaps who are intellectually a good deal dumber than I am. But why! Because it means good-bye to this thing I've been telling you about, this special feeling inside you. Call it peace, if you like. But when I

say peace I don't mean absence of war, I mean peace, a feeling in your guts. And it's gone for ever if the rubber truncheon boys get hold of us.

I picked up my bunch of primroses and had a smell at them. I was thinking of Lower Binfield. It was funny how for two months past it had been in and out of my mind all the time, after twenty years during which I'd practically forgotten it. And just at this moment there was the zoom of a car coming up the road.

It brought me up with a kind of jolt. I suddenly realized what I was doing — wandering round picking primroses when I ought to have been going through the inventory at that ironmonger's shop in Pudley. What was more, it suddenly struck me what I'd look like if those people in the car saw me. A fat man in a bowler hat holding a bunch of primroses! It wouldn't look right at all. Fat men mustn't pick primroses, at any rate in public. I just had time to chuck them over the hedge before the car came in sight. It was a good job I'd done so. The car was full of young fools of about twenty. How they'd have sniggered if they'd seen me! They were all looking at me — you know how people look at you when they're in a car coming towards you — and the thought struck me that even now they might somehow guess what I'd been doing. Better let 'em think it was something else. Why should a chap get out of his car at the side of a country road? Obvious! As the car went past I pretended to be doing up a fly-button.

I cranked up the car (the self-starter doesn't work any longer) and got in. Curiously enough, in the very moment when I was doing up the fly-button, when my mind was about three-quarters full of those young fools in the other car, a wonderful idea had occurred to me.

I'd go back to Lower Binfield!

Why not? I thought as I jammed her into top gear. Why shouldn't I? What was to stop me? And why the hell hadn't I thought of it before? A quiet holiday in Lower Binfield — just the thing I wanted.

Don't imagine that I had any ideas of going back to LIVE in Lower Binfield. I wasn't planning to desert Hilda and the kids and start life under a different name. That kind of thing only happens in books. But what was to stop me slipping down to Lower Binfield and having a week there all by myself, on the Q.T.?

I seemed to have it all planned out in my mind already. It was all right as far as the money went. There was still twelve quid left in that secret pile of mine, and you can have a very comfortable week on twelve quid. I get a fortnight's holiday a year, generally in August or September. But if I made up some suitable story — relative dying of incurable disease, or something — I could probably get the firm to give me my holiday in two separate halves. Then I could have a week all to myself before Hilda knew what was happening. A week in Lower Binfield, with no Hilda, no kids, no Flying Salamander, no Ellesmere Road, no rumpus about the hire- purchase payments, no noise of traffic driving you silly — just a week of loafing round and listening to the quietness?

But why did I want to go back to Lower Binfield? you say. Why Lower Binfield in particular? What did I mean to do when I got there?

I didn't mean to do anything. That was part of the point. I wanted peace and quiet. Peace! We had it once, in Lower Binfield. I've told you something about our old life there, before the war. I'm not pretending it was perfect. I dare say it was a dull, sluggish, vegetable kind of life. You can say we were like turnips, if you like. But turnips don't live in terror of the boss, they don't lie awake at night thinking about the next slump and the next war. We had peace inside us. Of course I knew that even in Lower Binfield life would have changed. But the place itself wouldn't have. There'd still be the beech woods round Binfield House, and the towpath down by Burford Weir, and the horse-trough in the market-place. I wanted to get back there, just for a week, and let the feeling of it soak into me. It was a bit like one of these Eastern sages retiring into a desert. And I should think, the way things are going, there'll be a good many people retiring into the desert during the next few years. It'll be like the time in ancient Rome that old Porteous was telling me about, when there were so many hermits that there was a waiting list for every cave.

But it wasn't that I wanted to watch my navel. I only wanted to get my nerve back before the bad times begin. Because does anyone who isn't dead from the neck up doubt that there's a bad time coming? We don't even know what it'll be, and yet we know it's

coming. Perhaps a war, perhaps a slump — no knowing, except that it'll be something bad. Wherever we're going, we're going downwards. Into the grave, into the cesspool — no knowing. And you can't face that kind of thing unless you've got the right feeling inside you. There's something that's gone out of us in these twenty years since the war. It's a kind of vital juice that we've squirted away until there's nothing left. All this rushing to and fro! Everlasting scramble for a bit of cash. Everlasting din of buses, bombs, radios, telephone bells. Nerves worn all to bits, empty places in our bones where the marrow ought to be.

I shoved my foot down on the accelerator. The very thought of going back to Lower Binfield had done me good already. You know the feeling I had. Coming up for air! Like the big sea-turtles when they come paddling up to the surface, stick their noses out and fill their lungs with a great gulp before they sink down again among the seaweed and the octopuses. We're all stifling at the bottom of a dustbin, but I'd found the way to the top. Back to Lower Binfield! I kept my foot on the accelerator until the old car worked up to her maximum speed of nearly forty miles an hour. She was rattling like a tin tray full of crockery, and under cover of the noise I nearly started singing.

Of course the fly in the milk-jug was Hilda. That thought pulled me up a bit. I slowed down to about twenty to think it over.

There wasn't much doubt Hilda would find out sooner or later. As to getting only a week's holiday in August, I might be able to pass that off all right. I could tell her the firm were only giving me a week this year. Probably she wouldn't ask too many questions about that, because she'd jump at the chance of cutting down the holiday expenses. The kids, in any case, always stay at the seaside for a month. Where the difficulty came in was finding an alibi for that week in May. I couldn't just clear off without notice. Best thing, I thought, would be to tell her a good while ahead that I was being sent on some special job to Nottingham, or Derby, or Bristol, or some other place a good long way away. If I told her about it two months ahead it would look as if I hadn't anything to hide.

But of course she'd find out sooner or later. Trust Hilda! She'd start off by pretending to believe it, and then, in that quiet, obstinate

way she has, she'd nose out the fact that I'd never been to Nottingham or Derby or Bristol or wherever it might be. It's astonishing how she does it. Such perseverance! She lies low till she's found out all the weak points in your alibi, and then suddenly, when you've put your foot in it by some careless remark, she starts on you. Suddenly comes out with the whole dossier of the case. 'Where did you spend Saturday night? That's a lie! You've been off with a woman. Look at these hairs I found when I was brushing your waistcoat. Look at them! Is my hair that colour?' And then the fun begins. Lord knows how many times it's happened. Sometimes she's been right about the woman and sometimes she's been wrong, but the after-effects are always the same. Nagging for weeks on end! Never a meal without a row — and the kids can't make out what it's all about. The one completely hopeless thing would be to tell her just where I'd spent that week, and why. If I explained till the Day of Judgment she'd never believe that.

But, hell! I thought, why bother? It was a long way off. You know how different these things seem before and after. I shoved my foot down on the accelerator again. I'd had another idea, almost bigger than the first. I wouldn't go in May. I'd go in the second half of June, when the coarse-fishing season had started, and I'd go fishing!

Why not, after all? I wanted peace, and fishing is peace. And then the biggest idea of all came into my head and very nearly made me swing the car off the road.

I'd go and catch those big carp in the pool at Binfield House!

And once again, why not? Isn't it queer how we go through life, always thinking that the things we want to do are the things that can't be done? Why shouldn't I catch those carp? And yet, as soon as the idea's mentioned, doesn't it sound to you like something impossible, something that just couldn't happen? It seemed so to me, even at that moment. It seemed to me a kind of dope-dream, like the ones you have of sleeping with film stars or winning the heavyweight championship. And yet it wasn't in the least impossible, it wasn't even improbable. Fishing can be rented. Whoever owned Binfield House now would probably let the pool if they got enough for it. And Gosh! I'd be glad to pay five pounds for a day's fishing in that pool. For that matter it was quite likely that the house was still empty and

nobody even knew that the pool existed.

I thought of it in the dark place among the trees, waiting for me all those years. And the huge black fish still gliding round it. Jesus! If they were that size thirty years ago, what would they be like now?

3

It was June the seventeenth, Friday, the second day of the coarse-fishing season.

I hadn't had any difficulty in fixing things with the firm. As for Hilda, I'd fitted her up with a story that was all shipshape and watertight. I'd fixed on Birmingham for my alibi, and at the last moment I'd even told her the name of the hotel I was going to stay at, Rowbottom's Family and Commercial. I happened to know the address because I'd stayed there some years earlier. At the same time I didn't want her writing to me at Birmingham, which she might do if I was away as long as a week. After thinking it over I took young Saunders, who travels for Glisso Floor Polish, partly into my confidence. He'd happened to mention that he'd be passing through Birmingham on the eighteenth of June, and I got him to promise that he'd stop on his way and post a letter from me to Hilda, addressed from Rowbottom's. This was to tell her that I might be called away and she'd better not write. Saunders understood, or thought he did. He gave me a wink and said I was wonderful for my age. So that settled Hilda. She hadn't asked any questions, and even if she turned suspicious later, an alibi like that would take some breaking.

I drove through Westerham. It was a wonderful June morning. A faint breeze blowing, and the elm tops swaying in the sun, little white clouds streaming across the sky like a flock of sheep, and the shadows chasing each other across the fields. Outside Westerham a Walls' Ice Cream lad, with cheeks like apples, came tearing towards me on his bike, whistling so that it went through your head. It suddenly reminded me of the time when I'd been an errand boy myself (though in those days we didn't have free-wheel bikes) and I very nearly stopped him and took one. They'd cut the hay in places, but they hadn't got it in yet. It lay drying in long shiny rows, and the smell of it drifted across the road and got mixed up with the petrol.

I drove along at a gentle fifteen. The morning had a kind of peaceful, dreamy feeling. The ducks floated about on the ponds as if they felt too satisfied to eat. In Nettlefield, the village beyond Westerham, a little man in a white apron, with grey hair and a huge

grey moustache, darted across the green, planted himself in the middle of the road and began doing physical jerks to attract my attention. My car's known all along this road, of course. I pulled up. It's only Mr Weaver, who keeps the village general shop. No, he doesn't want to insure his life, nor his shop either. He's merely run out of change and wants to know whether I've got a quid's worth of 'large silver'. They never have any change in Nettlefield, not even at the pub.

I drove on. The wheat would have been as tall as your waist. It went undulating up and down the hills like a great green carpet, with the wind rippling it a little, kind of thick and silky- looking. It's like a woman, I thought. It makes you want to lie on it. And a bit ahead of me I saw the sign-post where the road forks right for Pudley and left for Oxford.

I was still on my usual beat, inside the boundary of my own 'district', as the firm calls it. The natural thing, as I was going westward, would have been to leave London along the Uxbridge Road. But by a kind of instinct I'd followed my usual route. The fact was I was feeling guilty about the whole business. I wanted to get well away before I headed for Oxfordshire. And in spite of the fact that I'd fixed things so neatly with Hilda and the firm, in spite of the twelve quid in my pocket-book and the suitcase in the back of the car, as I got nearer the crossroads I actually felt a temptation — I knew I wasn't going to succumb to it, and yet it was a temptation — to chuck the whole thing up. I had a sort of feeling that so long as I was driving along my normal beat I was still inside the law. It's not too late, I thought. There's still time to do the respectable thing. I could run into Pudley, for instance, see the manager of Barclay's Bank (he's our agent at Pudley) and find out if any new business had come in. For that matter I could even turn round, go back to Hilda, and make a clean breast of the plot.

I slowed down as I got to the corner. Should I or shouldn't I? For about a second I was really tempted. But no! I tooted the klaxon and swung the car westward, on to the Oxford road.

Well, I'd done it. I was on the forbidden ground. It was true that five miles farther on, if I wanted to, I could turn to the left again and get back to Westerham. But for the moment I was headed westward.

Strictly speaking I was in flight. And what was curious, I was no sooner on the Oxford road than I felt perfectly certain that THEY knew all about it. When I say THEY I mean all the people who wouldn't approve of a trip of this kind and who'd have stopped me if they could — which, I suppose, would include pretty well everybody.

What was more, I actually had a feeling that they were after me already. The whole lot of them! All the people who couldn't understand why a middle-aged man with false teeth should sneak away for a quiet week in the place where he spent his boyhood. And all the mean-minded bastards who COULD understand only too well, and who'd raise heaven and earth to prevent it. They were all on my track. It was as if a huge army were streaming up the road behind me. I seemed to see them in my mind's eye. Hilda was in front, of course, with the kids tagging after her, and Mrs Wheeler driving her forward with a grim, vindictive expression, and Miss Minns rushing along in the rear, with her pince-nez slipping down and a look of distress on her face, like the hen that gets left behind when the others have got hold of the bacon rind. And Sir Herbert Crum and the higher-ups of the Flying Salamander in their Rolls- Royces and Hispano-Suizas. And all the chaps at the office, and all the poor down-trodden pen-pushers from Ellesmere Road and from all such other roads, some of them wheeling prams and mowing- machines and concrete garden-rollers, some of them chugging along in little Austin Sevens. And all the soul-savers and Nosey Parkers, the people whom you've never seen but who rule your destiny all the same, the Home Secretary, Scotland Yard, the Temperance League, the Bank of England, Lord Beaverbrook, Hitler and Stalin on a tandem bicycle, the bench of Bishops, Mussolini, the Pope — they were all of them after me. I could almost hear them shouting:

'There's a chap who thinks he's going to escape! There's a chap who says he won't be streamlined! He's going back to Lower Binfield! After him! Stop him!'

It's queer. The impression was so strong that I actually took a peep through the little window at the back of the car to make sure I wasn't being followed. Guilty conscience, I suppose. But there was nobody. Only the dusty white road and the long line of the elms

dwindling out behind me.

I trod on the gas and the old car rattled into the thirties. A few minutes later I was past the Westerham turning. So that was that. I'd burnt my boats. This was the idea which, in a dim sort of way, had begun to form itself in my mind the day I got my new false teeth.

Part IV

1

I came towards Lower Binfield over Chamford Hill. There are four roads into Lower Binfield, and it would have been more direct to go through Walton. But I'd wanted to come over Chamford Hill, the way we used to go when we biked home from fishing in the Thames. When you get just past the crown of the hill the trees open out and you can see Lower Binfield lying in the valley below you.

It's a queer experience to go over a bit of country you haven't seen in twenty years. You remember it in great detail, and you remember it all wrong. All the distances are different, and the landmarks seem to have moved about. You keep feeling, surely this hill used to be a lot steeper — surely that turning was on the other side of the road? And on the other hand you'll have memories which are perfectly accurate, but which only belong to one particular occasion. You'll remember, for instance, a corner of a field, on a wet day in winter, with the grass so green that it's almost blue, and a rotten gatepost covered with lichen and a cow standing in the grass and looking at you. And you'll go back after twenty years and be surprised because the cow isn't standing in the same place and looking at you with the same expression.

As I drove up Chamford Hill I realized that the picture I'd had of it in my mind was almost entirely imaginary. But it was a fact that certain things had changed. The road was tarmac, whereas in the old days it used to be macadam (I remember the bumpy feeling of it under the bike), and it seemed to have got a lot wider. And there were far less trees. In the old days there used to be huge beeches growing in the hedgerows, and in places their boughs met across the road and made a kind of arch. Now they were all gone. I'd nearly got to the top of the hill when I came on something which was certainly new. To the right of the road there was a whole lot of fake-picturesque houses, with overhanging eaves and rose pergolas and what-not. You know the kind of houses that are just a little too high-class to stand in a row, and so they're dotted about in a kind of colony, with private roads leading up to them. And at the entrance to one of the private roads there was a huge white board which said:

THE KENNELS
PEDIGREE SEALYHAM PUPS
DOGS BOARDED

Surely THAT usen't to be there?

I thought for a moment. Yes, I remembered! Where those houses stood there used to be a little oak plantation, and the trees grew too close together, so that they were very tall and thin, and in spring the ground underneath them used to be smothered in anemones. Certainly there were never any houses as far out of the town as this.

I got to the top of the hill. Another minute and Lower Binfield would be in sight. Lower Binfield! Why should I pretend I wasn't excited? At the very thought of seeing it again an extraordinary feeling that started in my guts crept upwards and did something to my heart. Five seconds more and I'd be seeing it. Yes, here we are! I declutched, trod on the foot-brake, and — Jesus!

Oh, yes, I know you knew what was coming. But *I* didn't. You can say I was a bloody fool not to expect it, and so I was. But it hadn't even occurred to me.

The first question was, where WAS Lower Binfield?

I don't mean that it had been demolished. It had merely been swallowed. The thing I was looking down at was a good-sized manufacturing town. I remember — Gosh, how I remember! and in this case I don't think my memory is far out — what Lower Binfield used to look like from the top of Chamford Hill. I suppose the High Street was about a quarter of a mile long, and except for a few outlying houses the town was roughly the shape of a cross. The chief landmarks were the church tower and the chimney of the brewery. At this moment I couldn't distinguish either of them. All I could see was an enormous river of brand-new houses which flowed along the valley in both directions and half-way up the hills on either side. Over to the right there were what looked like several acres of bright red roofs all exactly alike. A big Council housing estate, by the look of it.

But where was Lower Binfield? Where was the town I used to know? It might have been anywhere. All I knew was that it was buried somewhere in the middle of that sea of bricks. Of the five or six factory chimneys that I could see, I couldn't even make a guess at

which belonged to the brewery. Towards the eastern end of the town there were two enormous factories of glass and concrete. That accounts for the growth of the town, I thought, as I began to take it in. It occurred to me that the population of this place (it used to be about two thousand in the old days) must be a good twenty-five thousand. The only thing that hadn't changed, seemingly, was Binfield House. It wasn't much more than a dot at that distance, but you could see it on the hillside opposite, with the beech trees round it, and the town hadn't climbed that high. As I looked a fleet of black bombing planes came over the hill and zoomed across the town.

I shoved the clutch in and started slowly down the hill. The houses had climbed half-way up it. You know those very cheap small houses which run up a hillside in one continuous row, with the roofs rising one above the other like a flight of steps, all exactly the same. But a little before I got to the houses I stopped again. On the left of the road there was something else that was quite new. The cemetery. I stopped opposite the lych- gate to have a look at it.

It was enormous, twenty acres, I should think. There's always a kind of jumped-up unhomelike look about a new cemetery, with its raw gravel paths and its rough green sods, and the machine-made marble angels that look like something off a wedding-cake. But what chiefly struck me at the moment was that in the old days this place hadn't existed. There was no separate cemetery then, only the churchyard. I could vaguely remember the farmer these fields used to belong to — Blackett, his name was, and he was a dairy- farmer. And somehow the raw look of the place brought it home to me how things have changed. It wasn't only that the town had grown so vast that they needed twenty acres to dump their corpses in. It was their putting the cemetery out here, on the edge of the town. Have you noticed that they always do that nowadays? Every new town puts its cemetery on the outskirts. Shove it away — keep it out of sight! Can't bear to be reminded of death. Even the tombstones tell you the same story. They never say that the chap underneath them 'died', it's always 'passed away' or 'fell asleep'. It wasn't so in the old days. We had our churchyard plumb in the middle of the town, you passed it every day, you saw the spot where your grandfather was lying and where some day you were going to lie yourself. We didn't mind

looking at the dead. In hot weather, I admit, we also had to smell them, because some of the family vaults weren't too well sealed.

I let the car run down the hill slowly. Queer! You can't imagine how queer! All the way down the hill I was seeing ghosts, chiefly the ghosts of hedges and trees and cows. It was as if I was looking at two worlds at once, a kind of thin bubble of the thing that used to be, with the thing that actually existed shining through it. There's the field where the bull chased Ginger Rodgers! And there's the place where the horse-mushrooms used to grow! But there weren't any fields or any bulls or any mushrooms. It was houses, houses everywhere, little raw red houses with their grubby window-curtains and their scraps of back-garden that hadn't anything in them except a patch of rank grass or a few larkspurs struggling among the weeds. And blokes walking up and down, and women shaking out mats, and snotty-nosed kids playing along the pavement. All strangers! They'd all come crowding in while my back was turned. And yet it was they who'd have looked on me as a stranger, they didn't know anything about the old Lower Binfield, they'd never heard of Shooter and Wetherall, or Mr Grimmett and Uncle Ezekiel, and cared less, you bet.

It's funny how quickly one adjusts. I suppose it was five minutes since I'd halted at the top of the hill, actually a bit out of breath at the thought of seeing Lower Binfield again. And already I'd got used to the idea that Lower Binfield had been swallowed up and buried like the lost cities of Peru. I braced up and faced it. After all, what else do you expect? Towns have got to grow, people have got to live somewhere. Besides, the old town hadn't been annihilated. Somewhere or other it still existed, though it had houses round it instead of fields. In a few minutes I'd be seeing it again, the church and the brewery chimney and Father's shop- window and the horse-trough in the market-place. I got to the bottom of the hill, and the road forked. I took the left-hand turning, and a minute later I was lost.

I could remember nothing. I couldn't even remember whether it was hereabouts that the town used to begin. All I knew was that in the old days this street hadn't existed. For hundreds of yards I was running along it — a rather mean, shabby kind of street, with the

houses giving straight on the pavement and here and there a corner grocery or a dingy little pub — and wondering where the hell it led to. Finally I pulled up beside a woman in a dirty apron and no hat who was walking down the pavement. I stuck my head out of the window.

'Beg pardon — can you tell me the way to the market-place?'

She 'couldn't tell'. Answered in an accent you could cut with a spade. Lancashire. There's lots of them in the south of England now. Overflow from the distressed areas. Then I saw a bloke in overalls with a bag of tools coming along and tried again. This time I got the answer in Cockney, but he had to think for a moment.

'Market-place? Market-place? Lessee, now. Oh — you mean the OLE Market?'

I supposed I did mean the Old Market.

'Oh, well — you take the right 'and turning— '

It was a long way. Miles, it seemed to me, though really it wasn't a mile. Houses, shops, cinemas, chapels, football grounds — new, all new. Again I had that feeling of a kind of enemy invasion having happened behind my back. All these people flooding in from Lancashire and the London suburbs, planting themselves down in this beastly chaos, not even bothering to know the chief landmarks of the town by name. But I grasped presently why what we used to call the market-place was now known as the Old Market. There was a big square, though you couldn't properly call it a square, because it was no particular shape, in the middle of the new town, with traffic-lights and a huge bronze statue of a lion worrying an eagle — the war-memorial, I suppose. And the newness of everything! The raw, mean look! Do you know the look of these new towns that have suddenly swelled up like balloons in the last few years, Hayes, Slough, Dagenham, and so forth? The kind of chilliness, the bright red brick everywhere, the temporary-looking shop-windows full of cut-price chocolates and radio parts. It was just like that. But suddenly I swung into a street with older houses. Gosh! The High Street!

After all my memory hadn't played tricks on me. I knew every inch of it now. Another couple of hundred yards and I'd be in the market-place. The old shop was down the other end of the High Street. I'd go there after lunch — I was going to put up at the

George. And every inch a memory! I knew all the shops, though all the names had changed, and the stuff they dealt in had mostly changed as well. There's Lovegrove's! And there's Todd's! And a big dark shop with beams and dormer windows. Used to be Lilywhite's the draper's, where Elsie used to work. And Grimmett's! Still a grocer's apparently. Now for the horse-trough in the market-place. There was another car ahead of me and I couldn't see.

It turned aside as we got into the market-place. The horse-trough was gone.

There was an A.A. man on traffic-duty where it used to stand. He gave a glance at the car, saw that it hadn't the A.A. sign, and decided not to salute.

I turned the corner and ran down to the George. The horse-trough being gone had thrown me out to such an extent that I hadn't even looked to see whether the brewery chimney was still standing. The George had altered too, all except the name. The front had been dolled up till it looked like one of those riverside hotels, and the sign was different. It was curious that although till that moment I hadn't thought of it once in twenty years, I suddenly found that I could remember every detail of the old sign, which had swung there ever since I could remember. It was a crude kind of picture, with St George on a very thin horse trampling on a very fat dragon, and in the corner, though it was cracked and faded, you could read the little signature, 'Wm. Sandford, Painter & Carpenter'. The new sign was kind of artistic-looking. You could see it had been painted by a real artist. St George looked a regular pansy. The cobbled yard, where the farmers' traps used to stand and the drunks used to puke on Saturday nights, had been enlarged to about three times its size and concreted over, with garages all round it. I backed the car into one of the garages and got out.

One thing I've noticed about the human mind is that it goes in jerks. There's no emotion that stays by you for any length of time. During the last quarter of an hour I'd had what you could fairly describe as a shock. I'd felt it almost like a sock in the guts when I stopped at the top of Chamford Hill and suddenly realized that Lower Binfield had vanished, and there'd been another little stab when I saw the horse-trough was gone. I'd driven through the streets

with a gloomy, Ichabod kind of feeling. But as I stepped out of the car and hitched my trilby hat on to my head I suddenly felt that it didn't matter a damn. It was such a lovely sunny day, and the hotel yard had a kind of summery look, with its flowers in green tubs and what-not. Besides, I was hungry and looking forward to a spot of lunch.

I strolled into the hotel with a consequential kind of air, with the boots, who'd already nipped out to meet me, following with the suitcase. I felt pretty prosperous, and probably I looked it. A solid business man, you'd have said, at any rate if you hadn't seen the car. I was glad I'd come in my new suit — blue flannel with a thin white stripe, which suits my style. It has what the tailor calls a 'reducing effect'. I believe that day I could have passed for a stockbroker. And say what you like it's a very pleasant thing, on a June day when the sun's shining on the pink geraniums in the window-boxes, to walk into a nice country hotel with roast lamb and mint sauce ahead of you. Not that it's any treat to me to stay in hotels, Lord knows I see all too much of them — but ninety- nine times out of a hundred it's those godless 'family and commercial' hotels, like Rowbottom's, where I was supposed to be staying at present, the kind of places where you pay five bob for bed and breakfast, and the sheets are always damp and the bath taps never work. The George had got so smart I wouldn't have known it. In the old days it had hardly been a hotel, only a pub, though it had a room or two to let and used to do a farmers' lunch (roast beef and Yorkshire, suet dumpling and Stilton cheese) on market days. It all seemed different except for the public bar, which I got a glimpse of as I went past, and which looked the same as ever. I went up a passage with a soft carpet, and hunting prints and copper warming-pans and such-like junk hanging on the walls. And dimly I could remember the passage as it used to be, the hollowed- out flags underfoot, and the smell of plaster mixed up with the smell of beer. A smart-looking young woman, with frizzed hair and a black dress, who I suppose was the clerk or something, took my name at the office.

'You wish for a room, sir? Certainly, sir. What name shall I put down, sir?'

I paused. After all, this was my big moment. She'd be pretty sure

to know the name. It isn't common, and there are a lot of us in the churchyard. We were one of the old Lower Binfield families, the Bowlings of Lower Binfield. And though in a way it's painful to be recognized, I'd been rather looking forward to it.

'Bowling,' I said very distinctly. 'Mr George Bowling.'

'Bowling, sir. B-O-A — oh! B-O-W? Yes, sir. And you are coming from London, sir?'

No response. Nothing registered. She'd never heard of me. Never heard of George Bowling, son of Samuel Bowling — Samuel Bowling who, damn it! had had his half-pint in this same pub every Saturday for over thirty years.

2

The dining-room had changed, too.

I could remember the old room, though I'd never had a meal there, with its brown mantelpiece and its bronzy-yellow wallpaper — I never knew whether it was meant to be that colour, or had just got like that from age and smoke — and the oil-painting, also by Wm. Sandford, Painter & Carpenter, of the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. Now they'd got the place up in a kind of medieval style. Brick fireplace with inglenooks, a huge beam across the ceiling, oak panelling on the walls, and every bit of it a fake that you could have spotted fifty yards away. The beam was genuine oak, came out of some old sailing-ship, probably, but it didn't hold anything up, and I had my suspicions of the panels as soon as I set eyes on them. As I sat down at my table, and the slick young waiter came towards me fiddling with his napkin, I tapped the wall behind me. Yes! Thought so! Not even wood. They fake it up with some kind of composition and then paint it over.

But the lunch wasn't bad. I had my lamb and mint sauce, and I had a bottle of some white wine or other with a French name which made me belch a bit but made me feel happy. There was one other person lunching there, a woman of about thirty with fair hair, looked like a widow. I wondered whether she was staying at the George, and made vague plans to get off with her. It's funny how your feelings get mixed up. Half the time I was seeing ghosts. The past was sticking out into the present, Market day, and the great solid farmers throwing their legs under the long table, with their hobnails grating on the stone floor, and working their way through a quantity of beef and dumpling you wouldn't believe the human frame could hold. And then the little tables with their shiny white cloths and wine-glasses and folded napkins, and the faked-up decorations and the general expensiveness would blot it out again. And I'd think, 'I've got twelve quid and a new suit. I'm little Georgie Bowling, and who'd have believed I'd ever come back to Lower Binfield in my own motorcar?' And then the wine would send a kind of warm feeling upwards from my stomach, and I'd run an eye over the

woman with fair hair and mentally take her clothes off.

It was the same in the afternoon as I lay about in the lounge — fake-medieval again, but it had streamlined leather armchairs and glass-topped tables — with some brandy and a cigar. I was seeing ghosts, but on the whole I was enjoying it. As a matter of fact I was a tiny bit boozed and hoping that the woman with fair hair would come in so that I could scrape acquaintance. She never showed up, however. It wasn't till nearly tea-time that I went out.

I strolled up to the market-place and turned to the left. The shop! It was funny. Twenty-one years ago, the day of Mother's funeral, I'd passed it in the station fly, and seen it all shut up and dusty, with the sign burnt off with a plumber's blowflame, and I hadn't cared a damn. And now, when I was so much further away from it, when there were actually details about the inside of the house that I couldn't remember, the thought of seeing it again did things to my heart and guts. I passed the barber's shop. Still a barber's, though the name was different. A warm, soapy, almondy smell came out of the door. Not quite so good as the old smell of bay rum and latakia. The shop — our shop — was twenty yards farther down. Ah!

An arty-looking sign — painted by the same chap as did the one at the George, I shouldn't wonder — hanging out over the pavement:

WENDY'S TEASHOP
MORNING COFFEE
HOME-MADE CAKES

A tea-shop!

I suppose if it had been a butcher's or an ironmonger's, or anything else except a seedsman's, it would have given me the same kind of jolt. It's absurd that because you happen to have been born in a certain house you should feel that you've got rights over it for the rest of your life, but so you do. The place lived up to its name, all right. Blue curtains in the window, and a cake or two standing about, the kind of cake that's covered with chocolate and has just one walnut stuck somewhere on the top. I went in. I didn't really want any tea, but I had to see the inside.

They'd evidently turned both the shop and what used to be the parlour into tea-rooms. As for the yard at the back where the dustbin used to stand and Father's little patch of weeds used to grow, they'd

paved it all over and dolled it up with rustic tables and hydrangeas and things. I went through into the parlour. More ghosts! The piano and the texts on the wall, and the two lumpy old red armchairs where Father and Mother used to sit on opposite sides of the fireplace, reading the People and the News of the World on Sunday afternoons! They'd got the place up in an even more antique style than the George, with gateleg tables and a hammered-iron chandelier and pewter plates hanging on the wall and what-not. Do you notice how dark they always manage to make it in these arty tea-rooms? It's part of the antiqueness, I suppose. And instead of an ordinary waitress there was a young woman in a kind of print wrapper who met me with a sour expression. I asked her for tea, and she was ten minutes getting it. You know the kind of tea — China tea, so weak that you could think it's water till you put the milk in. I was sitting almost exactly where Father's armchair used to stand. I could almost hear his voice, reading out a 'piece', as he used to call it, from the People, about the new flying machines, or the chap who was swallowed by a whale, or something. It gave me a most peculiar feeling that I was there on false pretences and they could kick me out if they discovered who I was, and yet simultaneously I had a kind of longing to tell somebody that I'd been born here, that I belonged to this house, or rather (what I really felt) that the house belonged to me. There was nobody else having tea. The girl in the print wrapper was hanging about by the window, and I could see that if I hadn't been there she'd have been picking her teeth. I bit into one of the slices of cake she'd brought me. Home-made cakes! You bet they were. Home-made with margarine and egg-substitute. But in the end I had to speak. I said:

'Have you been in Lower Binfield long?'

She started, looked surprised, and didn't answer. I tried again:

'I used to live in Lower Binfield myself, a good while ago.'

Again no answer, or only something that I couldn't hear. She gave me a kind of frigid look and then gazed out of the window again. I saw how it was. Too much of a lady to go in for back-chat with customers. Besides, she probably thought I was trying to get off with her. What was the good of telling her I'd been born in the house? Even if she believed it, it wouldn't interest her. She'd never heard of

Samuel Bowling, Corn & Seed Merchant. I paid the bill and cleared out.

I wandered up to the church. One thing that I'd been half afraid of, and half looking forward to, was being recognized by people I used to know. But I needn't have worried, there wasn't a face I knew anywhere in the streets. It seemed as if the whole town had got a new population.

When I got to the church I saw why they'd had to have a new cemetery. The churchyard was full to the brim, and half the graves had names on them that I didn't know. But the names I did know were easy enough to find. I wandered round among the graves. The sexton had just scythed the grass and there was a smell of summer even there. They were all alone, all the older folks I'd known. Gravitt the butcher, and Winkle the other seedsman, and Trew, who used to keep the George, and Mrs Wheeler from the sweet-shop — they were all lying there. Shooter and Wetherall were opposite one another on either side of the path, just as if they were still singing at each other across the aisle. So Wetherall hadn't got his hundred after all. Born in '43 and 'departed his life' in 1928. But he'd beaten Shooter, as usual. Shooter died in '26. What a time old Wetherall must have had those last two years when there was nobody to sing against him! And old Grimmett under a huge marble thing shaped rather like a veal-and-ham pie, with an iron railing round it, and in the corner a whole batch of Simmonses under cheap little crosses. All gone to dust. Old Hodges with his tobacco-coloured teeth, and Lovegrove with his big brown beard, and Lady Rampling with the coachman and the tiger, and Harry Barnes's aunt who had a glass eye, and Brewer of the Mill Farm with his wicked old face like something carved out of a nut — nothing left of any of them except a slab of stone and God knows what underneath.

I found Mother's grave, and Father's beside it. Both of them in pretty good repair. The sexton had kept the grass clipped. Uncle Ezekiel's was a little way away. They'd levelled a lot of the older graves, and the old wooden head-pieces, the ones that used to look like the end of a bedstead, had all been cleared away. What do you feel when you see your parents' graves after twenty years? I don't know what you ought to feel, but I'll tell you what I did feel, and that

was nothing. Father and Mother have never faded out of my mind. It's as if they existed somewhere or other in a kind of eternity, Mother behind the brown teapot, Father with his bald head a little mealy, and his spectacles and his grey moustache, fixed for ever like people in a picture, and yet in some way alive. Those boxes of bones lying in the ground there didn't seem to have anything to do with them. Merely, as I stood there, I began to wonder what you feel like when you're underground, whether you care much and how soon you cease to care, when suddenly a heavy shadow swept across me and gave me a bit of a start.

I looked over my shoulder. It was only a bombing plane which had flown between me and the sun. The place seemed to be creeping with them.

I strolled into the church. For almost the first time since I got back to Lower Binfield I didn't have the ghostly feeling, or rather I had it in a different form. Because nothing had changed. Nothing, except that all the people were gone. Even the hassocks looked the same. The same dusty, sweetish corpse-smell. And by God! the same hole in the window, though, as it was evening and the sun was round the other side, the spot of light wasn't creeping up the aisle. They'd still got pews — hadn't changed over to chairs. There was our pew, and there was the one in front where Wetherall used to bellow against Shooter. Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan! And the worn stones in the aisle where you could still half-read the epitaphs of the blokes who lay beneath them. I squatted down to have a look at the one opposite our pew. I still knew the readable bits of it by heart. Even the pattern they made seemed to have stuck in my memory. Lord knows how often I'd read them during the sermon.

Here. . . . . ..fon, Gent.,
of this parif h. . . . . ..his juft &
upright. . . . . ..
. . . .
To his. . . . . manifold private bene
volences he added a diligent. . . . . .
. . . . . .

. . . . . beloved wife
Amelia, by. . . . . ..iffue feven
daughters. . . . . ..

I remembered how the long S's used to puzzle me as a kid. Used to wonder whether in the old days they pronounced their S's as F's, and if so, why.

There was a step behind me. I looked up. A chap in a cassock was standing over me. It was the vicar.

But I mean THE vicar! It was old Betterton, who'd been vicar in the old days — not, as a matter of fact, ever since I could remember, but since 1904 or thereabouts. I recognized him at once, though his hair was quite white.

He didn't recognize me. I was only a fat tripper in a blue suit doing a bit of sightseeing. He said good evening and promptly started on the usual line of talk — was I interested in architecture, remarkable old building this, foundations go back to Saxon times and so on and so forth. And soon he was doddering round, showing me the sights, such as they were — Norman arch leading into the vestry, brass effigy of Sir Roderick Bone who was killed at the Battle of Newbury. And I followed him with the kind of whipped-dog air that middle-aged businessmen always have when they're being shown round a church or a picture-gallery. But did I tell him that I knew it all already? Did I tell him that I was Georgie Bowling, son of Samuel Bowling — he'd have remembered my father even if he didn't remember me — and that I'd not only listened to his sermons for ten years and gone to his Confirmation classes, but even belonged to the Lower Binfield Reading Circle and had a go at Sesame and Lilies just to please him? No, I didn't. I merely followed him round, making the kind of mumble that you make when somebody tells you that this or that is five hundred years old and you can't think what the hell to say except that it doesn't look it. From the moment that I set eyes on him I'd decided to let him think I was a stranger. As soon as I decently could I dropped sixpence in the Church Expenses box and bunked.

But why? Why not make contact, now that at last I'd found somebody I knew?

Because the change in his appearance after twenty years had actually frightened me. I suppose you think I mean that he looked older. But he didn't! He looked YOUNGER. And it suddenly taught me something about the passage of time.

I suppose old Betterton would be about sixty-five now, so that when I last saw him he'd have been about forty-five — my own present age. His hair was white now, and the day he buried Mother it was a kind of streaky grey, like a shaving-brush. And yet as soon as I saw him the first thing that struck me was that he looked younger. I'd thought of him as an old, old man, and after all he wasn't so very old. As a boy, it occurred to me, all people over forty had seemed to me just worn-out old wrecks, so old that there was hardly any difference between them. A man of forty-five had seemed to me older than this old dodderer of sixty-five seemed now. And Christ! I was forty-five myself. It frightened me.

So that's what I look like to chaps of twenty, I thought as I made off between the graves. Just a poor old hulk. Finished. It was curious. As a rule I don't care a damn about my age. Why should I? I'm fat, but I'm strong and healthy. I can do everything I want to do. A rose smells the same to me now as it did when I was twenty. Ah, but do I smell the same to the rose? Like an answer a girl, might have been eighteen, came up the churchyard lane. She had to pass within a yard or two of me. I saw the look she gave me, just a tiny momentary look. No, not frightened, nor hostile. Only kind of wild, remote, like a wild animal when you catch its eye. She'd been born and grown up in those twenty years while I was away from Lower Binfield. All my memories would have been meaningless to her. Living in a different world from me, like an animal.

I went back to the George. I wanted a drink, but the bar didn't open for another half-hour. I hung about for a bit, reading a Sporting and Dramatic of the year before, and presently the fair- haired dame, the one I thought might be a widow, came in. I had a sudden desperate yearning to get off with her. Wanted to show myself that there's life in the old dog yet, even if the old dog does have to wear false teeth. After all, I thought, if she's thirty and I'm forty-five, that's fair enough. I was standing in front of the empty fireplace, making believe to warm my bum, the way you do on a summer day.

In my blue suit I didn't look so bad. A bit fat, no doubt, but distingue. A man of the world. I could pass for a stockbroker. I put on my toniest accent and said casually:

'Wonderful June weather we're having.'

It was a pretty harmless remark, wasn't it? Nor in the same class as 'Haven't I met you somewhere before?'

But it wasn't a success. She didn't answer, merely lowered for about half a second the paper she was reading and gave me a look that would have cracked a window. It was awful. She had one of those blue eyes that go into you like a bullet. In that split second I saw how hopelessly I'd got her wrong. She wasn't the kind of widow with dyed hair who likes being taken out to dance-halls. She was upper-middle-class, probably an admiral's daughter, and been to one of those good schools where they play hockey. And I'd got myself wrong too. New suit or no new suit, I COULDN'T pass for a stockbroker. Merely looked like a commercial traveller who'd happened to get hold of a bit of dough. I sneaked off to the private bar to have a pint or two before dinner.

The beer wasn't the same. I remember the old beer, the good Thames Valley beer that used to have a bit of taste in it because it was made out of chalky water. I asked the barmaid:

'Have Bessemers' still got the brewery?'

'Bessemers? Oo, NO, sir! They've gorn. Oo, years ago — long before we come 'ere.'

She was a friendly sort, what I call the elder-sister type of barmaid, thirty-fivish, with a mild kind of face and the fat arms they develop from working the beer-handle. She told me the name of the combine that had taken over the brewery. I could have guessed it from the taste, as a matter of fact. The different bars ran round in a circle with compartments in between. Across in the public bar two chaps were playing a game of darts, and in the Jug and Bottle there was a chap I couldn't see who occasionally put in a remark in a sepulchral kind of voice. The barmaid leaned her fat elbows on the bar and had a talk with me. I ran over the names of the people I used to know, and there wasn't a single one of them that she'd heard of. She said she'd only been in Lower Binfield five years. She hadn't even heard of old Trew, who used to have the George in the old days.

‘I used to live in Lower Binfield myself,’ I told her. ‘A good while back, it was, before the war.’

‘Before the war? Well, now! You don’t look that old.’

‘See some changes, I dessay,’ said the chap in the Jug and Bottle.

‘The town’s grown,’ I said. ‘It’s the factories, I suppose.’

‘Well, of course they mostly work at the factories. There’s the gramophone works, and then there’s Truefitt Stockings. But of course they’re making bombs nowadays.’

I didn’t altogether see why it was of course, but she began telling me about a young fellow who worked at Truefitt’s factory and sometimes came to the George, and he’d told her that they were making bombs as well as stockings, the two, for some reason I didn’t understand, being easy to combine. And then she told me about the big military aerodrome near Walton — that accounted for the bombing planes I kept seeing — and the next moment we’d started talking about the war, as usual. Funny. It was exactly to escape the thought of war that I’d come here. But how can you, anyway? It’s in the air you breathe.

I said it was coming in 1941. The chap in the Jug and Bottle said he reckoned it was a bad job. The barmaid said it gave her the creeps. She said:

‘It doesn’t seem to do much good, does it, after all said and done? And sometimes I lie awake at night and hear one of those great things going overhead, and think to myself, “Well, now, suppose that was to drop a bomb right down on top of me!” And all this A.R.P., and Miss Todgers, she’s the Air Warden, telling you it’ll be all right if you keep your head and stuff the windows up with newspaper, and they say they’re going to dig a shelter under the Town Hall. But the way I look at it is, how could you put a gas- mask on a baby?’

The chap in the Jug and Bottle said he’d read in the paper that you ought to get into a hot bath till it was all over. The chaps in the public bar overheard this and there was a bit of a by-play on the subject of how many people could get into the same bath, and both of them asked the barmaid if they could share her bath with her. She told them not to get saucy, and then she went up the other end of the bar and hauled them out a couple more pints of old and mild. I took a suck at my beer. It was poor stuff. Bitter, they call it. And it was

bitter, right enough, too bitter, a kind of sulphurous taste. Chemicals. They say no English hops ever go into beer nowadays, they're all made into chemicals. Chemicals, on the other hand, are made into beer. I found myself thinking about Uncle Ezekiel, what he'd have said to beer like this, and what he'd have said about A.R.P. and the buckets of sand you're supposed to put the thermite bombs out with. As the barmaid came back to my side of the bar I said:

'By the way, who's got the Hall nowadays?'

We always used to call it the Hall, though its name was Binfield House. For a moment she didn't seem to understand.

'The Hall, sir?'

''E means Binfield 'Ouse,' said the chap in the Jug and Bottle.

'Oh, Binfield House! Oo, I thought you meant the Memorial Hall. It's Dr Merrall's got Binfield House now.'

'Dr Merrall?'

'Yes, sir. He's got more than sixty patients up there, they say.'

'Patients? Have they turned it into a hospital, or something?'

'Well — it's not what you'd call an ordinary hospital. More of a sanatorium. It's mental patients, reely. What they call a Mental Home.'

A loony-bin!

But after all, what else could you expect?

3

I crawled out of bed with a bad taste in my mouth and my bones creaking.

The fact was that, what with a bottle of wine at lunch and another at dinner, and several pints in between, besides a brandy or two, I'd had a bit too much to drink the day before. For several minutes I stood in the middle of the carpet, gazing at nothing in particular and too done-in to make a move. You know that god-awful feeling you get sometimes in the early morning. It's a feeling chiefly in your legs, but it says to you clearer than any words could do, 'Why the hell do you go on with it? Chuck it up, old chap! Stick your head in the gas oven!'

Then I shoved my teeth in and went to the window. A lovely June day, again, and the sun was just beginning to slant over the roofs and hit the house-fronts on the other side of the street. The pink geraniums in the window-boxes didn't look half bad. Although it was only about half past eight and this was only a side-street off the market-place there was quite a crowd of people coming and going. A stream of clerkly-looking chaps in dark suits with dispatch-cases were hurrying along, all in the same direction, just as if this had been a London suburb and they were scooting for the Tube, and the schoolkids were straggling up towards the market- place in twos and threes. I had the same feeling that I'd had the day before when I saw the jungle of red houses that had swallowed Chamford Hill. Bloody interlopers! Twenty thousand gate-crashers who didn't even know my name. And here was all this new life swarming to and fro, and here was I, a poor old fatty with false teeth, watching them from a window and mumbling stuff that nobody wanted to listen to about things that happened thirty and forty years ago. Christ! I thought, I was wrong to think that I was seeing ghosts. I'm the ghost myself. I'm dead and they're alive.

But after breakfast — haddock, grilled kidneys, toast and marmalade, and a pot of coffee — I felt better. The frozen dame wasn't breakfasting in the dining-room, there was a nice summery feeling in the air, and I couldn't get rid of the feeling that in that blue

flannel suit of mine I looked just a little bit distingue. By God! I thought, if I'm a ghost, I'll BE a ghost! I'll walk. I'll haunt the old places. And maybe I can work a bit of black magic on some of these bastards who've stolen my home town from me.

I started out, but I'd got no farther than the market-place when I was pulled up by something I hadn't expected to see. A procession of about fifty school-kids was marching down the street in column of fours — quite military, they looked — with a grim-looking woman marching alongside of them like a sergeant-major. The leading four were carrying a banner with a red, white, and blue border and BRITONS PREPARE on it in huge letters. The barber on the corner had come out on to his doorstep to have a look at them. I spoke to him. He was a chap with shiny black hair and a dull kind of face.

'What are those kids doing?'

'It's this here air-raid practice,' he said vaguely. 'This here A.R.P. Kind of practising, like. That's Miss Todgers, that is.'

I might have guessed it was Miss Todgers. You could see it in her eye. You know the kind of tough old devil with grey hair and a kippered face that's always put in charge of Girl Guide detachments, Y.W.C.A. hostels, and whatnot. She had on a coat and skirt that somehow looked like a uniform and gave you a strong impression that she was wearing a Sam Browne belt, though actually she wasn't. I knew her type. Been in the W.A.A.C.s in the war, and never had a day's fun since. This A.R.P. was jam to her. As the kids swung past I heard her letting out at them with the real sergeant-major yell, 'Monica! Lift your feet up!' and I saw that the rear four had another banner with a red, white, and blue border, and in the middle

WE ARE READY. ARE YOU?

'What do they want to march them up and down for?' I said to the barber.

'I dunno. I s'pose it's kind of propaganda, like.'

I knew, of course. Get the kids war-minded. Give us all the feeling that there's no way out of it, the bombers are coming as sure as Christmas, so down to the cellar you go and don't argue. Two of the great black planes from Walton were zooming over the eastern end of the town. Christ! I thought, when it starts it won't surprise us any more than a shower of rain. Already we're listening for the first

bomb. The barber went on to tell me that thanks to Miss Todgers's efforts the school-kids had been served with their gas-masks already.

Well, I started to explore the town. Two days I spent just wandering round the old landmarks, such of them as I could identify. And all that time I never ran across a soul that knew me. I was a ghost, and if I wasn't actually invisible, I felt like it.

It was queer, queerer than I can tell you. Did you ever read a story of H.G. Wells's about a chap who was in two places at once — that's to say, he was really in his own home, but he had a kind of hallucination that he was at the bottom of the sea? He'd been walking round his room, but instead of the tables and chairs he'd see the wavy waterweed and the great crabs and cuttlefish reaching out to get him. Well, it was just like that. For hours on end I'd be walking through a world that wasn't there. I'd count my paces as I went down the pavement and think, 'Yes, here's where so-and- so's field begins. The hedge runs across the street and slap through that house. That petrol pump is really an elm tree. And here's the edge of the allotments. And this street (it was a dismal little row of semi-detached houses called Cumberledge Road, I remember) is the lane where we used to go with Katie Simmons, and the nut-bushes grew on both sides.' No doubt I got the distances wrong, but the general directions were right. I don't believe anyone who hadn't happened to be born here would have believed that these streets were fields as little as twenty years ago. It was as though the countryside had been buried by a kind of volcanic eruption from the outer suburbs. Nearly the whole of what used to be old Brewer's land had been swallowed up in the Council housing estate. The Mill Farm had vanished, the cow-pond where I caught my first fish had been drained and filled up and built over, so that I couldn't even say exactly where it used to stand. It was all houses, houses, little red cubes of houses all alike, with privet hedges and asphalt paths leading up to the front door. Beyond the Council Estate the town thinned out a bit, but the jerry-builders were doing their best. And there were little knots of houses dumped here and there, wherever anybody had been able to buy a plot of land, and the makeshift roads leading up to the houses, and empty lots with builders' boards, and bits of ruined fields covered with thistles and tin cans.

In the centre of the old town, on the other hand, things hadn't changed much, so far as buildings went. A lot of the shops were still doing the same line of trade, although the names were different. Lillywhite's was still a draper's, but it didn't look too prosperous. What used to be Gravitt's, the butcher's, was now a shop that sold radio parts. Mother Wheeler's little window had been bricked over. Grimmett's was still a grocer's, but it had been taken over by the International. It gives you an idea of the power of these big combines that they could even swallow up a cute old skinflint like Grimmett. But from what I know of him — not to mention that slap-up tombstone in the churchyard — I bet he got out while the going was good and had ten to fifteen thousand quid to take to heaven with him. The only shop that was still in the same hands was Sarazins', the people who'd ruined Father. They'd swollen to enormous dimensions, and they had another huge branch in the new part of the town. But they'd turned into a kind of general store and sold furniture, drugs, hardware, and ironmongery as well as the old garden stuff.

For the best part of two days I was wandering round, not actually groaning and rattling a chain, but sometimes feeling that I'd like to. Also I was drinking more than was good for me. Almost as soon as I got to Lower Binfield I'd started on the booze, and after that the pubs never seemed to open quite early enough. My tongue was always hanging out of my mouth for the last half-hour before opening time.

Mind you, I wasn't in the same mood all the time. Sometimes it seemed to me that it didn't matter a damn if Lower Binfield had been obliterated. After all, what had I come here for, except to get away from the family? There was no reason why I shouldn't do all the things I wanted to do, even go fishing if I felt like it. On the Saturday afternoon I even went to the fishing-tackle shop in the High Street and bought a split-cane rod (I'd always pined for a split-cane rod as a boy — it's a little bit dearer than a green- heart) and hooks and gut and so forth. The atmosphere of the shop cheered me up. Whatever else changes, fishing-tackle doesn't — because, of course, fish don't change either. And the shopman didn't see anything funny in a fat middle-aged man buying a fishing-rod. On the contrary, we had a little talk about the fishing in the Thames and the big chub somebody

had landed the year before last on a paste made of brown bread, honey, and minced boiled rabbit. I even — though I didn't tell him what I wanted them for, and hardly even admitted it to myself — bought the strongest salmon trace he'd got, and some No. 5 roach-hooks, with an eye to those big carp at Binfield House, in case they still existed.

Most of Sunday morning I was kind of debating it in my mind — should I go fishing, or shouldn't I? One moment I'd think, why the hell not, and the next moment it would seem to me that it was just one of those things that you dream about and don't ever do. But in the afternoon I got the car out and drove down to Burford Weir. I thought I'd just have a look at the river, and tomorrow, if the weather was right, maybe I'd take my new fishing-rod and put on the old coat and grey flannel bags I had in my suitcase, and have a good day's fishing. Three or four days, if I felt like it.

I drove over Chamford Hill. Down at the bottom the road turns off and runs parallel to the towpath. I got out of the car and walked. Ah! A knot of little red and white bungalows had sprung up beside the road. Might have expected it, of course. And there seemed to be a lot of cars standing about. As I got nearer the river I came into the sound — yes, plonk-tiddle-tiddle-plonk! — yes, the sound of gramphones.

I rounded the bend and came in sight of the towpath. Christ! Another jolt. The place was black with people. And where the water-meadows used to be — tea-houses, penny-in-the-slot machines, sweet kiosks, and chaps selling Walls' Ice-Cream. Might as well have been at Margate. I remember the old towpath. You could walk along it for miles, and except for the chaps at the lock gates, and now and again a bargeman mooching along behind his horse, you'd meet never a soul. When we went fishing we always had the place to ourselves. Often I've sat there a whole afternoon, and a heron might be standing in the shallow water fifty yards up the bank, and for three or four hours on end there wouldn't be anyone passing to scare him away. But where had I got the idea that grown-up men don't go fishing? Up and down the bank, as far as I could see in both directions, there was a continuous chain of men fishing, one every five yards. I wondered how the hell they could all have got there until it struck me that they must be some fishing-club or other. And the

river was crammed with boats — rowing-boats, canoes, punts, motor-launches, full of young fools with next to nothing on, all of them screaming and shouting and most of them with a gramphone aboard as well. The floats of the poor devils who were trying to fish rocked up and down on the wash of the motor-boats.

I walked a little way. Dirty, choppy water, in spite of the fine day. Nobody was catching anything, not even minnows. I wondered whether they expected to. A crowd like that would be enough to scare every fish in creation. But actually, as I watched the floats rocking up and down among the ice-cream tubs and the paper bags, I doubted whether there were any fish to catch. Are there still fish in the Thames? I suppose there must be. And yet I'll swear the Thames water isn't the same as it used to be. Its colour is quite different. Of course you think that's merely my imagination, but I can tell you it isn't so. I know the water has changed. I remember the Thames water as it used to be, a kind of luminous green that you could see deep into, and the shoals of dace cruising round the reeds. You couldn't see three inches into the water now. It's all brown and dirty, with a film of oil in it from the motor-boats, not to mention the fag-ends and the paper bags.

After a bit I turned back. Couldn't stand the noise of the gramophones any longer. Of course it's Sunday, I thought. Mightn't be so bad on a week-day. But after all, I knew I'd never come back. God rot them, let 'em keep their bloody river. Wherever I go fishing it won't be in the Thames.

The crowds swarmed past me. Crowds of bloody aliens, and nearly all of them young. Boys and girls larking along in couples. A troop of girls came past, wearing bell-bottomed trousers and white caps like the ones they wear in the American Navy, with slogans printed on them. One of them, seventeen she might have been, had PLEASE KISS ME. I wouldn't have minded. On an impulse I suddenly turned aside and weighed myself on one of the penny-in-the-slot machines. There was a clicking noise somewhere inside it — you know those machines that tell your fortune as well as your weight — and a typewritten card came sliding out.

'You are the possessor of exceptional gifts,' I read, 'but owing to excessive modesty you have never received your reward. Those

about you underrate your abilities. You are too fond of standing aside and allowing others to take the credit for what you have done yourself . You are sensitive, affectionate, and always loyal to your friends. You are deeply attractive to the opposite sex. Your worst fault is generosity. Persevere, for you will rise high!

'Weight: 14 stone 11 pounds.'

I'd put on four pounds in the last three days, I noticed. Must have been the booze.

4

I drove back to the George, dumped the car in the garage, and had a late cup of tea. As it was Sunday the bar wouldn't open for another hour or two. In the cool of the evening I went out and strolled up in the direction of the church.

I was just crossing the market-place when I noticed a woman walking a little way ahead of me. As soon as I set eyes on her I had a most peculiar feeling that I'd seen her somewhere before. You know that feeling. I couldn't see her face, of course, and so far as her back view went there was nothing I could identify and yet I could have sworn I knew her.

She went up the High Street and turned down one of the side-streets to the right, the one where Uncle Ezekiel used to have his shop. I followed. I don't quite know why — partly curiosity, perhaps, and partly as a kind of precaution. My first thought had been that here at last was one of the people I'd known in the old days in Lower Binfield, but almost at the same moment it struck me that it was just as likely that she was someone from West Bletchley. In that case I'd have to watch my step, because if she found out I was here she'd probably split to Hilda. So I followed cautiously, keeping at a safe distance and examining her back view as well as I could. There was nothing striking about it. She was a tallish, fattish woman, might have been forty or fifty, in a rather shabby black dress. She'd no hat on, as though she'd just slipped out of her house for a moment, and the way she walked gave you the impression that her shoes were down at heel. All in all, she looked a bit of a slut. And yet there was nothing to identify, only that vague something which I knew I'd seen before. It was something in her movements, perhaps. Presently she got to a little sweet and paper shop, the kind of little shop that always keeps open on a Sunday. The woman who kept it was standing in the doorway, doing something to a stand of postcards. My woman stopped to pass the time of day.

I stopped too, as soon as I could find a shop window which I could pretend to be looking into. It was a plumber's and decorator's, full of samples of wallpaper and bathroom fittings and things. By this

time I wasn't fifteen yards away from the other two. I could hear their voices cooing away in one of those meaningless conversations that women have when they're just passing the time of day. 'Yes, that's jest about it. That's jest where it is. I said to him myself, I said, "Well, what else do you expect?" I said. It don't seem right, do it? But what's the use, you might as well talk to a stone. It's a shame!' and so on and so forth. I was getting warmer. Obviously my woman was a small shopkeeper's wife, like the other. I was just wondering whether she mightn't be one of the people I'd known in Lower Binfield after all, when she turned almost towards me and I saw three-quarters of her face. And Jesus Christ! It was Elsie!

Yes, it was Elsie. No chance of mistake. Elsie! That fat hag!

It gave me such a shock — not, mind you, seeing Elsie, but seeing what she'd grown to be like — that for a moment things swam in front of my eyes. The brass taps and ballstops and porcelain sinks and things seemed to fade away into the distance, so that I both saw them and didn't see them. Also for a moment I was in a deadly funk that she might recognize me. But she'd looked bang in my face and hadn't made any sign. A moment more, and she turned and went on. Again I followed. It was dangerous, she might spot I was following her, and that might start her wondering who I was, but I just had to have another look at her. The fact was that she exercised a kind of horrible fascination on me. In a manner of speaking I'd been watching her before, but I watched her with quite different eyes now.

It was horrible, and yet I got a kind of scientific kick out of studying her back view. It's frightening, the things that twenty- four years can do to a woman. Only twenty-four years, and the girl I'd known, with her milky-white skin and red mouth and kind of dull-gold hair, had turned into this great round-shouldered hag, shambling along on twisted heels. It made me feel downright glad I'm a man. No man ever goes to pieces quite so completely as that. I'm fat, I grant you. I'm the wrong shape, if you like. But at least I'm A shape. Elsie wasn't even particularly fat, she was merely shapeless. Ghastly things had happened to her hips. As for her waist, it had vanished. She was just a kind of soft lumpy cylinder, like a bag of meal.

I followed her a long way, out of the old town and through a lot of mean little streets I didn't know. Finally she turned in at the doorway

of another shop. By the way she went in, it was obviously her own. I stopped for a moment outside the window. 'G. Cookson, Confectioner and Tobacconist.' So Elsie was Mrs Cookson. It was a mangy little shop, much like the other one where she'd stopped before, but smaller and a lot more flyblown. Didn't seem to sell anything except tobacco and the cheapest kinds of sweets. I wondered what I could buy that would take a minute or two. Then I saw a rack of cheap pipes in the window, and I went in. I had to brace my nerve up a little before I did it, because there'd need to be some hard lying if by any chance she recognized me.

She'd disappeared into the room behind the shop, but she came back as I tapped on the counter. So we were face to face. Ah! no sign. Didn't recognize me. Just looked at me the way they do. You know the way small shopkeepers look at their customers — utter lack of interest.

It was the first time I'd seen her full face, and though I half expected what I saw, it gave me almost as big a shock as that first moment when I'd recognized her. I suppose when you look at the face of someone young, even of a child, you ought to be able to foresee what it'll look like when it's old. It's all a question of the shape of the bones. But if it had ever occurred to me, when I was twenty and she was twenty-two, to wonder what Elsie would look like at forty-seven, it wouldn't have crossed my mind that she could ever look like THAT. The whole face had kind of sagged, as if it had somehow been drawn downwards. Do you know that type of middle-aged woman that has a face just like a bulldog? Great underhung jaw, mouth turned down at the corners, eyes sunken, with pouches underneath. Exactly like a bulldog. And yet it was the same face, I'd have known it in a million. Her hair wasn't completely grey, it was a kind of dirty colour, and there was much less of it than there used to be. She didn't know me from Adam. I was just a customer, a stranger, an uninteresting fat man. It's queer what an inch or two of fat can do. I wondered whether I'd changed even more than she had, or whether it was merely that she wasn't expecting to see me, or whether — what was the likeliest of all — she's simply forgotten my existence.

'Devening,' she said, in that listless way they have.

‘I want a pipe,’ I said flatly. ‘A briar pipe.’

‘A pipe. Now jest lemme see. I know we gossome pipes somewhere. Now where did I — ah! ‘Ere we are.’

She took a cardboard box full of pipes from somewhere under the counter. How bad her accent had got! Or maybe I was just imagining that, because my own standards had changed? But no, she used to be so ‘superior’, all the girls at Lilywhite’s were so ‘superior’, and she’d been a member of the vicar’s Reading Circle. I swear she never used to drop her aitches. It’s queer how these women go to pieces once they’re married. I fiddled among the pipes for a moment and pretended to look them over. Finally I said I’d like one with an amber mouthpiece.

‘Amber? I don’t know as we got any— ‘ she turned towards the back of the shop and called: ‘Ge-orge!’

So the other bloke’s name was George too. A noise that sounded something like ‘Ur!’ came from the back of the shop.

‘Ge-orge! Where ju put that other box of pipes?’

George came in. He was a small stoutish chap, in shirtsleeves, with a bald head and a big gingery-coloured soupstrainer moustache. His jaw was working in a ruminative kind of way. Obviously he’d been interrupted in the middle of his tea. The two of them started poking round in search of the other box of pipes. It was about five minutes before they ran it to earth behind some bottles of sweets. It’s wonderful, the amount of litter they manage to accumulate in these frowsy little shops where the whole stock is worth about fifty quid.

I watched old Elsie poking about among the litter and mumbling to herself. Do you know the kind of shuffling, round-shouldered movements of an old woman who’s lost something? No use trying to describe to you what I felt. A kind of cold, deadly desolate feeling. You can’t conceive it unless you’ve had it. All I can say is, if there was a girl you used to care about twenty-five years ago, go and have a look at her now. Then perhaps you’ll know what I felt.

But as a matter of fact, the thought that was chiefly in my mind was how differently things turn out from what you expect. The times I’d had with Elsie! The July nights under the chestnut trees! Wouldn’t you think it would leave some kind of after-effect behind? Who’d have thought the time would ever come when there would be

just no feeling whatever between us? Here was I and here was she, our bodies might be a yard apart, and we were just as much strangers as though we'd never met. As for her, she didn't even recognize me. If I told her who I was, very likely she wouldn't remember. And if she did remember, what would she feel? Just nothing. Probably wouldn't even be angry because I'd done the dirty on her. It was as if the whole thing had never happened.

And on the other hand, who'd ever have foreseen that Elsie would end up like this? She'd seemed the kind of girl who's bound to go to the devil. I know there'd been at least one other man before I had met her, and it's safe to bet there were others between me and the second George. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that she'd had a dozen altogether. I treated her badly, there's no question about that, and many a time it had given me a bad half-hour. She'll end up on the streets, I used to think, or stick her head in the gas oven. And sometimes I felt I'd been a bit of a bastard, but other times I reflected (what was true enough) that if it hadn't been me it would have been somebody else. But you see the way things happen, the kind of dull pointless way. How many women really end up on the streets? A damn sight more end up at the mangle. She hadn't gone to the bad, or to the good either. Just ended up like everybody else, a fat old woman muddling about a frowsy little shop, with a gingery-moustached George to call her own. Probably got a string of kids as well. Mrs George Cookson. Lived respected and died lamented — and might die this side of the bankruptcy-court, if she was lucky.

They'd found the box of pipes. Of course there weren't any with amber mouthpieces among them.

'I don't know as we got any amber ones just at present, sir. Not amber. We gossome nice vulcanite ones.'

'I wanted an amber one,' I said.

'We gossome nice pipes 'ere.' She held one out. 'That's a nice pipe, now. 'Alf a crown, that one is.'

I took it. Our fingers touched. No kick, no reaction. The body doesn't remember. And I suppose you think I bought the pipe, just for old sake's sake, to put half a crown in Elsie's pocket. But not a bit of it. I didn't want the thing. I don't smoke a pipe. I'd merely been making a pretext to come into the shop. I turned it over in my

fingers and then put it down on the counter.

'Doesn't matter, I'll leave it,' I said. 'Give me a small Players'.'

Had to buy something, after all that fuss. George the second, or maybe the third or fourth, routed out a packet of Players', still munching away beneath his moustache. I could see he was sulky because I'd dragged him away from his tea for nothing. But it seemed too damn silly to waste half a crown. I cleared out and that was the last I ever saw of Elsie.

I went back to the George and had dinner. Afterwards I went out with some vague idea of going to the pictures, if they were open, but instead I landed up in one of the big noisy pubs in the new part of the town. There I ran into a couple of chaps from Staffordshire who were travelling in hardware, and we got talking about the state of trade, and playing darts and drinking Guinness. By closing time they were both so boozed that I had to take them home in a taxi, and I was a bit under the weather myself, and the next morning I woke up with a worse head than ever.

5

But I had to see the pool at Binfield House.

I felt really bad that morning. The fact was that ever since I struck Lower Binfield I'd been drinking almost continuously from every opening time to every closing time. The reason, though it hadn't occurred to me till this minute, was that really there'd been nothing else to do. That was all my trip had amounted to so far — three days on the booze.

The same as the other morning, I crawled over to the window and watched the bowler hats and school caps hustling to and fro. My enemies, I thought. The conquering army that's sacked the town and covered the ruins with fag-ends and paper bags. I wondered why I cared. You think, I dare say, that if it had given me a jolt to find Lower Binfield swollen into a kind of Dagenham, it was merely because I don't like to see the earth getting fuller and country turning into town. But it isn't that at all. I don't mind towns growing, so long as they do grow and don't merely spread like gravy over a tablecloth. I know that people have got to have somewhere to live, and that if a factory isn't in one place it'll be in another. As for the picturesqueness, the sham countrified stuff, the oak panels and pewter dishes and copper warming-pans and what- not, it merely gives me the sick. Whatever we were in the old days, we weren't picturesque. Mother would never have seen any sense in the antiques that Wendy had filled our house with. She didn't like gateleg tables — she said they 'caught your legs'. As for pewter, she wouldn't have it in the house. 'Nasty greasy stuff', she called it. And yet, say what you like, there was something that we had in those days and haven't got now, something that you probably can't have in a streamlined milk-bar with the radio playing. I'd come back to look for it, and I hadn't found it. And yet somehow I half believe in it even now, when I hadn't yet got my teeth in and my belly was crying out for an aspirin and a cup of tea.

And that started me thinking again about the pool at Binfield House. After seeing what they'd done to the town, I'd had a feeling you could only describe as fear about going to see whether the pool

still existed. And yet it might, there was no knowing. The town was smothered under red brick, our house was full of Wendy and her junk, the Thames was poisoned with motor-oil and paper bags. But maybe the pool was still there, with the great black fish still cruising round it. Maybe, even, it was still hidden in the woods and from that day to this no one had discovered it existed. It was quite possible. It was a very thick bit of wood, full of brambles and rotten brushwood (the beech trees gave way to oaks round about there, which made the undergrowth thicker), the kind of place most people don't care to penetrate. Queerer things have happened.

I didn't start out till late afternoon. It must have been about half past four when I took the car out and drove on to the Upper Binfield road. Half-way up the hill the houses thinned out and stopped and the beech trees began. The road forks about there and I took the right-hand fork, meaning to make a detour round and come back to Binfield House on the road. But presently I stopped to have a look at the copse I was driving through. The beech trees seemed just the same. Lord, how they were the same! I backed the car on to a bit of grass beside the road, under a fall of chalk, and got out and walked. Just the same. The same stillness, the same great beds of rustling leaves that seem to go on from year to year without rotting. Not a creature stirring except the small birds in the tree-tops which you couldn't see. It wasn't easy to believe that that great noisy mess of a town was barely three miles away. I began to make my way through the little copse, in the direction of Binfield House. I could vaguely remember how the paths went. And Lord! Yes! The same chalk hollow where the Black Hand went and had catapult shots, and Sid Lovegrove told us how babies were born, the day I caught my first fish, pretty near forty years ago!

As the trees thinned out again you could see the other road and the wall of Binfield House. The old rotting wooden fence was gone, of course, and they'd put up a high brick wall with spikes on top, such as you'd expect to see round a loony-bin. I'd puzzled for some time about how to get into Binfield House until finally it had struck me that I'd only to tell them my wife was mad and I was looking for somewhere to put her. After that they'd be quite ready to show me round the grounds. In my new suit I probably looked prosperous

enough to have a wife in a private asylum. It wasn't till I was actually at the gate that it occurred to me to wonder whether the pool was still inside the grounds.

The old grounds of Binfield House had covered fifty acres, I suppose, and the grounds of the loony-bin weren't likely to be more than five or ten. They wouldn't want a great pool of water for the loonies to drown themselves in. The lodge, where old Hodges used to live, was the same as ever, but the yellow brick wall and the huge iron gates were new. From the glimpse I got through the gates I wouldn't have known the place. Gravel walks, flower-beds, lawns, and a few aimless-looking types wandering about — loonies, I suppose. I strolled up the road to the right. The pool — the big pool, the one where I used to fish — was a couple of hundred yards behind the house. It might have been a hundred yards before I got to the corner of the wall. So the pool was outside the grounds. The trees seemed to have got much thinner. I could hear children's voices. And Gosh! there was the pool.

I stood for a moment, wondering what had happened to it. Then I saw what it was — all the trees were gone from round its edge. It looked all bare and different, in fact it looked extraordinarily like the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens. Kids were playing all round the edge, sailing boats and paddling, and a few rather older kids were rushing about in those little canoes which you work by turning a handle. Over to the left, where the old rotting boat- house used to stand among the reeds, there was a sort of pavilion and a sweet kiosk, and a huge white notice saying UPPER BINFIELD MODEL YACHT CLUB.

I looked over to the right. It was all houses, houses, houses. One might as well have been in the outer suburbs. All the woods that used to grow beyond the pool, and grew so thick that they were like a kind of tropical jungle, had been shaved flat. Only a few clumps of trees still standing round the houses. There were arty- looking houses, another of those sham-Tudor colonies like the one I'd seen the first day at the top of Chamford Hill, only more so. What a fool I'd been to imagine that these woods were still the same! I saw how it was. There was just the one tiny bit of copse, half a dozen acres perhaps, that hadn't been cut down, and it was pure chance that I'd walked

through it on my way here. Upper Binfield, which had been merely a name in the old days, had grown into a decent-sized town. In fact it was merely an outlying chunk of Lower Binfield.

I wandered up to the edge of the pool. The kids were splashing about and making the devil of a noise. There seemed to be swarms of them. The water looked kind of dead. No fish in it now. There was a chap standing watching the kids. He was an oldish chap with a bald head and a few tufts of white hair, and pince-nez and very sunburnt face. There was something vaguely queer about his appearance. He was wearing shorts and sandals and one of those celanese shirts open at the neck, I noticed, but what really struck me was the look in his eye. He had very blue eyes that kind of twinkled at you from behind his spectacles. I could see that he was one of those old men who've never grown up. They're always either health-food cranks or else they have something to do with the Boy Scouts — in either case they're great ones for Nature and the open air. He was looking at me as if he'd like to speak.

'Upper Binfield's grown a great deal,' I said.

He twinkled at me.

'Grown! My dear sir, we never allow Upper Binfield to grow. We pride ourselves on being rather exceptional people up here, you know. Just a little colony of us all by ourselves. No interlopers — te-hee!'

'I mean compared with before the war,' I said. 'I used to live here as a boy.'

'Oh-ah. No doubt. That was before my time, of course. But the Upper Binfield Estate is something rather special in the way of building estates, you know. Quite a little world of its own. All designed by young Edward Watkin, the architect. You've heard of him, of course. We live in the midst of Nature up here. No connexion with the town down there' — he waved a hand in the direction of Lower Binfield— 'the dark satanic mills — te-hee!'

He had a benevolent old chuckle, and a way of wrinkling his face up, like a rabbit. Immediately, as though I'd asked him, he began telling me all about the Upper Binfield Estate and young Edward Watkin, the architect, who had such a feeling for the Tudor, and was such a wonderful fellow at finding genuine Elizabethan beams in old

farmhouses and buying them at ridiculous prices. And such an interesting young fellow, quite the life and soul of the nudist parties. He repeated a number of times that they were very exceptional people in Upper Binfield, quite different from Lower Binfield, they were determined to enrich the countryside instead of defiling it (I'm using his own phrase), and there weren't any public houses on the estate.

'They talk of their Garden Cities. But we call Upper Binfield the Woodland City — te-hee! Nature!' He waved a hand at what was left of the trees. 'The primeval forest brooding round us. Our young people grow up amid surroundings of natural beauty. We are nearly all of us enlightened people, of course. Would you credit that three-quarters of us up here are vegetarians? The local butchers don't like us at all — te-hee! And some quite eminent people live here. Miss Helena Thurloe, the novelist — you've heard of her, of course. And Professor Woad, the psychic research worker. Such a poetic character! He goes wandering out into the woods and the family can't find him at mealtimes. He says he's walking among the fairies. Do you believe in fairies? I admit — te-hee! — I am just a wee bit sceptical. But his photographs are most convincing.'

I began to wonder whether he was someone who'd escaped from Binfield House. But no, he was sane enough, after a fashion. I knew the type. Vegetarianism, simple life, poetry, nature-worship, roll in the dew before breakfast. I'd met a few of them years ago in Ealing. He began to show me round the estate. There was nothing left of the woods. It was all houses, houses — and what houses! Do you know these faked-up Tudor houses with the curly roofs and the buttresses that don't buttress anything, and the rock-gardens with concrete bird-baths and those red plaster elves you can buy at the florists'? You could see in your mind's eye the awful gang of food-cranks and spook-hunters and simple-lifers with 1,000 pounds a year that lived there. Even the pavements were crazy. I didn't let him take me far. Some of the houses made me wish I'd got a hand-grenade in my pocket. I tried to damp him down by asking whether people didn't object to living so near the lunatic asylum, but it didn't have much effect. Finally I stopped and said:

'There used to be another pool, besides the big one. It can't be far

from here.'

'Another pool? Oh, surely not. I don't think there was ever another pool.'

'They may have drained it off,' I said. 'It was a pretty deep pool. It would leave a big pit behind.'

For the first time he looked a bit uneasy. He rubbed his nose.

'Oh-ah. Of course, you must understand our life up here is in some ways primitive. The simple life, you know. We prefer it so. But being so far from the town has its inconveniences, of course. Some of our sanitary arrangements are not altogether satisfactory. The dust-cart only calls once a month, I believe.'

'You mean they've turned the pool into a rubbish-dump?'

'Well, there IS something in the nature of a— ' he shied at the word rubbish-dump. 'We have to dispose of tins and so forth, of course. Over there, behind that clump of trees.'

We went across there. They'd left a few trees to hid it. But yes, there it was. It was my pool, all right. They'd drained the water off. It made a great round hole, like an enormous well, twenty or thirty feet deep. Already it was half full of tin cans.

I stood looking at the tin cans.

'It's a pity they drained it,' I said. 'There used to be some big fish in that pool.'

'Fish? Oh, I never heard anything about that. Of course we could hardly have a pool of water here among the houses. The mosquitoes, you know. But it was before my time.'

'I suppose these houses have been built a good long time?' I said.

'Oh — ten or fifteen years, I think.'

'I used to know this place before the war,' I said. 'It was all woods then. There weren't any houses except Binfield House. But that little bit of copse over there hasn't changed. I walked through it on my way here.'

'Ah, that! That is sacrosanct. We have decided never to build in it. It is sacred to the young people. Nature, you know.' He twinkled at me, a kind of roguish look, as if he was letting me into a little secret: 'We call it the Pixy Glen.'

The Pixy Glen. I got rid of him, went back to the car and drove down to Lower Binfield. The Pixy Glen. And they'd filled my pool

up with tin cans. God rot them and bust them! Say what you like — call it silly, childish, anything — but doesn't it make you puke sometimes to see what they're doing to England, with their bird-baths and their plaster gnomes, and their pixies and tin cans, where the beech woods used to be?

Sentimental, you say? Anti-social? Oughtn't to prefer trees to men? I say it depends what trees and what men. Not that there's anything one can do about it, except to wish them the pox in their guts.

One thing, I thought as I drove down the hill, I'm finished with this notion of getting back into the past. What's the good of trying to revisit the scenes of your boyhood? They don't exist. Coming up for air! But there isn't any air. The dustbin that we're in reaches up to the stratosphere. All the same, I didn't particularly care. After all, I thought, I've still got three days left. I'd have a bit of peace and quiet, and stop bothering about what they'd done to Lower Binfield. As for my idea of going fishing — that was off, of course. Fishing, indeed! At my age! Really, Hilda was right.

I dumped the car in the garage of the George and walked into the lounge. It was six o'clock. Somebody had switched on the wireless and the news-broadcast was beginning. I came through the door just in time to hear the last few words of an S.O.S. And it gave me a bit of a jolt, I admit. For the words I heard were:

' — where his wife, Hilda Bowling, is seriously ill.'

The next instant the plummy voice went on: 'Here is another S.O.S. Will Percival Chute, who was last heard of— ', but I didn't wait to hear any more. I just walked straight on. What made me feel rather proud, when I thought it over afterwards, was that when I heard those words come out of the loudspeaker I never turned an eyelash. Not even a pause in my step to let anyone know that I was George Bowling, whose wife Hilda Bowling was seriously ill. The landlord's wife was in the lounge, and she knew my name was Bowling, at any rate she'd seen it in the register. Otherwise there was nobody there except a couple of chaps who were staying at the George and who didn't know me from Adam. But I kept my head. Not a sign to anyone. I merely walked on into the private bar, which had just opened, and ordered my pint as usual.

I had to think it over. By the time I'd drunk about half the pint I began to get the bearings of the situation. In the first place, Hilda WASN'T ill, seriously or otherwise. I knew that. She'd been perfectly well when I came away, and it wasn't the time of the year for 'flu or anything of that kind. She was shamming. Why?

Obviously it was just another of her dodges. I saw how it was. She'd got wind somehow — trust Hilda! — that I wasn't really at Birmingham, and this was just her way of getting me home. Couldn't bear to think of me any longer with that other woman. Because of course she'd take it for granted that I was with a woman. Can't imagine any other motive. And naturally she assumed that I'd come rushing home as soon as I heard she was ill.

But that's just where you've got it wrong, I thought to myself as I finished off the pint. I'm too cute to be caught that way. I remembered the dodges she'd pulled before, and the extraordinary trouble she'll take to catch me out. I've even known her, when I'd been on some journey she was suspicious about, check it all up with a Bradshaw and a road-map, just to see whether I was telling the truth about my movements. And then there was that time when she followed me all the way to Colchester and suddenly burst in on me at the Temperance Hotel. And that time, unfortunately, she happened to be right — at least, she wasn't, but there were circumstances which made it look as if she was. I hadn't the slightest belief that she was ill. In fact, I knew she wasn't, although I couldn't say exactly how.

I had another pint and things looked better. Of course there was a row coming when I got home, but there'd have been a row anyway. I've got three good days ahead of me, I thought. Curiously enough, now that the things I'd come to look for had turned out not to exist, the idea of having a bit of holiday appealed to me all the more. Being away from home — that was the great thing. Peace perfect peace with loved ones far away, as the hymn puts it. And suddenly I decided that I WOULD have a woman if I felt like it. It would serve Hilda right for being so dirty-minded, and besides, where's the sense of being suspected if it isn't true?

But as the second pint worked inside me, the thing began to amuse me. I hadn't fallen for it, but it was damned ingenious all the same. I wondered how she'd managed about the S.O.S. I've no idea

what the procedure is. Do you have to have a doctor's certificate, or do you just send your name in? I felt pretty sure it was the Wheeler woman who'd put her up to it. It seemed to me to have the Wheeler touch.

But all the same, the cheek of it! The lengths that women will go! Sometimes you can't help kind of admiring them.

6

After breakfast I strolled out into the market-place. It was a lovely morning, kind of cool and still, with a pale yellow light like white wine playing over everything. The fresh smell of the morning was mixed up with the smell of my cigar. But there was a zooming noise from behind the houses, and suddenly a fleet of great black bombers came whizzing over. I looked up at them. They seemed to be bang overhead.

The next moment I heard something. And at the same moment, if you'd happened to be there, you'd have seen an interesting instance of what I believe is called conditioned reflex. Because what I'd heard — there wasn't any question of mistake — was the whistle of a bomb. I hadn't heard such a thing for twenty years, but I didn't need to be told what it was. And without taking any kind of thought I did the right thing. I flung myself on my face.

After all I'm glad you didn't see me. I don't suppose I looked dignified. I was flattened out on the pavement like a rat when it squeezes under a door. Nobody else had been half as prompt. I'd acted so quickly that in the split second while the bomb was whistling down I even had time to be afraid that it was all a mistake and I'd made a fool of myself for nothing.

But the next moment — ah!

BOOM-BRRRRR!

A noise like the Day of Judgment, and then a noise like a ton of coal falling on to a sheet of tin. That was falling bricks. I seemed to kind of melt into the pavement. 'It's started,' I thought. 'I knew it! Old Hitler didn't wait. Just sent his bombers across without warning.'

And yet here's a peculiar thing. Even in the echo of that awful, deafening crash, which seemed to freeze me up from top to toe, I had time to think that there's something grand about the bursting of a big projectile. What does it sound like? It's hard to say, because what you hear is mixed up with what you're frightened of. Mainly it gives you a vision of bursting metal. You seem to see great sheets of iron bursting open. But the peculiar thing is the feeling it gives you of

being suddenly shoved up against reality. It's like being woken up by somebody shying a bucket of water over you. You're suddenly dragged out of your dreams by a clang of bursting metal, and it's terrible, and it's real.

There was a sound of screams and yells, and also of car brakes being suddenly jammed on. The second bomb which I was waiting for didn't fall. I raised my head a little. On every side people seemed to be rushing round and screaming. A car was skidding diagonally across the road, I could hear a woman's voice shrieking, 'The Germans! The Germans!' To the right I had a vague impression of a man's round white face, rather like a wrinkled paper bag, looking down at me. He was kind of dithering:

'What is it? What's happened? What are they doing?'

'It's started,' I said. 'That was a bomb. Lie down.'

But still the second bomb didn't fall. Another quarter of a minute or so, and I raised my head again. Some of the people were still rushing about, others were standing as if they'd been glued to the ground. From somewhere behind the houses a huge haze of dust had risen up, and through it a black jet of smoke was streaming upwards. And then I saw an extraordinary sight. At the other end of the market-place the High Street rises a little. And down this little hill a herd of pigs was galloping, a sort of huge flood of pig-faces. The next moment, of course, I saw what it was. It wasn't pigs at all, it was only the schoolchildren in their gas- masks. I suppose they were bolting for some cellar where they'd been told to take cover in case of air-raids. At the back of them I could even make out a taller pig who was probably Miss Todgers. But I tell you for a moment they looked exactly like a herd of pigs.

I picked myself up and walked across the market-place. People were calming down already, and quite a little crowd had begun to flock towards the place where the bomb had dropped.

Oh, yes, you're right, of course. It wasn't a German aeroplane after all. The war hadn't broken out. It was only an accident. The planes were flying over to do a bit of bombing practice — at any rate they were carrying bombs — and somebody had put his hands on the lever by mistake. I expect he got a good ticking off for it. By the time that the postmaster had rung up London to ask whether there was a

war on, and been told that there wasn't, everyone had grasped that it was an accident. But there'd been a space of time, something between a minute and five minutes, when several thousand people believed we were at war. A good job it didn't last any longer. Another quarter of an hour and we'd have been lynching our first spy.

I followed the crowd. The bomb had dropped in a little side-street off the High Street, the one where Uncle Ezekiel used to have his shop. It wasn't fifty yards from where the shop used to be. As I came round the corner I could hear voices murmuring 'Oo-oo!' — a kind of awed noise, as if they were frightened and getting a big kick out of it. Luckily I got there a few minutes before the ambulance and the fire-engine, and in spite of the fifty people or so that had already collected I saw everything.

At first sight it looked as if the sky had been raining bricks and vegetables. There were cabbage leaves everywhere. The bomb had blown a greengrocer's shop out of existence. The house to the right of it had part of its roof blown off, and the roof beams were on fire, and all the houses round had been more or less damaged and had their windows smashed. But what everyone was looking at was the house on the left. Its wall, the one that joined the greengrocer's shop, was ripped off as neatly as if someone had done it with a knife. And what was extraordinary was that in the upstairs rooms nothing had been touched. It was just like looking into a doll's house. Chests-of-drawers, bedroom chairs, faded wallpaper, a bed not yet made, and a jerry under the bed — all exactly as it had been lived in, except that one wall was gone. But the lower rooms had caught the force of the explosion. There was a frightful smashed-up mess of bricks, plaster, chair-legs, bits of a varnished dresser, rags of tablecloth, piles of broken plates, and chunks of a scullery sink. A jar of marmalade had rolled across the floor, leaving a long streak of marmalade behind, and running side by side with it there was a ribbon of blood. But in among the broken crockery there was lying a leg. Just a leg, with the trouser still on it and a black boot with a Wood-Milne rubber heel. This was what people were oo-ing and ah-ing at.

I had a good look at it and took it in. The blood was beginning to get mixed up with the marmalade. When the fire-engine arrived I

cleared off to the George to pack my bag.

This finishes me with Lower Binfield, I thought. I'm going home. But as a matter of fact I didn't shake the dust off my shoes and leave immediately. One never does. When anything like that happens, people always stand about and discuss it for hours. There wasn't much work done in the old part of Lower Binfield that day, everyone was too busy talking about the bomb, what it sounded like and what they thought when they heard it. The barmaid at the George said it fair gave her the shudders. She said she'd never sleep sound in her bed again, and what did you expect, it just showed that with these here bombs you never knew. A woman had bitten off part of her tongue owing to the jump the explosion gave her. It turned out that whereas at our end of the town everyone had imagined it was a German air-raid, everyone at the other end had taken it for granted that it was an explosion at the stocking factory. Afterwards (I got this out of the newspaper) the Air Ministry sent a chap to inspect the damage, and issued a report saying that the effects of the bomb were 'disappointing'. As a matter of fact it only killed three people, the greengrocer, Perrott his name was, and an old couple who lived next door. The woman wasn't much smashed about, and they identified the old man by his boots, but they never found a trace of Perrott. Not even a trouser-button to read the burial service over.

In the afternoon I paid my bill and hooked it. I didn't have much more than three quid left after I'd paid the bill. They know how to cut it out of you these dolled-up country hotels, and what with drinks and other odds and ends I'd been shying money about pretty freely. I left my new rod and the rest of the fishing tackle in my bedroom. Let 'em keep it. No use to me. It was merely a quid that I'd chucked down the drain to teach myself a lesson. And I'd learnt the lesson all right. Fat men of forty-five can't go fishing. That kind of thing doesn't happen any longer, it's just a dream, there'll be no more fishing this side of the grave.

It's funny how things sink into you by degrees. What had I really felt when the bomb exploded? At the actual moment, of course, it scared the wits out of me, and when I saw the smashed-up house and the old man's leg I'd had the kind of mild kick that you get from seeing a street-accident. Disgusting, of course. Quite enough to make

me fed-up with this so-called holiday. But it hadn't really made much impression.

But as I got clear of the outskirts of Lower Binfield and turned the car eastward, it all came back to me. You know how it is when you're in a car alone. There's something either in the hedges flying past you, or in the throb of the engine, that gets your thoughts running in a certain rhythm. You have the same feeling sometimes when you're in the train. It's a feeling of being able to see things in better perspective than usual. All kinds of things that I'd been doubtful about I felt certain about now. To begin with, I'd come to Lower Binfield with a question in my mind. What's ahead of us? Is the game really up? Can we get back to the life we used to live, or is it gone for ever? Well, I'd had my answer. The old life's finished, and to go back to Lower Binfield, you can't put Jonah back into the whale. I KNEW, though I don't expect you to follow my train of thought. And it was a queer thing I'd done coming here. All those years Lower Binfield had been tucked away somewhere or other in my mind, a sort of quiet corner that I could step back into when I felt like it, and finally I'd stepped back into it and found that it didn't exist. I'd chucked a pineapple into my dreams, and lest there should be any mistake the Royal Air Force had followed up with five hundred pounds of T.N.T.

War is coming. 1941, they say. And there'll be plenty of broken crockery, and little houses ripped open like packing-cases, and the guts of the chartered accountant's clerk plastered over the piano that he's buying on the never-never. But what does that kind of thing matter, anyway? I'll tell you what my stay in Lower Binfield had taught me, and it was this. IT'S ALL GOING TO HAPPEN. All the things you've got at the back of your mind, the things you're terrified of, the things that you tell yourself are just a nightmare or only happen in foreign countries. The bombs, the food-queues, the rubber truncheons, the barbed wire, the coloured shirts, the slogans, the enormous faces, the machine-guns squirting out of bedroom windows. It's all going to happen. I know it — at any rate, I knew it then. There's no escape. Fight against it if you like, or look the other way and pretend not to notice, or grab your spanner and rush out to do a bit of face-smashing along with the others. But there's no way

out. It's just something that's got to happen.

I trod on the gas, and the old car whizzed up and down the little hills, and the cows and elm trees and fields of wheat rushed past till the engine was pretty nearly red-hot. I felt in much the same mood as I'd felt that day in January when I was coming down the Strand, the day I got my new false teeth. It was as though the power of prophecy had been given me. It seemed to me that I could see the whole of England, and all the people in it, and all the things that'll happen to all of them. Sometimes, of course, even then, I had a doubt or two. The world is very large, that's a thing you notice when you're driving about in a car, and in a way it's reassuring. Think of the enormous stretches of land you pass over when you cross a corner of a single English county. It's like Siberia. And the fields and beech spinneys and farmhouses and churches, and the villages with their little grocers' shops and the parish hall and the ducks walking across the green. Surely it's too big to be changed? Bound to remain more or less the same. And presently I struck into outer London and followed the Uxbridge Road as far as Southall. Miles and miles of ugly houses, with people living dull decent lives inside them. And beyond it London stretching on and on, streets, squares, back-alleys, tenements, blocks of flats, pubs, fried-fish shops, picture-houses, on and on for twenty miles, and all the eight million people with their little private lives which they don't want to have altered. The bombs aren't made that could smash it out of existence. And the chaos of it! The privateness of all those lives! John Smith cutting out the football coupons, Bill Williams swapping stories in the barber's. Mrs Jones coming home with the supper beer. Eight million of them! Surely they'll manage somehow, bombs or no bombs, to keep on with the life that they've been used to?

Illusion! Baloney! It doesn't matter how many of them there are, they're all for it. The bad times are coming, and the streamlined men are coming too. What's coming afterwards I don't know, it hardly even interests me. I only know that if there's anything you care a curse about, better say good-bye to it now, because everything you've ever known is going down, down, into the muck, with the machine-guns rattling all the time.

But when I got back to the suburb my mood suddenly changed.

It suddenly struck me — and it hadn't even crossed my mind till that moment — that Hilda might really be ill after all.

That's the effect of environment, you see. In Lower Binfield I'd taken it absolutely for granted that she wasn't ill and was merely shamming in order to get me home. It had seemed natural at the time, I don't know why. But as I drove into West Bletchley and the Hesperides Estate closed round me like a kind of red-brick prison, which is what it is, the ordinary habits of thought came back. I had this kind of Monday morning feeling when everything seems bleak and sensible. I saw what bloody rot it was, this business that I'd wasted the last five days on. Sneaking off to Lower Binfield to try and recover the past, and then, in the car coming home, thinking a lot of prophetic baloney about the future. The future! What's the future got to do with chaps like you and me? Holding down our jobs — that's our future. As for Hilda, even when the bombs are dropping she'll be still thinking about the price of butter.

And suddenly I saw what a fool I'd been to think she'd do a thing like that. Of course the S.O.S. wasn't a fake! As though she'd have the imagination! It was just the plain cold truth. She wasn't shamming at all, she was really ill. And Gosh! at this moment she might be lying somewhere in ghastly pain, or even dead, for all I knew. The thought sent a most horrible pang of fright through me, a sort of dreadful cold feeling in my guts. I whizzed down Ellesmere Road at nearly forty miles an hour, and instead of taking the car to the lock-up garage as usual I stopped outside the house and jumped out.

So I'm fond of Hilda after all, you say! I don't know exactly what you mean by fond. Are you fond of your own face? Probably not, but you can't imagine yourself without it. It's part of you. Well, that's how I felt about Hilda. When things are going well I can't stick the sight of her, but the thought that she might be dead or even in pain sent the shivers through me.

I fumbled with the key, got the door open, and the familiar smell of old mackintoshes hit me.

'Hilda!' I yelled. 'Hilda!'

No answer. For a moment I was yelling 'Hilda! Hilda!' into utter silence, and some cold sweat started out on my backbone. Maybe

they carted her away to hospital already — maybe there was a corpse lying upstairs in the empty house.

I started to dash up the stairs, but at the same moment the two kids, in their pyjamas, came out of their rooms on either side of the landing. It was eight or nine o'clock, I suppose — at any rate the light was just beginning to fail. Lorna hung over the banisters.

'Oo, Daddy! Oo, it's Daddy! Why have you come back today? Mummy said you weren't coming till Friday.'

'Where's your mother?' I said.

'Mummy's out. She went out with Mrs Wheeler. Why have you come home today, Daddy?'

'Then your mother hasn't been ill?'

'No. Who said she'd been ill? Daddy! Have you been in Birmingham?'

'Yes. Get back to bed, now. You'll be catching cold.'

'But where's our presents, Daddy?'

'What presents?'

'The presents you've bought us from Birmingham.'

'You'll see them in the morning,' I said.

'Oo, Daddy! Can't we see them tonight?'

'No. Dry up. Get back to bed or I'll wallop the pair of you.'

So she wasn't ill after all. She HAD been shamming. And really I hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. I turned back to the front door, which I'd left open, and there, as large as life, was Hilda coming up the garden path.

I looked at her as she came towards me in the last of the evening light. It was queer to think that less than three minutes earlier I'd been in the devil of a stew, with actual cold sweat on my backbone, at the thought that she might be dead. Well, she wasn't dead, she was just as usual. Old Hilda with her thin shoulders and her anxious face, and the gas bill and the school-fees, and the mackintoshy smell and the office on Monday — all the bedrock facts that you invariably come back to, the eternal verities as old Porteous calls them. I could see that Hilda wasn't in too good a temper. She darted me a little quick look, like she does sometimes when she's got something on her mind, the kind of look some little thin animal, a weasel for instance, might give you. She didn't seem surprised to see me back,

however.

'Oh, so you're back already, are you?' she said.

It seemed pretty obvious that I was back, and I didn't answer. She didn't make any move to kiss me.

'There's nothing for your supper,' she went on promptly. That's Hilda all over. Always manages to say something depressing the instant you set foot inside the house. 'I wasn't expecting you. You'll just have to have bread and cheese — but I don't think we've got any cheese.'

I followed her indoors, into the smell of mackintoshes. We went into the sitting-room. I shut the door and switched on the light. I meant to get my say in first, and I knew it would make things better if I took a strong line from the start.

'Now', I said, 'what the bloody hell do you mean by playing that trick on me?'

She'd just laid her bag down on top of the radio, and for a moment she looked genuinely surprised.

'What trick? What do you mean?'

'Sending out that S.O.S.!'

'What S.O.S.? What are you TALKING about, George?'

'Are you trying to tell me you didn't get them to send out an S.O.S. saying you were seriously ill?'

'Of course I didn't! How could I? I wasn't ill. What would I do a thing like that for?'

I began to explain, but almost before I began I saw what had happened. It was all a mistake. I'd only heard the last few words of the S.O.S. and obviously it was some other Hilda Bowling. I suppose there'd be scores of Hilda Bowlings if you looked the name up in the directory. It just was the kind of dull stupid mistake that's always happening. Hilda hadn't even showed that little bit of imagination I'd credited her with. The sole interest in the whole affair had been the five minutes or so when I thought she was dead, and found that I cared after all. But that was over and done with. While I explained she was watching me, and I could see in her eye that there was trouble of some kind coming. And then she began questioning me in what I call her third-degree voice, which isn't, as you might expect, angry and nagging, but quiet and kind of watchful.

‘So you heard this S.O.S. in the hotel at Birmingham?’

‘Yes. Last night, on the National Broadcast.’

‘When did you leave Birmingham, then?’

‘This morning, of course.’ (I’d planned out the journey in my mind, just in case there should be any need to lie my way out of it. Left at ten, lunch at Coventry, tea at Bedford — I’d got it all mapped out.)

‘So you thought last night I was seriously ill, and you didn’t even leave till this morning?’

‘But I tell you I didn’t think you were ill. Haven’t I explained? I thought it was just another of your tricks. It sounded a damn sight more likely.’

‘Then I’m rather surprised you left at all!’ she said with so much vinegar in her voice that I knew there was something more coming. But she went on more quietly: ‘So you left this morning, did you?’

‘Yes. I left about ten. I had lunch at Coventry— ‘

‘Then how do you account for THIS?’ she suddenly shot out at me, and in the same instant she ripped her bag open, took out a piece of paper, and held it out as if it had been a forged cheque, or something.

I felt as if someone had hit me a sock in the wind. I might have known it! She’d caught me after all. And there was the evidence, the dossier of the case. I didn’t even know what it was, except that it was something that proved I’d been off with a woman. All the stuffing went out of me. A moment earlier I’d been kind of bullying her, making out to be angry because I’d been dragged back from Birmingham for nothing, and now she’d suddenly turned the tables on me. You don’t have to tell me what I look like at that moment. I know. Guilt written all over me in big letters — I know. And I wasn’t even guilty! But it’s a matter of habit. I’m used to being in the wrong. For a hundred quid I couldn’t have kept the guilt out of my voice as I answered:

‘What do you mean? What’s that thing you’ve got there?’

‘You read it and you’ll see what it is.’

I took it. It was a letter from what seemed to be a firm of solicitors, and it was addressed from the same street as Rowbottom’s Hotel, I noticed.

‘Dear Madam,’ I read, ‘With reference to your letter of the 18th inst., we think there must be some mistake. Rowbottom’s Hotel was closed down two years ago and has been converted into a block of offices. No one answering the description of your husband has been here. Possibly— ‘

I didn’t read any further. Of course I saw it all in a flash. I’d been a little bit too clever and put my foot in it. There was just one faint ray of hope — young Saunders might have forgotten to post the letter I’d addressed from Rowbottom’s, in which case it was just possible I could brazen it out. But Hilda soon put the lid on that idea.

‘Well, George, you see what the letter says? The day you left here I wrote to Rowbottom’s Hotel — oh, just a little note, asking them whether you’d arrived there. And you see the answer I got! There isn’t even any such place as Rowbottom’s Hotel. And the same day, the very same post, I got your letter saying you were at the hotel. You got someone to post it for you, I suppose. THAT was your business in Birmingham!’

‘But look here, Hilda! You’ve got all this wrong. It isn’t what you think at all. You don’t understand.’

‘Oh, yes, I do, George. I understand PERFECTLY.’

‘But look here, Hilda— ‘

Wasn’t any use, of course. It was a fair cop. I couldn’t even meet her eye. I turned and tried to make for the door.

‘I’ll have to take the car round to the garage,’ I said.

‘Oh, no George! You don’t get out of it like that. You’ll stay here and listen to what I’ve got to say, please.’

‘But, damn it! I’ve got to switch the lights on, haven’t I? It’s past lighting-up time. You don’t want us to get fined?’

At that she let me go, and I went out and switched the car lights on, but when I came back she was still standing there like a figure of doom, with the two letters, mine and the solicitor’s on the table in front of her. I’d got a little of my nerve back, and I had another try:

‘Listen, Hilda. You’ve got hold of the wrong end of the stick about this business. I can explain the whole thing.’

‘I’m sure YOU could explain anything, George. The question is whether I’d believe you.’

‘But you’re just jumping to conclusions! What made you write to

these hotel people, anyway?'

'It was Mrs Wheeler's idea. And a very good idea too, as it turned out.'

'Oh, Mrs Wheeler, was it? So you don't mind letting that blasted woman into our private affairs?'

'She didn't need any letting in. It was she who warned me what you were up to this week. Something seemed to tell her, she said. And she was right, you see. She knows all about you, George. She used to have a husband JUST like you.'

'But, Hilda— '

I looked at her. Her face had gone a kind of white under the surface, the way it does when she thinks of me with another woman. A woman. If only it had been true!

And Gosh! what I could see ahead of me! You know what it's like. The weeks on end of ghastly nagging and sulking, and the catty remarks after you think peace has been signed, and the meals always late, and the kids wanting to know what it's all about. But what really got me down was the kind of mental squalor, the kind of mental atmosphere in which the real reason why I'd gone to Lower Binfield wouldn't even be conceivable. That was what chiefly struck me at the moment. If I spent a week explaining to Hilda WHY I'd been to Lower Binfield, she'd never understand. And who WOULD understand, here in Ellesmere Road? Gosh! did I even understand myself? The whole thing seemed to be fading out of my mind. Why had I gone to Lower Binfield? HAD I gone there? In this atmosphere it just seemed meaningless. Nothing's real in Ellesmere Road except gas bills, school-fees, boiled cabbage, and the office on Monday.

One more try:

'But look here, Hilda! I know what you think. But you're absolutely wrong. I swear to you you're wrong.'

'Oh, no, George. If I was wrong why did you have to tell all those lies?'

No getting away from that, of course.

I took a pace or two up and down. The smell of old mackintoshes was very strong. Why had I run away like that? Why had I bothered about the future and the past, seeing that the future and the past don't matter? Whatever motives I might have had, I could hardly

remember them now. The old life in Lower Binfield, the war and the after-war, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, machine-guns, food-queues, rubber truncheons — it was fading out, all fading out. Nothing remained except a vulgar low-down row in a smell of old mackintoshes.

One last try:

'Hilda! Just listen to me a minute. Look here, you don't know where I've been all this week, do you?'

'I don't want to know where you've been. I know WHAT you've been doing. That's quite enough for me.'

'But dash it— '

Quite useless, of course. She'd found me guilty and now she was going to tell me what she thought of me. That might take a couple of hours. And after that there was further trouble looming up, because presently it would occur to her to wonder where I'd got the money for this trip, and then she'd discover that I'd been holding out on her about the seventeen quid. Really there was no reason why this row shouldn't go on till three in the morning. No use playing injured innocence any longer. All I wanted was the line of least resistance. And in my mind I ran over the three possibilities, which were:

A. To tell her what I'd really been doing and somehow make her believe me.

B. To pull the old gag about losing my memory.

C. To let her go on thinking it was a woman, and take my medicine.

But, damn it! I knew which it would have to be.

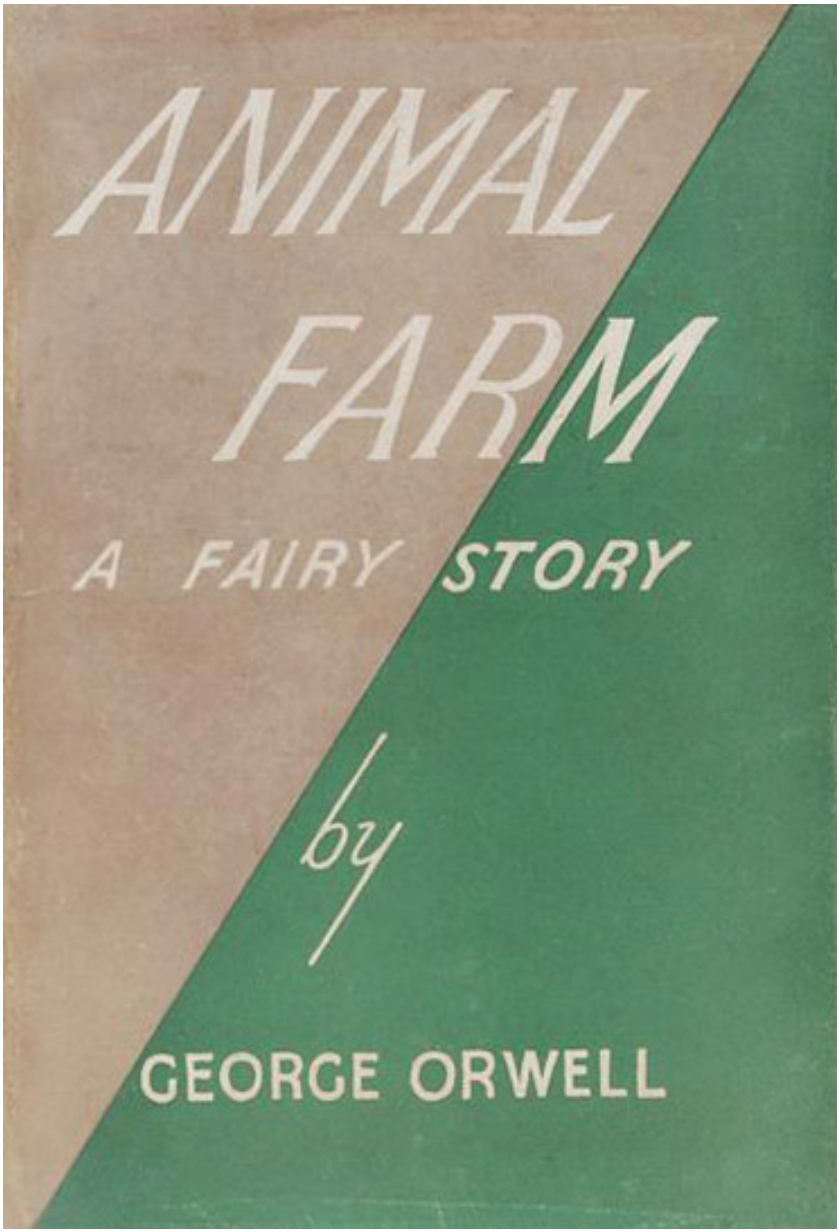
ANIMAL FARM

Animal Farm was published by Secker and Warburg on the 17th of August 1945. It originally had the sub-title *A Fairy Story,* but this was removed for the 1946 American publication and rarely used again in Britain. The novel has sold millions of copies over the years and has been translated into more than seventy languages, whilst also becoming a text which is frequently featured on school curriculums. It is an allegorical work representing events from the 1917 Russian Revolution and the corruption of its ideals under Stalinism. World War II did not finish until after Orwell wrote the novel and he was rejected by multiple publishers who did not want to be associated with a work that criticised one of the UK's allies against the Axis powers. The novel was so controversial during the wartime period that Ukrainian copies of it were confiscated by the American authorities and given to the Soviets. After World War II, when the Soviet Union became a super power, it was banned in the Eastern bloc and viewed as counter-revolutionary and a tool of the capitalist West. Orwell, a dedicated democratic socialist, fought the nationalists in the Spanish Civil War and witnessed in person the Stalinist style purges and the totalitarian regime. He was horrified by oppressive, violent dictatorship of Russia and resented the propagandist war time British media presenting tales of Stalin's reign of terror as Nazi fabrications.

The narrative depicts a farm where 'Old Major' an old boar gathers the other animals around him to give a rousing revolutionary speech where he condemns the life of an animal as 'misery and slavery', and contends that this is the case because 'the whole of the produce of our labour is stolen from us by human beings'. Orwell is creating an analogy between the animal and human relationship and the proletariat and bourgeoisie, who are the capitalist class, of Communist theory. The animals manage to overthrow the exploitative human owner of the farm and chase him from the premises before creating the seven commandments of 'Animalism'

espousing equality and comradeship. However soon after the revolution comes to Manor Farm, it quickly descends into a leadership struggle between two young pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, who are broadly based on Trotsky and Stalin respectively.

Orwell highlights how a revolution can be corrupted by its leadership and the danger of totalitarianism when a political movement allows greed, wickedness and ignorance to enter the picture. The internal conflict and struggle for power poisons the ideals and the interests of the masses are ignored by those who claim to be liberating the working people. Orwell believed it was necessary to destroy the myth of the Soviet Union in order to revive the socialist movement for future endeavours. The horrific Stalinist purges of the 1930's are mirrored in Napoleon's reign of terror and Orwell underlines indifference and fear are contributors to murderous government acts. The dreams of freedom offered to the animals, the pledges of equality and solidarity continue to be promised to the animals through propaganda even as the utopian vision of the revolution devolves into a violent despotic regime.



The first edition, containing the original sub-title

Trotsky and Stalin, the two leading Russian figures that are parodied in the novel

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Orwell (tallest figure) during his time in the Spanish Civil War

An image from the 1954 animated film where the ending of the novel was changed

Chapter 1

Mr. Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the pop-holes. With the ring of light from his lantern dancing from side to side, he lurched across the yard, kicked off his boots at the back door, drew himself a last glass of beer from the barrel in the scullery, and made his way up to bed, where Mrs. Jones was already snoring.

As soon as the light in the bedroom went out there was a stirring and a fluttering all through the farm buildings. Word had gone round during the day that old Major, the prize Middle White boar, had had a strange dream on the previous night and wished to communicate it to the other animals. It had been agreed that they should all meet in the big barn as soon as Mr. Jones was safely out of the way. Old Major (so he was always called, though the name under which he had been exhibited was Willingdon Beauty) was so highly regarded on the farm that everyone was quite ready to lose an hour's sleep in order to hear what he had to say.

At one end of the big barn, on a sort of raised platform, Major was already ensconced on his bed of straw, under a lantern which hung from a beam. He was twelve years old and had lately grown rather stout, but he was still a majestic-looking pig, with a wise and benevolent appearance in spite of the fact that his tushes had never been cut. Before long the other animals began to arrive and make themselves comfortable after their different fashions. First came the three dogs, Bluebell, Jessie, and Pincher, and then the pigs, who settled down in the straw immediately in front of the platform. The hens perched themselves on the window-sills, the pigeons fluttered up to the rafters, the sheep and cows lay down behind the pigs and began to chew the cud. The two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover, came in together, walking very slowly and setting down their vast hairy hoofs with great care lest there should be some small animal concealed in the straw. Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching middle life, who had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal. Boxer was an enormous beast, nearly eighteen hands high, and as strong as any two ordinary horses put together. A

white stripe down his nose gave him a somewhat stupid appearance, and in fact he was not of first-rate intelligence, but he was universally respected for his steadiness of character and tremendous powers of work. After the horses came Muriel, the white goat, and Benjamin, the donkey. Benjamin was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered. He seldom talked, and when he did, it was usually to make some cynical remark — for instance, he would say that God had given him a tail to keep the flies off, but that he would sooner have had no tail and no flies. Alone among the animals on the farm he never laughed. If asked why, he would say that he saw nothing to laugh at. Nevertheless, without openly admitting it, he was devoted to Boxer; the two of them usually spent their Sundays together in the small paddock beyond the orchard, grazing side by side and never speaking.

The two horses had just lain down when a brood of ducklings, which had lost their mother, filed into the barn, cheeping feebly and wandering from side to side to find some place where they would not be trodden on. Clover made a sort of wall round them with her great foreleg, and the ducklings nestled down inside it and promptly fell asleep. At the last moment Mollie, the foolish, pretty white mare who drew Mr. Jones's trap, came mincing daintily in, chewing at a lump of sugar. She took a place near the front and began flirting her white mane, hoping to draw attention to the red ribbons it was plaited with. Last of all came the cat, who looked round, as usual, for the warmest place, and finally squeezed herself in between Boxer and Clover; there she purred contentedly throughout Major's speech without listening to a word of what he was saying.

All the animals were now present except Moses, the tame raven, who slept on a perch behind the back door. When Major saw that they had all made themselves comfortable and were waiting attentively, he cleared his throat and began:

"Comrades, you have heard already about the strange dream that I had last night. But I will come to the dream later. I have something else to say first. I do not think, comrades, that I shall be with you for many months longer, and before I die, I feel it my duty to pass on to you such wisdom as I have acquired. I have had a long life, I have had much time for thought as I lay alone in my stall, and I think I

may say that I understand the nature of life on this earth as well as any animal now living. It is about this that I wish to speak to you.

"Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty. No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth.

"But is this simply part of the order of nature? Is it because this land of ours is so poor that it cannot afford a decent life to those who dwell upon it? No, comrades, a thousand times no! The soil of England is fertile, its climate is good, it is capable of affording food in abundance to an enormously greater number of animals than now inhabit it. This single farm of ours would support a dozen horses, twenty cows, hundreds of sheep — and all of them living in a comfort and a dignity that are now almost beyond our imagining. Why then do we continue in this miserable condition? Because nearly the whole of the produce of our labour is stolen from us by human beings. There, comrades, is the answer to all our problems. It is summed up in a single word — Man. Man is the only real enemy we have. Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever.

"Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin. You cows that I see before me, how many thousands of gallons of milk have you given during this last year? And what has happened to that milk which should have been breeding up sturdy calves? Every drop of it has gone down the throats of our enemies. And you hens, how many eggs have you laid in this last year, and how many of those eggs ever

hatched into chickens? The rest have all gone to market to bring in money for Jones and his men. And you, Clover, where are those four foals you bore, who should have been the support and pleasure of your old age? Each was sold at a year old — you will never see one of them again. In return for your four confinements and all your labour in the fields, what have you ever had except your bare rations and a stall?

"And even the miserable lives we lead are not allowed to reach their natural span. For myself I do not grumble, for I am one of the lucky ones. I am twelve years old and have had over four hundred children. Such is the natural life of a pig. But no animal escapes the cruel knife in the end. You young porkers who are sitting in front of me, every one of you will scream your lives out at the block within a year. To that horror we all must come — cows, pigs, hens, sheep, everyone. Even the horses and the dogs have no better fate. You, Boxer, the very day that those great muscles of yours lose their power, Jones will sell you to the knacker, who will cut your throat and boil you down for the foxhounds. As for the dogs, when they grow old and toothless, Jones ties a brick round their necks and drowns them in the nearest pond.

"Is it not crystal clear, then, comrades, that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings? Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we could become rich and free. What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion! I do not know when that Rebellion will come, it might be in a week or in a hundred years, but I know, as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, that sooner or later justice will be done. Fix your eyes on that, comrades, throughout the short remainder of your lives! And above all, pass on this message of mine to those who come after you, so that future generations shall carry on the struggle until it is victorious.

"And remember, comrades, your resolution must never falter. No argument must lead you astray. Never listen when they tell you that Man and the animals have a common interest, that the prosperity of the one is the prosperity of the others. It is all lies. Man serves the

interests of no creature except himself. And among us animals let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle. All men are enemies. All animals are comrades."

At this moment there was a tremendous uproar. While Major was speaking four large rats had crept out of their holes and were sitting on their hindquarters, listening to him. The dogs had suddenly caught sight of them, and it was only by a swift dash for their holes that the rats saved their lives. Major raised his trotter for silence.

"Comrades," he said, "here is a point that must be settled. The wild creatures, such as rats and rabbits — are they our friends or our enemies? Let us put it to the vote. I propose this question to the meeting: Are rats comrades?"

The vote was taken at once, and it was agreed by an overwhelming majority that rats were comrades. There were only four dissentients, the three dogs and the cat, who was afterwards discovered to have voted on both sides. Major continued:

"I have little more to say. I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his ways. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal.

"And now, comrades, I will tell you about my dream of last night. I cannot describe that dream to you. It was a dream of the earth as it will be when Man has vanished. But it reminded me of something that I had long forgotten. Many years ago, when I was a little pig, my mother and the other sows used to sing an old song of which they knew only the tune and the first three words. I had known that tune in my infancy, but it had long since passed out of my mind. Last night, however, it came back to me in my dream. And what is more, the words of the song also came back-words, I am certain, which were sung by the animals of long ago and have been lost to memory for

generations. I will sing you that song now, comrades. I am old and my voice is hoarse, but when I have taught you the tune, you can sing it better for yourselves. It is called 'Beasts of England'."

Old Major cleared his throat and began to sing. As he had said, his voice was hoarse, but he sang well enough, and it was a stirring tune, something between 'Clementine' and 'La Cucaracha'. The words ran:

Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,
Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken to my joyful tidings
Of the golden future time.
Soon or late the day is coming,
Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown,
And the fruitful fields of England
Shall be trod by beasts alone.
Rings shall vanish from our noses,
And the harness from our back,
Bit and spur shall rust forever,
Cruel whips no more shall crack.
Riches more than mind can picture,
Wheat and barley, oats and hay,
Clover, beans, and mangel-wurzels
Shall be ours upon that day.
Bright will shine the fields of England,
Purer shall its waters be,
Sweeter yet shall blow its breezes
On the day that sets us free.
For that day we all must labour,
Though we die before it break;
Cows and horses, geese and turkeys,
All must toil for freedom's sake.
Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,
Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken well and spread my tidings
Of the golden future time.

The singing of this song threw the animals into the wildest excitement. Almost before Major had reached the end, they had

begun singing it for themselves. Even the stupidest of them had already picked up the tune and a few of the words, and as for the clever ones, such as the pigs and dogs, they had the entire song by heart within a few minutes. And then, after a few preliminary tries, the whole farm burst out into ‘Beasts of England’ in tremendous unison. The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whinnied it, the ducks quacked it. They were so delighted with the song that they sang it right through five times in succession, and might have continued singing it all night if they had not been interrupted.

Unfortunately, the uproar awoke Mr. Jones, who sprang out of bed, making sure that there was a fox in the yard. He seized the gun which always stood in a corner of his bedroom, and let fly a charge of number 6 shot into the darkness. The pellets buried themselves in the wall of the barn and the meeting broke up hurriedly. Everyone fled to his own sleeping-place. The birds jumped on to their perches, the animals settled down in the straw, and the whole farm was asleep in a moment.

Chapter 2

Three nights later old Major died peacefully in his sleep. His body was buried at the foot of the orchard.

This was early in March. During the next three months there was much secret activity. Major's speech had given to the more intelligent animals on the farm a completely new outlook on life. They did not know when the Rebellion predicted by Major would take place, they had no reason for thinking that it would be within their own lifetime, but they saw clearly that it was their duty to prepare for it. The work of teaching and organising the others fell naturally upon the pigs, who were generally recognised as being the cleverest of the animals. Pre-eminent among the pigs were two young boars named Snowball and Napoleon, whom Mr. Jones was breeding up for sale. Napoleon was a large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way. Snowball was a more vivacious pig than Napoleon, quicker in speech and more inventive, but was not considered to have the same depth of character. All the other male pigs on the farm were porkers. The best known among them was a small fat pig named Squealer, with very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements, and a shrill voice. He was a brilliant talker, and when he was arguing some difficult point he had a way of skipping from side to side and whisking his tail which was somehow very persuasive. The others said of Squealer that he could turn black into white.

These three had elaborated old Major's teachings into a complete system of thought, to which they gave the name of Animalism. Several nights a week, after Mr. Jones was asleep, they held secret meetings in the barn and expounded the principles of Animalism to the others. At the beginning they met with much stupidity and apathy. Some of the animals talked of the duty of loyalty to Mr. Jones, whom they referred to as "Master," or made elementary remarks such as "Mr. Jones feeds us. If he were gone, we should starve to death." Others asked such questions as "Why should we care what happens after we are dead?" or "If this Rebellion is to

happen anyway, what difference does it make whether we work for it or not?", and the pigs had great difficulty in making them see that this was contrary to the spirit of Animalism. The stupidest questions of all were asked by Mollie, the white mare. The very first question she asked Snowball was: "Will there still be sugar after the Rebellion?"

"No," said Snowball firmly. "We have no means of making sugar on this farm. Besides, you do not need sugar. You will have all the oats and hay you want."

"And shall I still be allowed to wear ribbons in my mane?" asked Mollie.

"Comrade," said Snowball, "those ribbons that you are so devoted to are the badge of slavery. Can you not understand that liberty is worth more than ribbons?"

Mollie agreed, but she did not sound very convinced.

The pigs had an even harder struggle to counteract the lies put about by Moses, the tame raven. Moses, who was Mr. Jones's especial pet, was a spy and a tale-bearer, but he was also a clever talker. He claimed to know of the existence of a mysterious country called Sugarcandy Mountain, to which all animals went when they died. It was situated somewhere up in the sky, a little distance beyond the clouds, Moses said. In Sugarcandy Mountain it was Sunday seven days a week, clover was in season all the year round, and lump sugar and linseed cake grew on the hedges. The animals hated Moses because he told tales and did no work, but some of them believed in Sugarcandy Mountain, and the pigs had to argue very hard to persuade them that there was no such place.

Their most faithful disciples were the two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover. These two had great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves, but having once accepted the pigs as their teachers, they absorbed everything that they were told, and passed it on to the other animals by simple arguments. They were unfailing in their attendance at the secret meetings in the barn, and led the singing of 'Beasts of England', with which the meetings always ended.

Now, as it turned out, the Rebellion was achieved much earlier and more easily than anyone had expected. In past years Mr. Jones, although a hard master, had been a capable farmer, but of late he had

fallen on evil days. He had become much disheartened after losing money in a lawsuit, and had taken to drinking more than was good for him. For whole days at a time he would lounge in his Windsor chair in the kitchen, reading the newspapers, drinking, and occasionally feeding Moses on crusts of bread soaked in beer. His men were idle and dishonest, the fields were full of weeds, the buildings wanted roofing, the hedges were neglected, and the animals were underfed.

June came and the hay was almost ready for cutting. On Midsummer's Eve, which was a Saturday, Mr. Jones went into Willingdon and got so drunk at the Red Lion that he did not come back till midday on Sunday. The men had milked the cows in the early morning and then had gone out rabbiting, without bothering to feed the animals. When Mr. Jones got back he immediately went to sleep on the drawing-room sofa with the News of the World over his face, so that when evening came, the animals were still unfed. At last they could stand it no longer. One of the cows broke in the door of the store-shed with her horn and all the animals began to help themselves from the bins. It was just then that Mr. Jones woke up. The next moment he and his four men were in the store-shed with whips in their hands, lashing out in all directions. This was more than the hungry animals could bear. With one accord, though nothing of the kind had been planned beforehand, they flung themselves upon their tormentors. Jones and his men suddenly found themselves being butted and kicked from all sides. The situation was quite out of their control. They had never seen animals behave like this before, and this sudden uprising of creatures whom they were used to thrashing and maltreating just as they chose, frightened them almost out of their wits. After only a moment or two they gave up trying to defend themselves and took to their heels. A minute later all five of them were in full flight down the cart-track that led to the main road, with the animals pursuing them in triumph.

Mrs. Jones looked out of the bedroom window, saw what was happening, hurriedly flung a few possessions into a carpet bag, and slipped out of the farm by another way. Moses sprang off his perch and flapped after her, croaking loudly. Meanwhile the animals had chased Jones and his men out on to the road and slammed the five-

barred gate behind them. And so, almost before they knew what was happening, the Rebellion had been successfully carried through: Jones was expelled, and the Manor Farm was theirs.

For the first few minutes the animals could hardly believe in their good fortune. Their first act was to gallop in a body right round the boundaries of the farm, as though to make quite sure that no human being was hiding anywhere upon it; then they raced back to the farm buildings to wipe out the last traces of Jones's hated reign. The harness-room at the end of the stables was broken open; the bits, the nose-rings, the dog-chains, the cruel knives with which Mr. Jones had been used to castrate the pigs and lambs, were all flung down the well. The reins, the halters, the blinkers, the degrading nosebags, were thrown on to the rubbish fire which was burning in the yard. So were the whips. All the animals capered with joy when they saw the whips going up in flames. Snowball also threw on to the fire the ribbons with which the horses' manes and tails had usually been decorated on market days.

"Ribbons," he said, "should be considered as clothes, which are the mark of a human being. All animals should go naked."

When Boxer heard this he fetched the small straw hat which he wore in summer to keep the flies out of his ears, and flung it on to the fire with the rest.

In a very little while the animals had destroyed everything that reminded them of Mr. Jones. Napoleon then led them back to the store-shed and served out a double ration of corn to everybody, with two biscuits for each dog. Then they sang 'Beasts of England' from end to end seven times running, and after that they settled down for the night and slept as they had never slept before.

But they woke at dawn as usual, and suddenly remembering the glorious thing that had happened, they all raced out into the pasture together. A little way down the pasture there was a knoll that commanded a view of most of the farm. The animals rushed to the top of it and gazed round them in the clear morning light. Yes, it was theirs — everything that they could see was theirs! In the ecstasy of that thought they gambolled round and round, they hurled themselves into the air in great leaps of excitement. They rolled in the dew, they cropped mouthfuls of the sweet summer grass, they kicked up clods

of the black earth and snuffed its rich scent. Then they made a tour of inspection of the whole farm and surveyed with speechless admiration the ploughland, the hayfield, the orchard, the pool, the spinney. It was as though they had never seen these things before, and even now they could hardly believe that it was all their own.

Then they filed back to the farm buildings and halted in silence outside the door of the farmhouse. That was theirs too, but they were frightened to go inside. After a moment, however, Snowball and Napoleon butted the door open with their shoulders and the animals entered in single file, walking with the utmost care for fear of disturbing anything. They tiptoed from room to room, afraid to speak above a whisper and gazing with a kind of awe at the unbelievable luxury, at the beds with their feather mattresses, the looking-glasses, the horsehair sofa, the Brussels carpet, the lithograph of Queen Victoria over the drawing-room mantelpiece. They were lust coming down the stairs when Mollie was discovered to be missing. Going back, the others found that she had remained behind in the best bedroom. She had taken a piece of blue ribbon from Mrs. Jones's dressing-table, and was holding it against her shoulder and admiring herself in the glass in a very foolish manner. The others reproached her sharply, and they went outside. Some hams hanging in the kitchen were taken out for burial, and the barrel of beer in the scullery was stove in with a kick from Boxer's hoof, otherwise nothing in the house was touched. A unanimous resolution was passed on the spot that the farmhouse should be preserved as a museum. All were agreed that no animal must ever live there.

The animals had their breakfast, and then Snowball and Napoleon called them together again.

"Comrades," said Snowball, "it is half-past six and we have a long day before us. Today we begin the hay harvest. But there is another matter that must be attended to first."

The pigs now revealed that during the past three months they had taught themselves to read and write from an old spelling book which had belonged to Mr. Jones's children and which had been thrown on the rubbish heap. Napoleon sent for pots of black and white paint and led the way down to the five-barred gate that gave on to the main road. Then Snowball (for it was Snowball who was best at writing)

took a brush between the two knuckles of his trotter, painted out MANOR FARM from the top bar of the gate and in its place painted ANIMAL FARM. This was to be the name of the farm from now onwards. After this they went back to the farm buildings, where Snowball and Napoleon sent for a ladder which they caused to be set against the end wall of the big barn. They explained that by their studies of the past three months the pigs had succeeded in reducing the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments. These Seven Commandments would now be inscribed on the wall; they would form an unalterable law by which all the animals on Animal Farm must live for ever after. With some difficulty (for it is not easy for a pig to balance himself on a ladder) Snowball climbed up and set to work, with Squealer a few rungs below him holding the paint-pot. The Commandments were written on the tarred wall in great white letters that could be read thirty yards away. They ran thus:

THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS

1.Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2.Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3.No animal shall wear clothes.
4.No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5.No animal shall drink alcohol.
6.No animal shall kill any other animal.
7.All animals are equal.

It was very neatly written, and except that "friend" was written "freind" and one of the "S's" was the wrong way round, the spelling was correct all the way through. Snowball read it aloud for the benefit of the others. All the animals nodded in complete agreement, and the cleverer ones at once began to learn the Commandments by heart.

"Now, comrades," cried Snowball, throwing down the paint-brush, "to the hayfield! Let us make it a point of honour to get in the harvest more quickly than Jones and his men could do."

But at this moment the three cows, who had seemed uneasy for some time past, set up a loud lowing. They had not been milked for

twenty-four hours, and their udders were almost bursting. After a little thought, the pigs sent for buckets and milked the cows fairly successfully, their trotters being well adapted to this task. Soon there were five buckets of frothing creamy milk at which many of the animals looked with considerable interest.

"What is going to happen to all that milk?" said someone.

"Jones used sometimes to mix some of it in our mash," said one of the hens.

"Never mind the milk, comrades!" cried Napoleon, placing himself in front of the buckets. "That will be attended to. The harvest is more important. Comrade Snowball will lead the way. I shall follow in a few minutes. Forward, comrades! The hay is waiting."

So the animals trooped down to the hayfield to begin the harvest, and when they came back in the evening it was noticed that the milk had disappeared.

Chapter 3

How they toiled and sweated to get the hay in! But their efforts were rewarded, for the harvest was an even bigger success than they had hoped.

Sometimes the work was hard; the implements had been designed for human beings and not for animals, and it was a great drawback that no animal was able to use any tool that involved standing on his hind legs. But the pigs were so clever that they could think of a way round every difficulty. As for the horses, they knew every inch of the field, and in fact understood the business of mowing and raking far better than Jones and his men had ever done. The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others. With their superior knowledge it was natural that they should assume the leadership. Boxer and Clover would harness themselves to the cutter or the horse-rake (no bits or reins were needed in these days, of course) and tramp steadily round and round the field with a pig walking behind and calling out "Gee up, comrade!" or "Whoa back, comrade!" as the case might be. And every animal down to the humblest worked at turning the hay and gathering it. Even the ducks and hens toiled to and fro all day in the sun, carrying tiny wisps of hay in their beaks. In the end they finished the harvest in two days' less time than it had usually taken Jones and his men. Moreover, it was the biggest harvest that the farm had ever seen. There was no wastage whatever; the hens and ducks with their sharp eyes had gathered up the very last stalk. And not an animal on the farm had stolen so much as a mouthful.

All through that summer the work of the farm went like clockwork. The animals were happy as they had never conceived it possible to be. Every mouthful of food was an acute positive pleasure, now that it was truly their own food, produced by themselves and for themselves, not doled out to them by a grudging master. With the worthless parasitical human beings gone, there was more for everyone to eat. There was more leisure too, inexperienced though the animals were. They met with many difficulties — for instance, later in the year, when they harvested the corn, they had to

tread it out in the ancient style and blow away the chaff with their breath, since the farm possessed no threshing machine — but the pigs with their cleverness and Boxer with his tremendous muscles always pulled them through. Boxer was the admiration of everybody. He had been a hard worker even in Jones's time, but now he seemed more like three horses than one; there were days when the entire work of the farm seemed to rest on his mighty shoulders. From morning to night he was pushing and pulling, always at the spot where the work was hardest. He had made an arrangement with one of the cockerels to call him in the mornings half an hour earlier than anyone else, and would put in some volunteer labour at whatever seemed to be most needed, before the regular day's work began. His answer to every problem, every setback, was "I will work harder!" — which he had adopted as his personal motto.

But everyone worked according to his capacity The hens and ducks, for instance, saved five bushels of corn at the harvest by gathering up the stray grains. Nobody stole, nobody grumbled over his rations, the quarrelling and biting and jealousy which had been normal features of life in the old days had almost disappeared. Nobody shirked — or almost nobody. Mollie, it was true, was not good at getting up in the mornings, and had a way of leaving work early on the ground that there was a stone in her hoof. And the behaviour of the cat was somewhat peculiar. It was soon noticed that when there was work to be done the cat could never be found. She would vanish for hours on end, and then reappear at meal-times, or in the evening after work was over, as though nothing had happened. But she always made such excellent excuses, and purred so affectionately, that it was impossible not to believe in her good intentions. Old Benjamin, the donkey, seemed quite unchanged since the Rebellion. He did his work in the same slow obstinate way as he had done it in Jones's time, never shirking and never volunteering for extra work either. About the Rebellion and its results he would express no opinion. When asked whether he was not happier now that Jones was gone, he would say only "Donkeys live a long time. None of you has ever seen a dead donkey," and the others had to be content with this cryptic answer.

On Sundays there was no work. Breakfast was an hour later than

usual, and after breakfast there was a ceremony which was observed every week without fail. First came the hoisting of the flag. Snowball had found in the harness-room an old green tablecloth of Mrs. Jones's and had painted on it a hoof and a horn in white. This was run up the flagstaff in the farmhouse garden every Sunday morning. The flag was green, Snowball explained, to represent the green fields of England, while the hoof and horn signified the future Republic of the Animals which would arise when the human race had been finally overthrown. After the hoisting of the flag all the animals trooped into the big barn for a general assembly which was known as the Meeting. Here the work of the coming week was planned out and resolutions were put forward and debated. It was always the pigs who put forward the resolutions. The other animals understood how to vote, but could never think of any resolutions of their own. Snowball and Napoleon were by far the most active in the debates. But it was noticed that these two were never in agreement: whatever suggestion either of them made, the other could be counted on to oppose it. Even when it was resolved — a thing no one could object to in itself — to set aside the small paddock behind the orchard as a home of rest for animals who were past work, there was a stormy debate over the correct retiring age for each class of animal. The Meeting always ended with the singing of 'Beasts of England', and the afternoon was given up to recreation.

The pigs had set aside the harness-room as a headquarters for themselves. Here, in the evenings, they studied blacksmithing, carpentering, and other necessary arts from books which they had brought out of the farmhouse. Snowball also busied himself with organising the other animals into what he called Animal Committees. He was indefatigable at this. He formed the Egg Production Committee for the hens, the Clean Tails League for the cows, the Wild Comrades' Re-education Committee (the object of this was to tame the rats and rabbits), the Whiter Wool Movement for the sheep, and various others, besides instituting classes in reading and writing. On the whole, these projects were a failure. The attempt to tame the wild creatures, for instance, broke down almost immediately. They continued to behave very much as before, and when treated with generosity, simply took advantage of it. The cat joined the Re-

education Committee and was very active in it for some days. She was seen one day sitting on a roof and talking to some sparrows who were just out of her reach. She was telling them that all animals were now comrades and that any sparrow who chose could come and perch on her paw; but the sparrows kept their distance.

The reading and writing classes, however, were a great success. By the autumn almost every animal on the farm was literate in some degree.

As for the pigs, they could already read and write perfectly. The dogs learned to read fairly well, but were not interested in reading anything except the Seven Commandments. Muriel, the goat, could read somewhat better than the dogs, and sometimes used to read to the others in the evenings from scraps of newspaper which she found on the rubbish heap. Benjamin could read as well as any pig, but never exercised his faculty. So far as he knew, he said, there was nothing worth reading. Clover learnt the whole alphabet, but could not put words together. Boxer could not get beyond the letter D. He would trace out A, B, C, D, in the dust with his great hoof, and then would stand staring at the letters with his ears back, sometimes shaking his forelock, trying with all his might to remember what came next and never succeeding. On several occasions, indeed, he did learn E, F, G, H, but by the time he knew them, it was always discovered that he had forgotten A, B, C, and D. Finally he decided to be content with the first four letters, and used to write them out once or twice every day to refresh his memory. Mollie refused to learn any but the six letters which spelt her own name. She would form these very neatly out of pieces of twig, and would then decorate them with a flower or two and walk round them admiring them.

None of the other animals on the farm could get further than the letter A. It was also found that the stupider animals, such as the sheep, hens, and ducks, were unable to learn the Seven Commandments by heart. After much thought Snowball declared that the Seven Commandments could in effect be reduced to a single maxim, namely: “Four legs good, two legs bad.” This, he said, contained the essential principle of Animalism. Whoever had thoroughly grasped it would be safe from human influences. The birds at first objected, since it seemed to them that they also had two

legs, but Snowball proved to them that this was not so.

"A bird's wing, comrades," he said, "is an organ of propulsion and not of manipulation. It should therefore be regarded as a leg. The distinguishing mark of man is the HAND, the instrument with which he does all his mischief."

The birds did not understand Snowball's long words, but they accepted his explanation, and all the humbler animals set to work to learn the new maxim by heart. FOUR LEGS GOOD, TWO LEGS BAD, was inscribed on the end wall of the barn, above the Seven Commandments and in bigger letters When they had once got it by heart, the sheep developed a great liking for this maxim, and often as they lay in the field they would all start bleating "Four legs good, two legs bad! Four legs good, two legs bad!" and keep it up for hours on end, never growing tired of it.

Napoleon took no interest in Snowball's committees. He said that the education of the young was more important than anything that could be done for those who were already grown up. It happened that Jessie and Bluebell had both whelped soon after the hay harvest, giving birth between them to nine sturdy puppies. As soon as they were weaned, Napoleon took them away from their mothers, saying that he would make himself responsible for their education. He took them up into a loft which could only be reached by a ladder from the harness-room, and there kept them in such seclusion that the rest of the farm soon forgot their existence.

The mystery of where the milk went to was soon cleared up. It was mixed every day into the pigs' mash. The early apples were now ripening, and the grass of the orchard was littered with windfalls. The animals had assumed as a matter of course that these would be shared out equally; one day, however, the order went forth that all the windfalls were to be collected and brought to the harness-room for the use of the pigs. At this some of the other animals murmured, but it was no use. All the pigs were in full agreement on this point, even Snowball and Napoleon. Squealer was sent to make the necessary explanations to the others.

"Comrades!" he cried. "You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. I dislike them myself. Our sole

object in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig. We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for YOUR sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! Yes, Jones would come back! Surely, comrades," cried Squealer almost pleadingly, skipping from side to side and whisking his tail, "surely there is no one among you who wants to see Jones come back?"

Now if there was one thing that the animals were completely certain of, it was that they did not want Jones back. When it was put to them in this light, they had no more to say. The importance of keeping the pigs in good health was all too obvious. So it was agreed without further argument that the milk and the windfall apples (and also the main crop of apples when they ripened) should be reserved for the pigs alone.

Chapter 4

By the late summer the news of what had happened on Animal Farm had spread across half the county. Every day Snowball and Napoleon sent out flights of pigeons whose instructions were to mingle with the animals on neighbouring farms, tell them the story of the Rebellion, and teach them the tune of 'Beasts of England'.

Most of this time Mr. Jones had spent sitting in the taproom of the Red Lion at Willingdon, complaining to anyone who would listen of the monstrous injustice he had suffered in being turned out of his property by a pack of good-for-nothing animals. The other farmers sympathised in principle, but they did not at first give him much help. At heart, each of them was secretly wondering whether he could not somehow turn Jones's misfortune to his own advantage. It was lucky that the owners of the two farms which adjoined Animal Farm were on permanently bad terms. One of them, which was named Foxwood, was a large, neglected, old-fashioned farm, much overgrown by woodland, with all its pastures worn out and its hedges in a disgraceful condition. Its owner, Mr. Pilkington, was an easy-going gentleman farmer who spent most of his time in fishing or hunting according to the season. The other farm, which was called Pinchfield, was smaller and better kept. Its owner was a Mr. Frederick, a tough, shrewd man, perpetually involved in lawsuits and with a name for driving hard bargains. These two disliked each other so much that it was difficult for them to come to any agreement, even in defence of their own interests.

Nevertheless, they were both thoroughly frightened by the rebellion on Animal Farm, and very anxious to prevent their own animals from learning too much about it. At first they pretended to laugh to scorn the idea of animals managing a farm for themselves. The whole thing would be over in a fortnight, they said. They put it about that the animals on the Manor Farm (they insisted on calling it the Manor Farm; they would not tolerate the name "Animal Farm") were perpetually fighting among themselves and were also rapidly starving to death. When time passed and the animals had evidently not starved to death, Frederick and Pilkington changed their tune and

began to talk of the terrible wickedness that now flourished on Animal Farm. It was given out that the animals there practised cannibalism, tortured one another with red-hot horseshoes, and had their females in common. This was what came of rebelling against the laws of Nature, Frederick and Pilkington said.

However, these stories were never fully believed. Rumours of a wonderful farm, where the human beings had been turned out and the animals managed their own affairs, continued to circulate in vague and distorted forms, and throughout that year a wave of rebelliousness ran through the countryside. Bulls which had always been tractable suddenly turned savage, sheep broke down hedges and devoured the clover, cows kicked the pail over, hunters refused their fences and shot their riders on to the other side. Above all, the tune and even the words of 'Beasts of England' were known everywhere. It had spread with astonishing speed. The human beings could not contain their rage when they heard this song, though they pretended to think it merely ridiculous. They could not understand, they said, how even animals could bring themselves to sing such contemptible rubbish. Any animal caught singing it was given a flogging on the spot. And yet the song was irrepressible. The blackbirds whistled it in the hedges, the pigeons cooed it in the elms, it got into the din of the smithies and the tune of the church bells. And when the human beings listened to it, they secretly trembled, hearing in it a prophecy of their future doom.

Early in October, when the corn was cut and stacked and some of it was already threshed, a flight of pigeons came whirling through the air and alighted in the yard of Animal Farm in the wildest excitement. Jones and all his men, with half a dozen others from Foxwood and Pinchfield, had entered the five-barred gate and were coming up the cart-track that led to the farm. They were all carrying sticks, except Jones, who was marching ahead with a gun in his hands. Obviously they were going to attempt the recapture of the farm.

This had long been expected, and all preparations had been made. Snowball, who had studied an old book of Julius Caesar's campaigns which he had found in the farmhouse, was in charge of the defensive operations. He gave his orders quickly, and in a couple of minutes

every animal was at his post.

As the human beings approached the farm buildings, Snowball launched his first attack. All the pigeons, to the number of thirty-five, flew to and fro over the men's heads and muted upon them from mid-air; and while the men were dealing with this, the geese, who had been hiding behind the hedge, rushed out and pecked viciously at the calves of their legs. However, this was only a light skirmishing manoeuvre, intended to create a little disorder, and the men easily drove the geese off with their sticks. Snowball now launched his second line of attack. Muriel, Benjamin, and all the sheep, with Snowball at the head of them, rushed forward and prodded and butted the men from every side, while Benjamin turned around and lashed at them with his small hoofs. But once again the men, with their sticks and their hobnailed boots, were too strong for them; and suddenly, at a squeal from Snowball, which was the signal for retreat, all the animals turned and fled through the gateway into the yard.

The men gave a shout of triumph. They saw, as they imagined, their enemies in flight, and they rushed after them in disorder. This was just what Snowball had intended. As soon as they were well inside the yard, the three horses, the three cows, and the rest of the pigs, who had been lying in ambush in the cowshed, suddenly emerged in their rear, cutting them off. Snowball now gave the signal for the charge. He himself dashed straight for Jones. Jones saw him coming, raised his gun and fired. The pellets scored bloody streaks along Snowball's back, and a sheep dropped dead. Without halting for an instant, Snowball flung his fifteen stone against Jones's legs. Jones was hurled into a pile of dung and his gun flew out of his hands. But the most terrifying spectacle of all was Boxer, rearing up on his hind legs and striking out with his great iron-shod hoofs like a stallion. His very first blow took a stable-lad from Foxwood on the skull and stretched him lifeless in the mud. At the sight, several men dropped their sticks and tried to run. Panic overtook them, and the next moment all the animals together were chasing them round and round the yard. They were gored, kicked, bitten, trampled on. There was not an animal on the farm that did not take vengeance on them after his own fashion. Even the cat suddenly leapt off a roof onto a

cowman's shoulders and sank her claws in his neck, at which he yelled horribly. At a moment when the opening was clear, the men were glad enough to rush out of the yard and make a bolt for the main road. And so within five minutes of their invasion they were in ignominious retreat by the same way as they had come, with a flock of geese hissing after them and pecking at their calves all the way.

All the men were gone except one. Back in the yard Boxer was pawing with his hoof at the stable-lad who lay face down in the mud, trying to turn him over. The boy did not stir.

"He is dead," said Boxer sorrowfully. "I had no intention of doing that. I forgot that I was wearing iron shoes. Who will believe that I did not do this on purpose?"

"No sentimentality, comrade!" cried Snowball from whose wounds the blood was still dripping. "War is war. The only good human being is a dead one."

"I have no wish to take life, not even human life," repeated Boxer, and his eyes were full of tears.

"Where is Mollie?" exclaimed somebody.

Mollie in fact was missing. For a moment there was great alarm; it was feared that the men might have harmed her in some way, or even carried her off with them. In the end, however, she was found hiding in her stall with her head buried among the hay in the manger. She had taken to flight as soon as the gun went off. And when the others came back from looking for her, it was to find that the stable-lad, who in fact was only stunned, had already recovered and made off.

The animals had now reassembled in the wildest excitement, each recounting his own exploits in the battle at the top of his voice. An impromptu celebration of the victory was held immediately. The flag was run up and 'Beasts of England' was sung a number of times, then the sheep who had been killed was given a solemn funeral, a hawthorn bush being planted on her grave. At the graveside Snowball made a little speech, emphasising the need for all animals to be ready to die for Animal Farm if need be.

The animals decided unanimously to create a military decoration, "Animal Hero, First Class," which was conferred there and then on Snowball and Boxer. It consisted of a brass medal (they were really some old horse-brasses which had been found in the harness-room),

to be worn on Sundays and holidays. There was also “Animal Hero, Second Class,” which was conferred posthumously on the dead sheep.

There was much discussion as to what the battle should be called. In the end, it was named the Battle of the Cowshed, since that was where the ambush had been sprung. Mr. Jones’s gun had been found lying in the mud, and it was known that there was a supply of cartridges in the farmhouse. It was decided to set the gun up at the foot of the Flagstaff, like a piece of artillery, and to fire it twice a year — once on October the twelfth, the anniversary of the Battle of the Cowshed, and once on Midsummer Day, the anniversary of the Rebellion.

Chapter 5

As winter drew on, Mollie became more and more troublesome. She was late for work every morning and excused herself by saying that she had overslept, and she complained of mysterious pains, although her appetite was excellent. On every kind of pretext she would run away from work and go to the drinking pool, where she would stand foolishly gazing at her own reflection in the water. But there were also rumours of something more serious. One day, as Mollie strolled blithely into the yard, flirting her long tail and chewing at a stalk of hay, Clover took her aside.

"Mollie," she said, "I have something very serious to say to you. This morning I saw you looking over the hedge that divides Animal Farm from Foxwood. One of Mr. Pilkington's men was standing on the other side of the hedge. And — I was a long way away, but I am almost certain I saw this — he was talking to you and you were allowing him to stroke your nose. What does that mean, Mollie?"

"He didn't! I wasn't! It isn't true!" cried Mollie, beginning to prance about and paw the ground.

"Mollie! Look me in the face. Do you give me your word of honour that that man was not stroking your nose?"

"It isn't true!" repeated Mollie, but she could not look Clover in the face, and the next moment she took to her heels and galloped away into the field.

A thought struck Clover. Without saying anything to the others, she went to Mollie's stall and turned over the straw with her hoof. Hidden under the straw was a little pile of lump sugar and several bunches of ribbon of different colours.

Three days later Mollie disappeared. For some weeks nothing was known of her whereabouts, then the pigeons reported that they had seen her on the other side of Willingdon. She was between the shafts of a smart dogcart painted red and black, which was standing outside a public-house. A fat red-faced man in check breeches and gaiters, who looked like a publican, was stroking her nose and feeding her with sugar. Her coat was newly clipped and she wore a scarlet ribbon round her forelock. She appeared to be enjoying herself, so the

pigeons said. None of the animals ever mentioned Mollie again.

In January there came bitterly hard weather. The earth was like iron, and nothing could be done in the fields. Many meetings were held in the big barn, and the pigs occupied themselves with planning out the work of the coming season. It had come to be accepted that the pigs, who were manifestly cleverer than the other animals, should decide all questions of farm policy, though their decisions had to be ratified by a majority vote. This arrangement would have worked well enough if it had not been for the disputes between Snowball and Napoleon. These two disagreed at every point where disagreement was possible. If one of them suggested sowing a bigger acreage with barley, the other was certain to demand a bigger acreage of oats, and if one of them said that such and such a field was just right for cabbages, the other would declare that it was useless for anything except roots. Each had his own following, and there were some violent debates. At the Meetings Snowball often won over the majority by his brilliant speeches, but Napoleon was better at canvassing support for himself in between times. He was especially successful with the sheep. Of late the sheep had taken to bleating "Four legs good, two legs bad" both in and out of season, and they often interrupted the Meeting with this. It was noticed that they were especially liable to break into "Four legs good, two legs bad" at crucial moments in Snowball's speeches. Snowball had made a close study of some back numbers of the 'Farmer and Stockbreeder' which he had found in the farmhouse, and was full of plans for innovations and improvements. He talked learnedly about field drains, silage, and basic slag, and had worked out a complicated scheme for all the animals to drop their dung directly in the fields, at a different spot every day, to save the labour of cartage. Napoleon produced no schemes of his own, but said quietly that Snowball's would come to nothing, and seemed to be biding his time. But of all their controversies, none was so bitter as the one that took place over the windmill.

In the long pasture, not far from the farm buildings, there was a small knoll which was the highest point on the farm. After surveying the ground, Snowball declared that this was just the place for a windmill, which could be made to operate a dynamo and supply the

farm with electrical power. This would light the stalls and warm them in winter, and would also run a circular saw, a chaff-cutter, a mangel-slicer, and an electric milking machine. The animals had never heard of anything of this kind before (for the farm was an old-fashioned one and had only the most primitive machinery), and they listened in astonishment while Snowball conjured up pictures of fantastic machines which would do their work for them while they grazed at their ease in the fields or improved their minds with reading and conversation.

Within a few weeks Snowball's plans for the windmill were fully worked out. The mechanical details came mostly from three books which had belonged to Mr. Jones— 'One Thousand Useful Things to Do About the House', 'Every Man His Own Bricklayer', and 'Electricity for Beginners'. Snowball used as his study a shed which had once been used for incubators and had a smooth wooden floor, suitable for drawing on. He was closeted there for hours at a time. With his books held open by a stone, and with a piece of chalk gripped between the knuckles of his trotter, he would move rapidly to and fro, drawing in line after line and uttering little whimpers of excitement. Gradually the plans grew into a complicated mass of cranks and cog-wheels, covering more than half the floor, which the other animals found completely unintelligible but very impressive. All of them came to look at Snowball's drawings at least once a day. Even the hens and ducks came, and were at pains not to tread on the chalk marks. Only Napoleon held aloof. He had declared himself against the windmill from the start. One day, however, he arrived unexpectedly to examine the plans. He walked heavily round the shed, looked closely at every detail of the plans and snuffed at them once or twice, then stood for a little while contemplating them out of the corner of his eye; then suddenly he lifted his leg, urinated over the plans, and walked out without uttering a word.

The whole farm was deeply divided on the subject of the windmill. Snowball did not deny that to build it would be a difficult business. Stone would have to be carried and built up into walls, then the sails would have to be made and after that there would be need for dynamos and cables. (How these were to be procured, Snowball did not say.) But he maintained that it could all be done in a year.

And thereafter, he declared, so much labour would be saved that the animals would only need to work three days a week. Napoleon, on the other hand, argued that the great need of the moment was to increase food production, and that if they wasted time on the windmill they would all starve to death. The animals formed themselves into two factions under the slogan, "Vote for Snowball and the three-day week" and "Vote for Napoleon and the full manger." Benjamin was the only animal who did not side with either faction. He refused to believe either that food would become more plentiful or that the windmill would save work. Windmill or no windmill, he said, life would go on as it had always gone on — that is, badly.

Apart from the disputes over the windmill, there was the question of the defence of the farm. It was fully realised that though the human beings had been defeated in the Battle of the Cowshed they might make another and more determined attempt to recapture the farm and reinstate Mr. Jones. They had all the more reason for doing so because the news of their defeat had spread across the countryside and made the animals on the neighbouring farms more restive than ever. As usual, Snowball and Napoleon were in disagreement. According to Napoleon, what the animals must do was to procure firearms and train themselves in the use of them. According to Snowball, they must send out more and more pigeons and stir up rebellion among the animals on the other farms. The one argued that if they could not defend themselves they were bound to be conquered, the other argued that if rebellions happened everywhere they would have no need to defend themselves. The animals listened first to Napoleon, then to Snowball, and could not make up their minds which was right; indeed, they always found themselves in agreement with the one who was speaking at the moment.

At last the day came when Snowball's plans were completed. At the Meeting on the following Sunday the question of whether or not to begin work on the windmill was to be put to the vote. When the animals had assembled in the big barn, Snowball stood up and, though occasionally interrupted by bleating from the sheep, set forth his reasons for advocating the building of the windmill. Then Napoleon stood up to reply. He said very quietly that the windmill

was nonsense and that he advised nobody to vote for it, and promptly sat down again; he had spoken for barely thirty seconds, and seemed almost indifferent as to the effect he produced. At this Snowball sprang to his feet, and shouting down the sheep, who had begun bleating again, broke into a passionate appeal in favour of the windmill. Until now the animals had been about equally divided in their sympathies, but in a moment Snowball's eloquence had carried them away. In glowing sentences he painted a picture of Animal Farm as it might be when sordid labour was lifted from the animals' backs. His imagination had now run far beyond chaff-cutters and turnip-slicers. Electricity, he said, could operate threshing machines, ploughs, harrows, rollers, and reapers and binders, besides supplying every stall with its own electric light, hot and cold water, and an electric heater. By the time he had finished speaking, there was no doubt as to which way the vote would go. But just at this moment Napoleon stood up and, casting a peculiar sidelong look at Snowball, uttered a high-pitched whimper of a kind no one had ever heard him utter before.

At this there was a terrible baying sound outside, and nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars came bounding into the barn. They dashed straight for Snowball, who only sprang from his place just in time to escape their snapping jaws. In a moment he was out of the door and they were after him. Too amazed and frightened to speak, all the animals crowded through the door to watch the chase. Snowball was racing across the long pasture that led to the road. He was running as only a pig can run, but the dogs were close on his heels. Suddenly he slipped and it seemed certain that they had him. Then he was up again, running faster than ever, then the dogs were gaining on him again. One of them all but closed his jaws on Snowball's tail, but Snowball whisked it free just in time. Then he put on an extra spurt and, with a few inches to spare, slipped through a hole in the hedge and was seen no more.

Silent and terrified, the animals crept back into the barn. In a moment the dogs came bounding back. At first no one had been able to imagine where these creatures came from, but the problem was soon solved: they were the puppies whom Napoleon had taken away from their mothers and reared privately. Though not yet full-grown,

they were huge dogs, and as fierce-looking as wolves. They kept close to Napoleon. It was noticed that they wagged their tails to him in the same way as the other dogs had been used to do to Mr. Jones.

Napoleon, with the dogs following him, now mounted on to the raised portion of the floor where Major had previously stood to deliver his speech. He announced that from now on the Sunday-morning Meetings would come to an end. They were unnecessary, he said, and wasted time. In future all questions relating to the working of the farm would be settled by a special committee of pigs, presided over by himself. These would meet in private and afterwards communicate their decisions to the others. The animals would still assemble on Sunday mornings to salute the flag, sing 'Beasts of England', and receive their orders for the week; but there would be no more debates.

In spite of the shock that Snowball's expulsion had given them, the animals were dismayed by this announcement. Several of them would have protested if they could have found the right arguments. Even Boxer was vaguely troubled. He set his ears back, shook his forelock several times, and tried hard to marshal his thoughts; but in the end he could not think of anything to say. Some of the pigs themselves, however, were more articulate. Four young porkers in the front row uttered shrill squeals of disapproval, and all four of them sprang to their feet and began speaking at once. But suddenly the dogs sitting round Napoleon let out deep, menacing growls, and the pigs fell silent and sat down again. Then the sheep broke out into a tremendous bleating of "Four legs good, two legs bad!" which went on for nearly a quarter of an hour and put an end to any chance of discussion.

Afterwards Squealer was sent round the farm to explain the new arrangement to the others.

"Comrades," he said, "I trust that every animal here appreciates the sacrifice that Comrade Napoleon has made in taking this extra labour upon himself. Do not imagine, comrades, that leadership is a pleasure! On the contrary, it is a deep and heavy responsibility. No one believes more firmly than Comrade Napoleon that all animals are equal. He would be only too happy to let you make your decisions for yourselves. But sometimes you might make the wrong decisions,

comrades, and then where should we be? Suppose you had decided to follow Snowball, with his moonshine of windmills — Snowball, who, as we now know, was no better than a criminal?"

"He fought bravely at the Battle of the Cowshed," said somebody.

"Bravery is not enough," said Squealer. "Loyalty and obedience are more important. And as to the Battle of the Cowshed, I believe the time will come when we shall find that Snowball's part in it was much exaggerated. Discipline, comrades, iron discipline! That is the watchword for today. One false step, and our enemies would be upon us. Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?"

Once again this argument was unanswerable. Certainly the animals did not want Jones back; if the holding of debates on Sunday mornings was liable to bring him back, then the debates must stop. Boxer, who had now had time to think things over, voiced the general feeling by saying: "If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right." And from then on he adopted the maxim, "Napoleon is always right," in addition to his private motto of "I will work harder."

By this time the weather had broken and the spring ploughing had begun. The shed where Snowball had drawn his plans of the windmill had been shut up and it was assumed that the plans had been rubbed off the floor. Every Sunday morning at ten o'clock the animals assembled in the big barn to receive their orders for the week. The skull of old Major, now clean of flesh, had been disinterred from the orchard and set up on a stump at the foot of the flagstaff, beside the gun. After the hoisting of the flag, the animals were required to file past the skull in a reverent manner before entering the barn. Nowadays they did not sit all together as they had done in the past. Napoleon, with Squealer and another pig named Minimus, who had a remarkable gift for composing songs and poems, sat on the front of the raised platform, with the nine young dogs forming a semicircle round them, and the other pigs sitting behind. The rest of the animals sat facing them in the main body of the barn. Napoleon read out the orders for the week in a gruff soldierly style, and after a single singing of 'Beasts of England', all the animals dispersed.

On the third Sunday after Snowball's expulsion, the animals were

somewhat surprised to hear Napoleon announce that the windmill was to be built after all. He did not give any reason for having changed his mind, but merely warned the animals that this extra task would mean very hard work, it might even be necessary to reduce their rations. The plans, however, had all been prepared, down to the last detail. A special committee of pigs had been at work upon them for the past three weeks. The building of the windmill, with various other improvements, was expected to take two years.

That evening Squealer explained privately to the other animals that Napoleon had never in reality been opposed to the windmill. On the contrary, it was he who had advocated it in the beginning, and the plan which Snowball had drawn on the floor of the incubator shed had actually been stolen from among Napoleon's papers. The windmill was, in fact, Napoleon's own creation. Why, then, asked somebody, had he spoken so strongly against it? Here Squealer looked very sly. That, he said, was Comrade Napoleon's cunning. He had SEEMED to oppose the windmill, simply as a manoeuvre to get rid of Snowball, who was a dangerous character and a bad influence. Now that Snowball was out of the way, the plan could go forward without his interference. This, said Squealer, was something called tactics. He repeated a number of times, "Tactics, comrades, tactics!" skipping round and whisking his tail with a merry laugh. The animals were not certain what the word meant, but Squealer spoke so persuasively, and the three dogs who happened to be with him growled so threateningly, that they accepted his explanation without further questions.

Chapter 6

All that year the animals worked like slaves. But they were happy in their work; they grudged no effort or sacrifice, well aware that everything that they did was for the benefit of themselves and those of their kind who would come after them, and not for a pack of idle, thieving human beings.

Throughout the spring and summer they worked a sixty-hour week, and in August Napoleon announced that there would be work on Sunday afternoons as well. This work was strictly voluntary, but any animal who absented himself from it would have his rations reduced by half. Even so, it was found necessary to leave certain tasks undone. The harvest was a little less successful than in the previous year, and two fields which should have been sown with roots in the early summer were not sown because the ploughing had not been completed early enough. It was possible to foresee that the coming winter would be a hard one.

The windmill presented unexpected difficulties. There was a good quarry of limestone on the farm, and plenty of sand and cement had been found in one of the outhouses, so that all the materials for building were at hand. But the problem the animals could not at first solve was how to break up the stone into pieces of suitable size. There seemed no way of doing this except with picks and crowbars, which no animal could use, because no animal could stand on his hind legs. Only after weeks of vain effort did the right idea occur to somebody-namely, to utilise the force of gravity. Huge boulders, far too big to be used as they were, were lying all over the bed of the quarry. The animals lashed ropes round these, and then all together, cows, horses, sheep, any animal that could lay hold of the rope — even the pigs sometimes joined in at critical moments — they dragged them with desperate slowness up the slope to the top of the quarry, where they were toppled over the edge, to shatter to pieces below. Transporting the stone when it was once broken was comparatively simple. The horses carried it off in cart-loads, the sheep dragged single blocks, even Muriel and Benjamin yoked themselves into an old governess-cart and did their share. By late

summer a sufficient store of stone had accumulated, and then the building began, under the superintendence of the pigs.

But it was a slow, laborious process. Frequently it took a whole day of exhausting effort to drag a single boulder to the top of the quarry, and sometimes when it was pushed over the edge it failed to break. Nothing could have been achieved without Boxer, whose strength seemed equal to that of all the rest of the animals put together. When the boulder began to slip and the animals cried out in despair at finding themselves dragged down the hill, it was always Boxer who strained himself against the rope and brought the boulder to a stop. To see him toiling up the slope inch by inch, his breath coming fast, the tips of his hoofs clawing at the ground, and his great sides matted with sweat, filled everyone with admiration. Clover warned him sometimes to be careful not to overstrain himself, but Boxer would never listen to her. His two slogans, "I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right," seemed to him a sufficient answer to all problems. He had made arrangements with the cockerel to call him three-quarters of an hour earlier in the mornings instead of half an hour. And in his spare moments, of which there were not many nowadays, he would go alone to the quarry, collect a load of broken stone, and drag it down to the site of the windmill unassisted.

The animals were not badly off throughout that summer, in spite of the hardness of their work. If they had no more food than they had had in Jones's day, at least they did not have less. The advantage of only having to feed themselves, and not having to support five extravagant human beings as well, was so great that it would have taken a lot of failures to outweigh it. And in many ways the animal method of doing things was more efficient and saved labour. Such jobs as weeding, for instance, could be done with a thoroughness impossible to human beings. And again, since no animal now stole, it was unnecessary to fence off pasture from arable land, which saved a lot of labour on the upkeep of hedges and gates. Nevertheless, as the summer wore on, various unforeseen shortages began to make them selves felt. There was need of paraffin oil, nails, string, dog biscuits, and iron for the horses' shoes, none of which could be produced on the farm. Later there would also be need for seeds and artificial manures, besides various tools and, finally, the machinery for the

windmill. How these were to be procured, no one was able to imagine.

One Sunday morning, when the animals assembled to receive their orders, Napoleon announced that he had decided upon a new policy. From now onwards Animal Farm would engage in trade with the neighbouring farms: not, of course, for any commercial purpose, but simply in order to obtain certain materials which were urgently necessary. The needs of the windmill must override everything else, he said. He was therefore making arrangements to sell a stack of hay and part of the current year's wheat crop, and later on, if more money were needed, it would have to be made up by the sale of eggs, for which there was always a market in Willingdon. The hens, said Napoleon, should welcome this sacrifice as their own special contribution towards the building of the windmill.

Once again the animals were conscious of a vague uneasiness. Never to have any dealings with human beings, never to engage in trade, never to make use of money — had not these been among the earliest resolutions passed at that first triumphant Meeting after Jones was expelled? All the animals remembered passing such resolutions: or at least they thought that they remembered it. The four young pigs who had protested when Napoleon abolished the Meetings raised their voices timidly, but they were promptly silenced by a tremendous growling from the dogs. Then, as usual, the sheep broke into "Four legs good, two legs bad!" and the momentary awkwardness was smoothed over. Finally Napoleon raised his trotter for silence and announced that he had already made all the arrangements. There would be no need for any of the animals to come in contact with human beings, which would clearly be most undesirable. He intended to take the whole burden upon his own shoulders. A Mr. Whymper, a solicitor living in Willingdon, had agreed to act as intermediary between Animal Farm and the outside world, and would visit the farm every Monday morning to receive his instructions. Napoleon ended his speech with his usual cry of "Long live Animal Farm!" and after the singing of 'Beasts of England' the animals were dismissed.

Afterwards Squealer made a round of the farm and set the animals' minds at rest. He assured them that the resolution against

engaging in trade and using money had never been passed, or even suggested. It was pure imagination, probably traceable in the beginning to lies circulated by Snowball. A few animals still felt faintly doubtful, but Squealer asked them shrewdly, "Are you certain that this is not something that you have dreamed, comrades? Have you any record of such a resolution? Is it written down anywhere?" And since it was certainly true that nothing of the kind existed in writing, the animals were satisfied that they had been mistaken.

Every Monday Mr. Whymper visited the farm as had been arranged. He was a sly-looking little man with side whiskers, a solicitor in a very small way of business, but sharp enough to have realised earlier than anyone else that Animal Farm would need a broker and that the commissions would be worth having. The animals watched his coming and going with a kind of dread, and avoided him as much as possible. Nevertheless, the sight of Napoleon, on all fours, delivering orders to Whymper, who stood on two legs, roused their pride and partly reconciled them to the new arrangement. Their relations with the human race were now not quite the same as they had been before. The human beings did not hate Animal Farm any less now that it was prospering; indeed, they hated it more than ever. Every human being held it as an article of faith that the farm would go bankrupt sooner or later, and, above all, that the windmill would be a failure. They would meet in the public-houses and prove to one another by means of diagrams that the windmill was bound to fall down, or that if it did stand up, then that it would never work. And yet, against their will, they had developed a certain respect for the efficiency with which the animals were managing their own affairs. One symptom of this was that they had begun to call Animal Farm by its proper name and ceased to pretend that it was called the Manor Farm. They had also dropped their championship of Jones, who had given up hope of getting his farm back and gone to live in another part of the county. Except through Whymper, there was as yet no contact between Animal Farm and the outside world, but there were constant rumours that Napoleon was about to enter into a definite business agreement either with Mr. Pilkington of Foxwood or with Mr. Frederick of Pinchfield — but never, it was noticed, with both simultaneously.

It was about this time that the pigs suddenly moved into the farmhouse and took up their residence there. Again the animals seemed to remember that a resolution against this had been passed in the early days, and again Squealer was able to convince them that this was not the case. It was absolutely necessary, he said, that the pigs, who were the brains of the farm, should have a quiet place to work in. It was also more suited to the dignity of the Leader (for of late he had taken to speaking of Napoleon under the title of "Leader") to live in a house than in a mere sty. Nevertheless, some of the animals were disturbed when they heard that the pigs not only took their meals in the kitchen and used the drawing-room as a recreation room, but also slept in the beds. Boxer passed it off as usual with "Napoleon is always right!", but Clover, who thought she remembered a definite ruling against beds, went to the end of the barn and tried to puzzle out the Seven Commandments which were inscribed there. Finding herself unable to read more than individual letters, she fetched Muriel.

"Muriel," she said, "read me the Fourth Commandment. Does it not say something about never sleeping in a bed?"

With some difficulty Muriel spelt it out.

"It says, 'No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets,'" she announced finally.

Curiously enough, Clover had not remembered that the Fourth Commandment mentioned sheets; but as it was there on the wall, it must have done so. And Squealer, who happened to be passing at this moment, attended by two or three dogs, was able to put the whole matter in its proper perspective.

"You have heard then, comrades," he said, "that we pigs now sleep in the beds of the farmhouse? And why not? You did not suppose, surely, that there was ever a ruling against beds? A bed merely means a place to sleep in. A pile of straw in a stall is a bed, properly regarded. The rule was against sheets, which are a human invention. We have removed the sheets from the farmhouse beds, and sleep between blankets. And very comfortable beds they are too! But not more comfortable than we need, I can tell you, comrades, with all the brainwork we have to do nowadays. You would not rob us of our repose, would you, comrades? You would not have us too

tired to carry out our duties? Surely none of you wishes to see Jones back?"

The animals reassured him on this point immediately, and no more was said about the pigs sleeping in the farmhouse beds. And when, some days afterwards, it was announced that from now on the pigs would get up an hour later in the mornings than the other animals, no complaint was made about that either.

By the autumn the animals were tired but happy. They had had a hard year, and after the sale of part of the hay and corn, the stores of food for the winter were none too plentiful, but the windmill compensated for everything. It was almost half built now. After the harvest there was a stretch of clear dry weather, and the animals toiled harder than ever, thinking it well worth while to plod to and fro all day with blocks of stone if by doing so they could raise the walls another foot. Boxer would even come out at nights and work for an hour or two on his own by the light of the harvest moon. In their spare moments the animals would walk round and round the half-finished mill, admiring the strength and perpendicularity of its walls and marvelling that they should ever have been able to build anything so imposing. Only old Benjamin refused to grow enthusiastic about the windmill, though, as usual, he would utter nothing beyond the cryptic remark that donkeys live a long time.

November came, with raging south-west winds. Building had to stop because it was now too wet to mix the cement. Finally there came a night when the gale was so violent that the farm buildings rocked on their foundations and several tiles were blown off the roof of the barn. The hens woke up squawking with terror because they had all dreamed simultaneously of hearing a gun go off in the distance. In the morning the animals came out of their stalls to find that the flagstaff had been blown down and an elm tree at the foot of the orchard had been plucked up like a radish. They had just noticed this when a cry of despair broke from every animal's throat. A terrible sight had met their eyes. The windmill was in ruins.

With one accord they dashed down to the spot. Napoleon, who seldom moved out of a walk, raced ahead of them all. Yes, there it lay, the fruit of all their struggles, levelled to its foundations, the stones they had broken and carried so laboriously scattered all

around. Unable at first to speak, they stood gazing mournfully at the litter of fallen stone. Napoleon paced to and fro in silence, occasionally snuffing at the ground. His tail had grown rigid and twitched sharply from side to side, a sign in him of intense mental activity. Suddenly he halted as though his mind were made up.

"Comrades," he said quietly, "do you know who is responsible for this? Do you know the enemy who has come in the night and overthrown our windmill? SNOWBALL!" he suddenly roared in a voice of thunder. "Snowball has done this thing! In sheer malignity, thinking to set back our plans and avenge himself for his ignominious expulsion, this traitor has crept here under cover of night and destroyed our work of nearly a year. Comrades, here and now I pronounce the death sentence upon Snowball. 'Animal Hero, Second Class,' and half a bushel of apples to any animal who brings him to justice. A full bushel to anyone who captures him alive!"

The animals were shocked beyond measure to learn that even Snowball could be guilty of such an action. There was a cry of indignation, and everyone began thinking out ways of catching Snowball if he should ever come back. Almost immediately the footprints of a pig were discovered in the grass at a little distance from the knoll. They could only be traced for a few yards, but appeared to lead to a hole in the hedge. Napoleon snuffed deeply at them and pronounced them to be Snowball's. He gave it as his opinion that Snowball had probably come from the direction of Foxwood Farm.

"No more delays, comrades!" cried Napoleon when the footprints had been examined. "There is work to be done. This very morning we begin rebuilding the windmill, and we will build all through the winter, rain or shine. We will teach this miserable traitor that he cannot undo our work so easily. Remember, comrades, there must be no alteration in our plans: they shall be carried out to the day. Forward, comrades! Long live the windmill! Long live Animal Farm!"

Chapter 7

It was a bitter winter. The stormy weather was followed by sleet and snow, and then by a hard frost which did not break till well into February. The animals carried on as best they could with the rebuilding of the windmill, well knowing that the outside world was watching them and that the envious human beings would rejoice and triumph if the mill were not finished on time.

Out of spite, the human beings pretended not to believe that it was Snowball who had destroyer the windmill: they said that it had fallen down because the walls were too thin. The animals knew that this was not the case. Still, it had been decided to build the walls three feet thick this time instead of eighteen inches as before, which meant collecting much larger quantities of stone. For a long time the quarry was full of snowdrifts and nothing could be done. Some progress was made in the dry frosty weather that followed, but it was cruel work, and the animals could not feel so hopeful about it as they had felt before. They were always cold, and usually hungry as well. Only Boxer and Clover never lost heart. Squealer made excellent speeches on the joy of service and the dignity of labour, but the other animals found more inspiration in Boxer's strength and his never-failing cry of "I will work harder!"

In January food fell short. The corn ration was drastically reduced, and it was announced that an extra potato ration would be issued to make up for it. Then it was discovered that the greater part of the potato crop had been frosted in the clamps, which had not been covered thickly enough. The potatoes had become soft and discoloured, and only a few were edible. For days at a time the animals had nothing to eat but chaff and mangels. Starvation seemed to stare them in the face.

It was vitally necessary to conceal this fact from the outside world. Emboldened by the collapse of the windmill, the human beings were inventing fresh lies about Animal Farm. Once again it was being put about that all the animals were dying of famine and disease, and that they were continually fighting among themselves and had resorted to cannibalism and infanticide. Napoleon was well

aware of the bad results that might follow if the real facts of the food situation were known, and he decided to make use of Mr. Whymper to spread a contrary impression. Hitherto the animals had had little or no contact with Whymper on his weekly visits: now, however, a few selected animals, mostly sheep, were instructed to remark casually in his hearing that rations had been increased. In addition, Napoleon ordered the almost empty bins in the store-shed to be filled nearly to the brim with sand, which was then covered up with what remained of the grain and meal. On some suitable pretext Whymper was led through the store-shed and allowed to catch a glimpse of the bins. He was deceived, and continued to report to the outside world that there was no food shortage on Animal Farm.

Nevertheless, towards the end of January it became obvious that it would be necessary to procure some more grain from somewhere. In these days Napoleon rarely appeared in public, but spent all his time in the farmhouse, which was guarded at each door by fierce-looking dogs. When he did emerge, it was in a ceremonial manner, with an escort of six dogs who closely surrounded him and growled if anyone came too near. Frequently he did not even appear on Sunday mornings, but issued his orders through one of the other pigs, usually Squealer.

One Sunday morning Squealer announced that the hens, who had just come in to lay again, must surrender their eggs. Napoleon had accepted, through Whymper, a contract for four hundred eggs a week. The price of these would pay for enough grain and meal to keep the farm going till summer came on and conditions were easier.

When the hens heard this, they raised a terrible outcry. They had been warned earlier that this sacrifice might be necessary, but had not believed that it would really happen. They were just getting their clutches ready for the spring sitting, and they protested that to take the eggs away now was murder. For the first time since the expulsion of Jones, there was something resembling a rebellion. Led by three young Black Minorca pullets, the hens made a determined effort to thwart Napoleon's wishes. Their method was to fly up to the rafters and there lay their eggs, which smashed to pieces on the floor. Napoleon acted swiftly and ruthlessly. He ordered the hens' rations to be stopped, and decreed that any animal giving so much as a grain

of corn to a hen should be punished by death. The dogs saw to it that these orders were carried out. For five days the hens held out, then they capitulated and went back to their nesting boxes. Nine hens had died in the meantime. Their bodies were buried in the orchard, and it was given out that they had died of coccidiosis. Whymper heard nothing of this affair, and the eggs were duly delivered, a grocer's van driving up to the farm once a week to take them away.

All this while no more had been seen of Snowball. He was rumoured to be hiding on one of the neighbouring farms, either Foxwood or Pinchfield. Napoleon was by this time on slightly better terms with the other farmers than before. It happened that there was in the yard a pile of timber which had been stacked there ten years earlier when a beech spinney was cleared. It was well seasoned, and Whymper had advised Napoleon to sell it; both Mr. Pilkington and Mr. Frederick were anxious to buy it. Napoleon was hesitating between the two, unable to make up his mind. It was noticed that whenever he seemed on the point of coming to an agreement with Frederick, Snowball was declared to be in hiding at Foxwood, while, when he inclined toward Pilkington, Snowball was said to be at Pinchfield.

Suddenly, early in the spring, an alarming thing was discovered. Snowball was secretly frequenting the farm by night! The animals were so disturbed that they could hardly sleep in their stalls. Every night, it was said, he came creeping in under cover of darkness and performed all kinds of mischief. He stole the corn, he upset the milk-pails, he broke the eggs, he trampled the seedbeds, he gnawed the bark off the fruit trees. Whenever anything went wrong it became usual to attribute it to Snowball. If a window was broken or a drain was blocked up, someone was certain to say that Snowball had come in the night and done it, and when the key of the store-shed was lost, the whole farm was convinced that Snowball had thrown it down the well. Curiously enough, they went on believing this even after the mislaid key was found under a sack of meal. The cows declared unanimously that Snowball crept into their stalls and milked them in their sleep. The rats, which had been troublesome that winter, were also said to be in league with Snowball.

Napoleon decreed that there should be a full investigation into

Snowball's activities. With his dogs in attendance he set out and made a careful tour of inspection of the farm buildings, the other animals following at a respectful distance. At every few steps Napoleon stopped and snuffed the ground for traces of Snowball's footsteps, which, he said, he could detect by the smell. He snuffed in every corner, in the barn, in the cow-shed, in the henhouses, in the vegetable garden, and found traces of Snowball almost everywhere. He would put his snout to the ground, give several deep sniffs, ad exclaim in a terrible voice, "Snowball! He has been here! I can smell him distinctly!" and at the word "Snowball" all the dogs let out blood-curdling growls and showed their side teeth.

The animals were thoroughly frightened. It seemed to them as though Snowball were some kind of invisible influence, pervading the air about them and menacing them with all kinds of dangers. In the evening Squealer called them together, and with an alarmed expression on his face told them that he had some serious news to report.

"Comrades!" cried Squealer, making little nervous skips, "a most terrible thing has been discovered. Snowball has sold himself to Frederick of Pinchfield Farm, who is even now plotting to attack us and take our farm away from us! Snowball is to act as his guide when the attack begins. But there is worse than that. We had thought that Snowball's rebellion was caused simply by his vanity and ambition. But we were wrong, comrades. Do you know what the real reason was? Snowball was in league with Jones from the very start! He was Jones's secret agent all the time. It has all been proved by documents which he left behind him and which we have only just discovered. To my mind this explains a great deal, comrades. Did we not see for ourselves how he attempted — fortunately without success — to get us defeated and destroyed at the Battle of the Cowshed?"

The animals were stupefied. This was a wickedness far outdoing Snowball's destruction of the windmill. But it was some minutes before they could fully take it in. They all remembered, or thought they remembered, how they had seen Snowball charging ahead of them at the Battle of the Cowshed, how he had rallied and encouraged them at every turn, and how he had not paused for an

instant even when the pellets from Jones's gun had wounded his back. At first it was a little difficult to see how this fitted in with his being on Jones's side. Even Boxer, who seldom asked questions, was puzzled. He lay down, tucked his fore hoofs beneath him, shut his eyes, and with a hard effort managed to formulate his thoughts.

"I do not believe that," he said. "Snowball fought bravely at the Battle of the Cowshed. I saw him myself. Did we not give him 'Animal Hero, first Class,' immediately afterwards?"

"That was our mistake, comrade. For we know now — it is all written down in the secret documents that we have found — that in reality he was trying to lure us to our doom."

"But he was wounded," said Boxer. "We all saw him running with blood."

"That was part of the arrangement!" cried Squealer. "Jones's shot only grazed him. I could show you this in his own writing, if you were able to read it. The plot was for Snowball, at the critical moment, to give the signal for flight and leave the field to the enemy. And he very nearly succeeded — I will even say, comrades, he WOULD have succeeded if it had not been for our heroic Leader, Comrade Napoleon. Do you not remember how, just at the moment when Jones and his men had got inside the yard, Snowball suddenly turned and fled, and many animals followed him? And do you not remember, too, that it was just at that moment, when panic was spreading and all seemed lost, that Comrade Napoleon sprang forward with a cry of 'Death to Humanity!' and sank his teeth in Jones's leg? Surely you remember THAT, comrades?" exclaimed Squealer, frisking from side to side.

Now when Squealer described the scene so graphically, it seemed to the animals that they did remember it. At any rate, they remembered that at the critical moment of the battle Snowball had turned to flee. But Boxer was still a little uneasy.

"I do not believe that Snowball was a traitor at the beginning," he said finally. "What he has done since is different. But I believe that at the Battle of the Cowshed he was a good comrade."

"Our Leader, Comrade Napoleon," announced Squealer, speaking very slowly and firmly, "has stated categorically — categorically, comrade — that Snowball was Jones's agent from the very beginning

— yes, and from long before the Rebellion was ever thought of."

"Ah, that is different!" said Boxer. "If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right."

"That is the true spirit, comrade!" cried Squealer, but it was noticed he cast a very ugly look at Boxer with his little twinkling eyes. He turned to go, then paused and added impressively: "I warn every animal on this farm to keep his eyes very wide open. For we have reason to think that some of Snowball's secret agents are lurking among us at this moment!"

Four days later, in the late afternoon, Napoleon ordered all the animals to assemble in the yard. When they were all gathered together, Napoleon emerged from the farmhouse, wearing both his medals (for he had recently awarded himself "Animal Hero, First Class", and "Animal Hero, Second Class"), with his nine huge dogs frisking round him and uttering growls that sent shivers down all the animals' spines. They all cowered silently in their places, seeming to know in advance that some terrible thing was about to happen.

Napoleon stood sternly surveying his audience; then he uttered a high-pitched whimper. Immediately the dogs bounded forward, seized four of the pigs by the ear and dragged them, squealing with pain and terror, to Napoleon's feet. The pigs' ears were bleeding, the dogs had tasted blood, and for a few moments they appeared to go quite mad. To the amazement of everybody, three of them flung themselves upon Boxer. Boxer saw them coming and put out his great hoof, caught a dog in mid-air, and pinned him to the ground. The dog shrieked for mercy and the other two fled with their tails between their legs. Boxer looked at Napoleon to know whether he should crush the dog to death or let it go. Napoleon appeared to change countenance, and sharply ordered Boxer to let the dog go, whereat Boxer lifted his hoof, and the dog slunk away, bruised and howling.

Presently the tumult died down. The four pigs waited, trembling, with guilt written on every line of their countenances. Napoleon now called upon them to confess their crimes. They were the same four pigs as had protested when Napoleon abolished the Sunday Meetings. Without any further prompting they confessed that they had been secretly in touch with Snowball ever since his expulsion,

that they had collaborated with him in destroying the windmill, and that they had entered into an agreement with him to hand over Animal Farm to Mr. Frederick. They added that Snowball had privately admitted to them that he had been Jones's secret agent for years past. When they had finished their confession, the dogs promptly tore their throats out, and in a terrible voice Napoleon demanded whether any other animal had anything to confess.

The three hens who had been the ringleaders in the attempted rebellion over the eggs now came forward and stated that Snowball had appeared to them in a dream and incited them to disobey Napoleon's orders. They, too, were slaughtered. Then a goose came forward and confessed to having secreted six ears of corn during the last year's harvest and eaten them in the night. Then a sheep confessed to having urinated in the drinking pool — urged to do this, so she said, by Snowball — and two other sheep confessed to having murdered an old ram, an especially devoted follower of Napoleon, by chasing him round and round a bonfire when he was suffering from a cough. They were all slain on the spot. And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones.

When it was all over, the remaining animals, except for the pigs and dogs, crept away in a body. They were shaken and miserable. They did not know which was more shocking — the treachery of the animals who had leagued themselves with Snowball, or the cruel retribution they had just witnessed. In the old days there had often been scenes of bloodshed equally terrible, but it seemed to all of them that it was far worse now that it was happening among themselves. Since Jones had left the farm, until today, no animal had killed another animal. Not even a rat had been killed. They had made their way on to the little knoll where the half-finished windmill stood, and with one accord they all lay down as though huddling together for warmth — Clover, Muriel, Benjamin, the cows, the sheep, and a whole flock of geese and hens — everyone, indeed, except the cat, who had suddenly disappeared just before Napoleon ordered the animals to assemble. For some time nobody spoke. Only Boxer remained on his feet. He fidgeted to and fro, swishing his long

black tail against his sides and occasionally uttering a little whinny of surprise. Finally he said:

"I do not understand it. I would not have believed that such things could happen on our farm. It must be due to some fault in ourselves. The solution, as I see it, is to work harder. From now onwards I shall get up a full hour earlier in the mornings."

And he moved off at his lumbering trot and made for the quarry. Having got there, he collected two successive loads of stone and dragged them down to the windmill before retiring for the night.

The animals huddled about Clover, not speaking. The knoll where they were lying gave them a wide prospect across the countryside. Most of Animal Farm was within their view — the long pasture stretching down to the main road, the hayfield, the spinney, the drinking pool, the ploughed fields where the young wheat was thick and green, and the red roofs of the farm buildings with the smoke curling from the chimneys. It was a clear spring evening. The grass and the bursting hedges were gilded by the level rays of the sun. Never had the farm — and with a kind of surprise they remembered that it was their own farm, every inch of it their own property — appeared to the animals so desirable a place. As Clover looked down the hillside her eyes filled with tears. If she could have spoken her thoughts, it would have been to say that this was not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves years ago to work for the overthrow of the human race. These scenes of terror and slaughter were not what they had looked forward to on that night when old Major first stirred them to rebellion. If she herself had had any picture of the future, it had been of a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip, all equal, each working according to his capacity, the strong protecting the weak, as she had protected the lost brood of ducklings with her foreleg on the night of Major's speech. Instead — she did not know why — they had come to a time when no one dared speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades torn to pieces after confessing to shocking crimes. There was no thought of rebellion or disobedience in her mind. She knew that, even as things were, they were far better off than they had been in the days of Jones, and that before all else it was needful to prevent the return of the

human beings. Whatever happened she would remain faithful, work hard, carry out the orders that were given to her, and accept the leadership of Napoleon. But still, it was not for this that she and all the other animals had hoped and toiled. It was not for this that they had built the windmill and faced the bullets of Jones's gun. Such were her thoughts, though she lacked the words to express them.

At last, feeling this to be in some way a substitute for the words she was unable to find, she began to sing 'Beasts of England'. The other animals sitting round her took it up, and they sang it three times over — very tunefully, but slowly and mournfully, in a way they had never sung it before.

They had just finished singing it for the third time when Squealer, attended by two dogs, approached them with the air of having something important to say. He announced that, by a special decree of Comrade Napoleon, 'Beasts of England' had been abolished. From now onwards it was forbidden to sing it.

The animals were taken aback.

"Why?" cried Muriel.

"It's no longer needed, comrade," said Squealer stiffly. "'Beasts of England' was the song of the Rebellion. But the Rebellion is now completed. The execution of the traitors this afternoon was the final act. The enemy both external and internal has been defeated. In 'Beasts of England' we expressed our longing for a better society in days to come. But that society has now been established. Clearly this song has no longer any purpose."

Frightened though they were, some of the animals might possibly have protested, but at this moment the sheep set up their usual bleating of "Four legs good, two legs bad," which went on for several minutes and put an end to the discussion.

So 'Beasts of England' was heard no more. In its place Minimus, the poet, had composed another song which began:

Animal Farm, Animal Farm,

Never through me shalt thou come to harm!

and this was sung every Sunday morning after the hoisting of the flag. But somehow neither the words nor the tune ever seemed to the animals to come up to 'Beasts of England'.

Chapter 8

A few days later, when the terror caused by the executions had died down, some of the animals remembered — or thought they remembered — that the Sixth Commandment decreed "No animal shall kill any other animal." And though no one cared to mention it in the hearing of the pigs or the dogs, it was felt that the killings which had taken place did not square with this. Clover asked Benjamin to read her the Sixth Commandment, and when Benjamin, as usual, said that he refused to meddle in such matters, she fetched Muriel. Muriel read the Commandment for her. It ran: "No animal shall kill any other animal WITHOUT CAUSE." Somehow or other, the last two words had slipped out of the animals' memory. But they saw now that the Commandment had not been violated; for clearly there was good reason for killing the traitors who had leagued themselves with Snowball.

Throughout the year the animals worked even harder than they had worked in the previous year. To rebuild the windmill, with walls twice as thick as before, and to finish it by the appointed date, together with the regular work of the farm, was a tremendous labour. There were times when it seemed to the animals that they worked longer hours and fed no better than they had done in Jones's day. On Sunday mornings Squealer, holding down a long strip of paper with his trotter, would read out to them lists of figures proving that the production of every class of foodstuff had increased by two hundred per cent, three hundred per cent, or five hundred per cent, as the case might be. The animals saw no reason to disbelieve him, especially as they could no longer remember very clearly what conditions had been like before the Rebellion. All the same, there were days when they felt that they would sooner have had less figures and more food.

All orders were now issued through Squealer or one of the other pigs. Napoleon himself was not seen in public as often as once in a fortnight. When he did appear, he was attended not only by his retinue of dogs but by a black cockerel who marched in front of him and acted as a kind of trumpeter, letting out a loud "cock-a-doodle-doo" before Napoleon spoke. Even in the farmhouse, it was said,

Napoleon inhabited separate apartments from the others. He took his meals alone, with two dogs to wait upon him, and always ate from the Crown Derby dinner service which had been in the glass cupboard in the drawing-room. It was also announced that the gun would be fired every year on Napoleon's birthday, as well as on the other two anniversaries.

Napoleon was now never spoken of simply as "Napoleon." He was always referred to in formal style as "our Leader, Comrade Napoleon," and this pigs liked to invent for him such titles as Father of All Animals, Terror of Mankind, Protector of the Sheep-fold, Ducklings' Friend, and the like. In his speeches, Squealer would talk with the tears rolling down his cheeks of Napoleon's wisdom the goodness of his heart, and the deep love he bore to all animals everywhere, even and especially the unhappy animals who still lived in ignorance and slavery on other farms. It had become usual to give Napoleon the credit for every successful achievement and every stroke of good fortune. You would often hear one hen remark to another, "Under the guidance of our Leader, Comrade Napoleon, I have laid five eggs in six days"; or two cows, enjoying a drink at the pool, would exclaim, "Thanks to the leadership of Comrade Napoleon, how excellent this water tastes!" The general feeling on the farm was well expressed in a poem entitled Comrade Napoleon, which was composed by Minimus and which ran as follows:

Friend of fatherless!
Fountain of happiness!
Lord of the swill-bucket! Oh, how my soul is on
Fire when I gaze at thy
Calm and commanding eye,
Like the sun in the sky,
Comrade Napoleon!
Thou are the giver of
All that thy creatures love,
Full belly twice a day, clean straw to roll upon;
Every beast great or small
Sleeps at peace in his stall,
Thou watchest over all,
Comrade Napoleon!

Had I a sucking-pig,
Ere he had grown as big
Even as a pint bottle or as a rolling-pin,
He should have learned to be
Faithful and true to thee,
Yes, his first squeak should be
"Comrade Napoleon!"

Napoleon approved of this poem and caused it to be inscribed on the wall of the big barn, at the opposite end from the Seven Commandments. It was surmounted by a portrait of Napoleon, in profile, executed by Squealer in white paint.

Meanwhile, through the agency of Whymper, Napoleon was engaged in complicated negotiations with Frederick and Pilkington. The pile of timber was still unsold. Of the two, Frederick was the more anxious to get hold of it, but he would not offer a reasonable price. At the same time there were renewed rumours that Frederick and his men were plotting to attack Animal Farm and to destroy the windmill, the building of which had aroused furious jealousy in him. Snowball was known to be still skulking on Pinchfield Farm. In the middle of the summer the animals were alarmed to hear that three hens had come forward and confessed that, inspired by Snowball, they had entered into a plot to murder Napoleon. They were executed immediately, and fresh precautions for Napoleon's safety were taken. Four dogs guarded his bed at night, one at each corner, and a young pig named Pinkeye was given the task of tasting all his food before he ate it, lest it should be poisoned.

At about the same time it was given out that Napoleon had arranged to sell the pile of timber to Mr. Pilkington; he was also going to enter into a regular agreement for the exchange of certain products between Animal Farm and Foxwood. The relations between Napoleon and Pilkington, though they were only conducted through Whymper, were now almost friendly. The animals distrusted Pilkington, as a human being, but greatly preferred him to Frederick, whom they both feared and hated. As the summer wore on, and the windmill neared completion, the rumours of an impending treacherous attack grew stronger and stronger. Frederick, it was said, intended to bring against them twenty men all armed with guns, and

he had already bribed the magistrates and police, so that if he could once get hold of the title-deeds of Animal Farm they would ask no questions. Moreover, terrible stories were leaking out from Pinchfield about the cruelties that Frederick practised upon his animals. He had flogged an old horse to death, he starved his cows, he had killed a dog by throwing it into the furnace, he amused himself in the evenings by making cocks fight with splinters of razor-blade tied to their spurs. The animals' blood boiled with rage when they heard of these things beingdone to their comrades, and sometimes they clamoured to be allowed to go out in a body and attack Pinchfield Farm, drive out the humans, and set the animals free. But Squealer counselled them to avoid rash actions and trust in Comrade Napoleon's strategy.

Nevertheless, feeling against Frederick continued to run high. One Sunday morning Napoleon appeared in the barn and explained that he had never at any time contemplated selling the pile of timber to Frederick; he considered it beneath his dignity, he said, to have dealings with scoundrels of that description. The pigeons who were still sent out to spread tidings of the Rebellion were forbidden to set foot anywhere on Foxwood, and were also ordered to drop their former slogan of "Death to Humanity" in favour of "Death to Frederick." In the late summer yet another of Snowball's machinations was laid bare. The wheat crop was full of weeds, and it was discovered that on one of his nocturnal visits Snowball had mixed weed seeds with the seed corn. A gander who had been privy to the plot had confessed his guilt to Squealer and immediately committed suicide by swallowing deadly nightshade berries. The animals now also learned that Snowball had never — as many of them had believed hitherto — received the order of "Animal Hero, First Class." This was merely a legend which had been spread some time after the Battle of the Cowshed by Snowball himself. So far from being decorated, he had been censured for showing cowardice in the battle. Once again some of the animals heard this with a certain bewilderment, but Squealer was soon able to convince them that their memories had been at fault.

In the autumn, by a tremendous, exhausting effort — for the harvest had to be gathered at almost the same time — the windmill

was finished. The machinery had still to be installed, and Whymper was negotiating the purchase of it, but the structure was completed. In the teeth of every difficulty, in spite of inexperience, of primitive implements, of bad luck and of Snowball's treachery, the work had been finished punctually to the very day! Tired out but proud, the animals walked round and round their masterpiece, which appeared even more beautiful in their eyes than when it had been built the first time. Moreover, the walls were twice as thick as before. Nothing short of explosives would lay them low this time! And when they thought of how they had laboured, what discouragements they had overcome, and the enormous difference that would be made in their lives when the sails were turning and the dynamos running — when they thought of all this, their tiredness forsook them and they gambolled round and round the windmill, uttering cries of triumph. Napoleon himself, attended by his dogs and his cockerel, came down to inspect the completed work; he personally congratulated the animals on their achievement, and announced that the mill would be named Napoleon Mill.

Two days later the animals were called together for a special meeting in the barn. They were struck dumb with surprise when Napoleon announced that he had sold the pile of timber to Frederick. Tomorrow Frederick's wagons would arrive and begin carting it away. Throughout the whole period of his seeming friendship with Pilkington, Napoleon had really been in secret agreement with Frederick.

All relations with Foxwood had been broken off; insulting messages had been sent to Pilkington. The pigeons had been told to avoid Pinchfield Farm and to alter their slogan from "Death to Frederick" to "Death to Pilkington." At the same time Napoleon assured the animals that the stories of an impending attack on Animal Farm were completely untrue, and that the tales about Frederick's cruelty to his own animals had been greatly exaggerated. All these rumours had probably originated with Snowball and his agents. It now appeared that Snowball was not, after all, hiding on Pinchfield Farm, and in fact had never been there in his life: he was living — in considerable luxury, so it was said — at Foxwood, and had in reality been a pensioner of Pilkington for years past.

The pigs were in ecstasies over Napoleon's cunning. By seeming to be friendly with Pilkington he had forced Frederick to raise his price by twelve pounds. But the superior quality of Napoleon's mind, said Squealer, was shown in the fact that he trusted nobody, not even Frederick. Frederick had wanted to pay for the timber with something called a cheque, which, it seemed, was a piece of paper with a promise to pay written upon it. But Napoleon was too clever for him. He had demanded payment in real five-pound notes, which were to be handed over before the timber was removed. Already Frederick had paid up; and the sum he had paid was just enough to buy the machinery for the windmill.

Meanwhile the timber was being carted away at high speed. When it was all gone, another special meeting was held in the barn for the animals to inspect Frederick's bank-notes. Smiling beatifically, and wearing both his decorations, Napoleon reposed on a bed of straw on the platform, with the money at his side, neatly piled on a china dish from the farmhouse kitchen. The animals filed slowly past, and each gazed his fill. And Boxer put out his nose to sniff at the bank-notes, and the flimsy white things stirred and rustled in his breath.

Three days later there was a terrible hullabaloo. Whymper, his face deadly pale, came racing up the path on his bicycle, flung it down in the yard and rushed straight into the farmhouse. The next moment a choking roar of rage sounded from Napoleon's apartments. The news of what had happened sped round the farm like wildfire. The banknotes were forgeries! Frederick had got the timber for nothing!

Napoleon called the animals together immediately and in a terrible voice pronounced the death sentence upon Frederick. When captured, he said, Frederick should be boiled alive. At the same time he warned them that after this treacherous deed the worst was to be expected. Frederick and his men might make their long-expected attack at any moment. Sentinels were placed at all the approaches to the farm. In addition, four pigeons were sent to Foxwood with a conciliatory message, which it was hoped might re-establish good relations with Pilkington.

The very next morning the attack came. The animals were at breakfast when the look-outs came racing in with the news that

Frederick and his followers had already come through the five-barred gate. Boldly enough the animals sallied forth to meet them, but this time they did not have the easy victory that they had had in the Battle of the Cowshed. There were fifteen men, with half a dozen guns between them, and they opened fire as soon as they got within fifty yards. The animals could not face the terrible explosions and the stinging pellets, and in spite of the efforts of Napoleon and Boxer to rally them, they were soon driven back. A number of them were already wounded. They took refuge in the farm buildings and peeped cautiously out from chinks and knot-holes. The whole of the big pasture, including the windmill, was in the hands of the enemy. For the moment even Napoleon seemed at a loss. He paced up and down without a word, his tail rigid and twitching. Wistful glances were sent in the direction of Foxwood. If Pilkington and his men would help them, the day might yet be won. But at this moment the four pigeons, who had been sent out on the day before, returned, one of them bearing a scrap of paper from Pilkington. On it was pencilled the words: "Serves you right."

Meanwhile Frederick and his men had halted about the windmill. The animals watched them, and a murmur of dismay went round. Two of the men had produced a crowbar and a sledge hammer. They were going to knock the windmill down.

"Impossible!" cried Napoleon. "We have built the walls far too thick for that. They could not knock it down in a week. Courage, comrades!"

But Benjamin was watching the movements of the men intently. The two with the hammer and the crowbar were drilling a hole near the base of the windmill. Slowly, and with an air almost of amusement, Benjamin nodded his long muzzle.

"I thought so," he said. "Do you not see what they are doing? In another moment they are going to pack blasting powder into that hole."

Terrified, the animals waited. It was impossible now to venture out of the shelter of the buildings. After a few minutes the men were seen to be running in all directions. Then there was a deafening roar. The pigeons swirled into the air, and all the animals, except Napoleon, flung themselves flat on their bellies and hid their faces.

When they got up again, a huge cloud of black smoke was hanging where the windmill had been. Slowly the breeze drifted it away. The windmill had ceased to exist!

At this sight the animals' courage returned to them. The fear and despair they had felt a moment earlier were drowned in their rage against this vile, contemptible act. A mighty cry for vengeance went up, and without waiting for further orders they charged forth in a body and made straight for the enemy. This time they did not heed the cruel pellets that swept over them like hail. It was a savage, bitter battle. The men fired again and again, and, when the animals got to close quarters, lashed out with their sticks and their heavy boots. A cow, three sheep, and two geese were killed, and nearly everyone was wounded. Even Napoleon, who was directing operations from the rear, had the tip of his tail chipped by a pellet. But the men did not go unscathed either. Three of them had their heads broken by blows from Boxer's hoofs; another was gored in the belly by a cow's horn; another had his trousers nearly torn off by Jessie and Bluebell. And when the nine dogs of Napoleon's own bodyguard, whom he had instructed to make a detour under cover of the hedge, suddenly appeared on the men's flank, baying ferociously, panic overtook them. They saw that they were in danger of being surrounded. Frederick shouted to his men to get out while the going was good, and the next moment the cowardly enemy was running for dear life. The animals chased them right down to the bottom of the field, and got in some last kicks at them as they forced their way through the thorn hedge.

They had won, but they were weary and bleeding. Slowly they began to limp back towards the farm. The sight of their dead comrades stretched upon the grass moved some of them to tears. And for a little while they halted in sorrowful silence at the place where the windmill had once stood. Yes, it was gone; almost the last trace of their labour was gone! Even the foundations were partially destroyed. And in rebuilding it they could not this time, as before, make use of the fallen stones. This time the stones had vanished too. The force of the explosion had flung them to distances of hundreds of yards. It was as though the windmill had never been.

As they approached the farm Squealer, who had unaccountably

been absent during the fighting, came skipping towards them, whisking his tail and beaming with satisfaction. And the animals heard, from the direction of the farm buildings, the solemn booming of a gun.

"What is that gun firing for?" said Boxer.

"To celebrate our victory!" cried Squealer.

"What victory?" said Boxer. His knees were bleeding, he had lost a shoe and split his hoof, and a dozen pellets had lodged themselves in his hind leg.

"What victory, comrade? Have we not driven the enemy off our soil — the sacred soil of Animal Farm?"

"But they have destroyed the windmill. And we had worked on it for two years!"

"What matter? We will build another windmill. We will build six windmills if we feel like it. You do not appreciate, comrade, the mighty thing that we have done. The enemy was in occupation of this very ground that we stand upon. And now — thanks to the leadership of Comrade Napoleon — we have won every inch of it back again!"

"Then we have won back what we had before," said Boxer.

"That is our victory," said Squealer.

They limped into the yard. The pellets under the skin of Boxer's leg smarted painfully. He saw ahead of him the heavy labour of rebuilding the windmill from the foundations, and already in imagination he braced himself for the task. But for the first time it occurred to him that he was eleven years old and that perhaps his great muscles were not quite what they had once been.

But when the animals saw the green flag flying, and heard the gun firing again — seven times it was fired in all — and heard the speech that Napoleon made, congratulating them on their conduct, it did seem to them after all that they had won a great victory. The animals slain in the battle were given a solemn funeral. Boxer and Clover pulled the wagon which served as a hearse, and Napoleon himself walked at the head of the procession. Two whole days were given over to celebrations. There were songs, speeches, and more firing of the gun, and a special gift of an apple was bestowed on every animal, with two ounces of corn for each bird and three biscuits for each dog.

It was announced that the battle would be called the Battle of the Windmill, and that Napoleon had created a new decoration, the Order of the Green Banner, which he had conferred upon himself. In the general rejoicings the unfortunate affair of the banknotes was forgotten.

It was a few days later than this that the pigs came upon a case of whisky in the cellars of the farmhouse. It had been overlooked at the time when the house was first occupied. That night there came from the farmhouse the sound of loud singing, in which, to everyone's surprise, the strains of 'Beasts of England' were mixed up. At about half past nine Napoleon, wearing an old bowler hat of Mr. Jones's, was distinctly seen to emerge from the back door, gallop rapidly round the yard, and disappear indoors again. But in the morning a deep silence hung over the farmhouse. Not a pig appeared to be stirring. It was nearly nine o'clock when Squealer made his appearance, walking slowly and dejectedly, his eyes dull, his tail hanging limply behind him, and with every appearance of being seriously ill. He called the animals together and told them that he had a terrible piece of news to impart. Comrade Napoleon was dying!

A cry of lamentation went up. Straw was laid down outside the doors of the farmhouse, and the animals walked on tiptoe. With tears in their eyes they asked one another what they should do if their Leader were taken away from them. A rumour went round that Snowball had after all contrived to introduce poison into Napoleon's food. At eleven o'clock Squealer came out to make another announcement. As his last act upon earth, Comrade Napoleon had pronounced a solemn decree: the drinking of alcohol was to be punished by death.

By the evening, however, Napoleon appeared to be somewhat better, and the following morning Squealer was able to tell them that he was well on the way to recovery. By the evening of that day Napoleon was back at work, and on the next day it was learned that he had instructed Whymper to purchase in Willingdon some booklets on brewing and distilling. A week later Napoleon gave orders that the small paddock beyond the orchard, which it had previously been intended to set aside as a grazing-ground for animals who were past work, was to be ploughed up. It was given out that the pasture was

exhausted and needed re-seeding; but it soon became known that Napoleon intended to sow it with barley.

About this time there occurred a strange incident which hardly anyone was able to understand. One night at about twelve o'clock there was a loud crash in the yard, and the animals rushed out of their stalls. It was a moonlit night. At the foot of the end wall of the big barn, where the Seven Commandments were written, there lay a ladder broken in two pieces. Squealer, temporarily stunned, was sprawling beside it, and near at hand there lay a lantern, a paint-brush, and an overturned pot of white paint. The dogs immediately made a ring round Squealer, and escorted him back to the farmhouse as soon as he was able to walk. None of the animals could form any idea as to what this meant, except old Benjamin, who nodded his muzzle with a knowing air, and seemed to understand, but would say nothing.

But a few days later Muriel, reading over the Seven Commandments to herself, noticed that there was yet another of them which the animals had remembered wrong. They had thought the Fifth Commandment was "No animal shall drink alcohol," but there were two words that they had forgotten. Actually the Commandment read: "No animal shall drink alcohol TO EXCESS."

Chapter 9

Boxer's split hoof was a long time in healing. They had started the rebuilding of the windmill the day after the victory celebrations were ended. Boxer refused to take even a day off work, and made it a point of honour not to let it be seen that he was in pain. In the evenings he would admit privately to Clover that the hoof troubled him a great deal. Clover treated the hoof with poultices of herbs which she prepared by chewing them, and both she and Benjamin urged Boxer to work less hard. "A horse's lungs do not last for ever," she said to him. But Boxer would not listen. He had, he said, only one real ambition left — to see the windmill well under way before he reached the age for retirement.

At the beginning, when the laws of Animal Farm were first formulated, the retiring age had been fixed for horses and pigs at twelve, for cows at fourteen, for dogs at nine, for sheep at seven, and for hens and geese at five. Liberal old-age pensions had been agreed upon. As yet no animal had actually retired on pension, but of late the subject had been discussed more and more. Now that the small field beyond the orchard had been set aside for barley, it was rumoured that a corner of the large pasture was to be fenced off and turned into a grazing-ground for superannuated animals. For a horse, it was said, the pension would be five pounds of corn a day and, in winter, fifteen pounds of hay, with a carrot or possibly an apple on public holidays. Boxer's twelfth birthday was due in the late summer of the following year.

Meanwhile life was hard. The winter was as cold as the last one had been, and food was even shorter. Once again all rations were reduced, except those of the pigs and the dogs. A too rigid equality in rations, Squealer explained, would have been contrary to the principles of Animalism. In any case he had no difficulty in proving to the other animals that they were NOT in reality short of food, whatever the appearances might be. For the time being, certainly, it had been found necessary to make a readjustment of rations (Squealer always spoke of it as a "readjustment," never as a "reduction"), but in comparison with the days of Jones, the

improvement was enormous. Reading out the figures in a shrill, rapid voice, he proved to them in detail that they had more oats, more hay, more turnips than they had had in Jones's day, that they worked shorter hours, that their drinking water was of better quality, that they lived longer, that a larger proportion of their young ones survived infancy, and that they had more straw in their stalls and suffered less from fleas. The animals believed every word of it. Truth to tell, Jones and all he stood for had almost faded out of their memories. They knew that life nowadays was harsh and bare, that they were often hungry and often cold, and that they were usually working when they were not asleep. But doubtless it had been worse in the old days. They were glad to believe so. Besides, in those days they had been slaves and now they were free, and that made all the difference, as Squealer did not fail to point out.

There were many more mouths to feed now. In the autumn the four sows had all littered about simultaneously, producing thirty-one young pigs between them. The young pigs were piebald, and as Napoleon was the only boar on the farm, it was possible to guess at their parentage. It was announced that later, when bricks and timber had been purchased, a schoolroom would be built in the farmhouse garden. For the time being, the young pigs were given their instruction by Napoleon himself in the farmhouse kitchen. They took their exercise in the garden, and were discouraged from playing with the other young animals. About this time, too, it was laid down as a rule that when a pig and any other animal met on the path, the other animal must stand aside: and also that all pigs, of whatever degree, were to have the privilege of wearing green ribbons on their tails on Sundays.

The farm had had a fairly successful year, but was still short of money. There were the bricks, sand, and lime for the schoolroom to be purchased, and it would also be necessary to begin saving up again for the machinery for the windmill. Then there were lamp oil and candles for the house, sugar for Napoleon's own table (he forbade this to the other pigs, on the ground that it made them fat), and all the usual replacements such as tools, nails, string, coal, wire, scrap-iron, and dog biscuits. A stump of hay and part of the potato crop were sold off, and the contract for eggs was increased to six

hundred a week, so that that year the hens barely hatched enough chicks to keep their numbers at the same level. Rations, reduced in December, were reduced again in February, and lanterns in the stalls were forbidden to save oil. But the pigs seemed comfortable enough, and in fact were putting on weight if anything. One afternoon in late February a warm, rich, appetising scent, such as the animals had never smelt before, wafted itself across the yard from the little brew-house, which had been disused in Jones's time, and which stood beyond the kitchen. Someone said it was the smell of cooking barley. The animals sniffed the air hungrily and wondered whether a warm mash was being prepared for their supper. But no warm mash appeared, and on the following Sunday it was announced that from now onwards all barley would be reserved for the pigs. The field beyond the orchard had already been sown with barley. And the news soon leaked out that every pig was now receiving a ration of a pint of beer daily, with half a gallon for Napoleon himself, which was always served to him in the Crown Derby soup tureen.

But if there were hardships to be borne, they were partly offset by the fact that life nowadays had a greater dignity than it had had before. There were more songs, more speeches, more processions. Napoleon had commanded that once a week there should be held something called a Spontaneous Demonstration, the object of which was to celebrate the struggles and triumphs of Animal Farm. At the appointed time the animals would leave their work and march round the precincts of the farm in military formation, with the pigs leading, then the horses, then the cows, then the sheep, and then the poultry. The dogs flanked the procession and at the head of all marched Napoleon's black cockerel. Boxer and Clover always carried between them a green banner marked with the hoof and the horn and the caption, "Long live Comrade Napoleon!" Afterwards there were recitations of poems composed in Napoleon's honour, and a speech by Squealer giving particulars of the latest increases in the production of foodstuffs, and on occasion a shot was fired from the gun. The sheep were the greatest devotees of the Spontaneous Demonstration, and if anyone complained (as a few animals sometimes did, when no pigs or dogs were near) that they wasted time and meant a lot of standing about in the cold, the sheep were

sure to silence him with a tremendous bleating of "Four legs good, two legs bad!" But by and large the animals enjoyed these celebrations. They found it comforting to be reminded that, after all, they were truly their own masters and that the work they did was for their own benefit. So that, what with the songs, the processions, Squealer's lists of figures, the thunder of the gun, the crowing of the cockerel, and the fluttering of the flag, they were able to forget that their bellies were empty, at least part of the time.

In April, Animal Farm was proclaimed a Republic, and it became necessary to elect a President. There was only one candidate, Napoleon, who was elected unanimously. On the same day it was given out that fresh documents had been discovered which revealed further details about Snowball's complicity with Jones. It now appeared that Snowball had not, as the animals had previously imagined, merely attempted to lose the Battle of the Cowshed by means of a stratagem, but had been openly fighting on Jones's side. In fact, it was he who had actually been the leader of the human forces, and had charged into battle with the words "Long live Humanity!" on his lips. The wounds on Snowball's back, which a few of the animals still remembered to have seen, had been inflicted by Napoleon's teeth.

In the middle of the summer Moses the raven suddenly reappeared on the farm, after an absence of several years. He was quite unchanged, still did no work, and talked in the same strain as ever about Sugarcandy Mountain. He would perch on a stump, flap his black wings, and talk by the hour to anyone who would listen. "Up there, comrades," he would say solemnly, pointing to the sky with his large beak— "up there, just on the other side of that dark cloud that you can see — there it lies, Sugarcandy Mountain, that happy country where we poor animals shall rest for ever from our labours!" He even claimed to have been there on one of his higher flights, and to have seen the everlasting fields of clover and the linseed cake and lump sugar growing on the hedges. Many of the animals believed him. Their lives now, they reasoned, were hungry and laborious; was it not right and just that a better world should exist somewhere else? A thing that was difficult to determine was the attitude of the pigs towards Moses. They all declared contemptuously

that his stories about Sugarcandy Mountain were lies, and yet they allowed him to remain on the farm, not working, with an allowance of a gill of beer a day.

After his hoof had healed up, Boxer worked harder than ever. Indeed, all the animals worked like slaves that year. Apart from the regular work of the farm, and the rebuilding of the windmill, there was the schoolhouse for the young pigs, which was started in March. Sometimes the long hours on insufficient food were hard to bear, but Boxer never faltered. In nothing that he said or did was there any sign that his strength was not what it had been. It was only his appearance that was a little altered; his hide was less shiny than it had used to be, and his great haunches seemed to have shrunken. The others said, "Boxer will pick up when the spring grass comes on"; but the spring came and Boxer grew no fatter. Sometimes on the slope leading to the top of the quarry, when he braced his muscles against the weight of some vast boulder, it seemed that nothing kept him on his feet except the will to continue. At such times his lips were seen to form the words, "I will work harder"; he had no voice left. Once again Clover and Benjamin warned him to take care of his health, but Boxer paid no attention. His twelfth birthday was approaching. He did not care what happened so long as a good store of stone was accumulated before he went on pension.

Late one evening in the summer, a sudden rumour ran round the farm that something had happened to Boxer. He had gone out alone to drag a load of stone down to the windmill. And sure enough, the rumour was true. A few minutes later two pigeons came racing in with the news; "Boxer has fallen! He is lying on his side and can't get up!"

About half the animals on the farm rushed out to the knoll where the windmill stood. There lay Boxer, between the shafts of the cart, his neck stretched out, unable even to raise his head. His eyes were glazed, his sides matted with sweat. A thin stream of blood had trickled out of his mouth. Clover dropped to her knees at his side.

"Boxer!" she cried, "how are you?"

"It is my lung," said Boxer in a weak voice. "It does not matter. I think you will be able to finish the windmill without me. There is a pretty good store of stone accumulated. I had only another month to

go in any case. To tell you the truth, I had been looking forward to my retirement. And perhaps, as Benjamin is growing old too, they will let him retire at the same time and be a companion to me."

"We must get help at once," said Clover. "Run, somebody, and tell Squealer what has happened."

All the other animals immediately raced back to the farmhouse to give Squealer the news. Only Clover remained, and Benjamin who lay down at Boxer's side, and, without speaking, kept the flies off him with his long tail. After about a quarter of an hour Squealer appeared, full of sympathy and concern. He said that Comrade Napoleon had learned with the very deepest distress of this misfortune to one of the most loyal workers on the farm, and was already making arrangements to send Boxer to be treated in the hospital at Willingdon. The animals felt a little uneasy at this. Except for Mollie and Snowball, no other animal had ever left the farm, and they did not like to think of their sick comrade in the hands of human beings. However, Squealer easily convinced them that the veterinary surgeon in Willingdon could treat Boxer's case more satisfactorily than could be done on the farm. And about half an hour later, when Boxer had somewhat recovered, he was with difficulty got on to his feet, and managed to limp back to his stall, where Clover and Benjamin had prepared a good bed of straw for him.

For the next two days Boxer remained in his stall. The pigs had sent out a large bottle of pink medicine which they had found in the medicine chest in the bathroom, and Clover administered it to Boxer twice a day after meals. In the evenings she lay in his stall and talked to him, while Benjamin kept the flies off him. Boxer professed not to be sorry for what had happened. If he made a good recovery, he might expect to live another three years, and he looked forward to the peaceful days that he would spend in the corner of the big pasture. It would be the first time that he had had leisure to study and improve his mind. He intended, he said, to devote the rest of his life to learning the remaining twenty-two letters of the alphabet.

However, Benjamin and Clover could only be with Boxer after working hours, and it was in the middle of the day when the van came to take him away. The animals were all at work weeding turnips under the supervision of a pig, when they were astonished to

see Benjamin come galloping from the direction of the farm buildings, braying at the top of his voice. It was the first time that they had ever seen Benjamin excited — indeed, it was the first time that anyone had ever seen him gallop. "Quick, quick!" he shouted. "Come at once! They're taking Boxer away!" Without waiting for orders from the pig, the animals broke off work and raced back to the farm buildings. Sure enough, there in the yard was a large closed van, drawn by two horses, with lettering on its side and a sly-looking man in a low-crowned bowler hat sitting on the driver's seat. And Boxer's stall was empty.

The animals crowded round the van. "Good-bye, Boxer!" they chorused, "good-bye!"

"Fools! Fools!" shouted Benjamin, prancing round them and stamping the earth with his small hoofs. "Fools! Do you not see what is written on the side of that van?"

That gave the animals pause, and there was a hush. Muriel began to spell out the words. But Benjamin pushed her aside and in the midst of a deadly silence he read:

"'Alfred Simmonds, Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler, Willingdon. Dealer in Hides and Bone-Meal. Kennels Supplied.' Do you not understand what that means? They are taking Boxer to the knacker's!"

A cry of horror burst from all the animals. At this moment the man on the box whipped up his horses and the van moved out of the yard at a smart trot. All the animals followed, crying out at the tops of their voices. Clover forced her way to the front. The van began to gather speed. Clover tried to stir her stout limbs to a gallop, and achieved a canter. "Boxer!" she cried. "Boxer! Boxer! Boxer!" And just at this moment, as though he had heard the uproar outside, Boxer's face, with the white stripe down his nose, appeared at the small window at the back of the van.

"Boxer!" cried Clover in a terrible voice. "Boxer! Get out! Get out quickly! They're taking you to your death!"

All the animals took up the cry of "Get out, Boxer, get out!" But the van was already gathering speed and drawing away from them. It was uncertain whether Boxer had understood what Clover had said. But a moment later his face disappeared from the window and there

was the sound of a tremendous drumming of hoofs inside the van. He was trying to kick his way out. The time had been when a few kicks from Boxer's hoofs would have smashed the van to matchwood. But alas! his strength had left him; and in a few moments the sound of drumming hoofs grew fainter and died away. In desperation the animals began appealing to the two horses which drew the van to stop. "Comrades, comrades!" they shouted. "Don't take your own brother to his death! "But the stupid brutes, too ignorant to realise what was happening, merely set back their ears and quickened their pace. Boxer's face did not reappear at the window. Too late, someone thought of racing ahead and shutting the five-barred gate; but in another moment the van was through it and rapidly disappearing down the road. Boxer was never seen again.

Three days later it was announced that he had died in the hospital at Willingdon, in spite of receiving every attention a horse could have. Squealer came to announce the news to the others. He had, he said, been present during Boxer's last hours.

"It was the most affecting sight I have ever seen!" said Squealer, lifting his trotter and wiping away a tear. "I was at his bedside at the very last. And at the end, almost too weak to speak, he whispered in my ear that his sole sorrow was to have passed on before the windmill was finished. 'Forward, comrades!' he whispered. 'Forward in the name of the Rebellion. Long live Animal Farm! Long live Comrade Napoleon! Napoleon is always right.' Those were his very last words, comrades."

Here Squealer's demeanour suddenly changed. He fell silent for a moment, and his little eyes darted suspicious glances from side to side before he proceeded.

It had come to his knowledge, he said, that a foolish and wicked rumour had been circulated at the time of Boxer's removal. Some of the animals had noticed that the van which took Boxer away was marked "Horse Slaughterer," and had actually jumped to the conclusion that Boxer was being sent to the knacker's. It was almost unbelievable, said Squealer, that any animal could be so stupid. Surely, he cried indignantly, whisking his tail and skipping from side to side, surely they knew their beloved Leader, Comrade Napoleon, better than that? But the explanation was really very simple. The van

had previously been the property of the knacker, and had been bought by the veterinary surgeon, who had not yet painted the old name out. That was how the mistake had arisen.

The animals were enormously relieved to hear this. And when Squealer went on to give further graphic details of Boxer's death-bed, the admirable care he had received, and the expensive medicines for which Napoleon had paid without a thought as to the cost, their last doubts disappeared and the sorrow that they felt for their comrade's death was tempered by the thought that at least he had died happy.

Napoleon himself appeared at the meeting on the following Sunday morning and pronounced a short oration in Boxer's honour. It had not been possible, he said, to bring back their lamented comrade's remains for interment on the farm, but he had ordered a large wreath to be made from the laurels in the farmhouse garden and sent down to be placed on Boxer's grave. And in a few days' time the pigs intended to hold a memorial banquet in Boxer's honour. Napoleon ended his speech with a reminder of Boxer's two favourite maxims, "I will work harder" and "Comrade Napoleon is always right" — maxims, he said, which every animal would do well to adopt as his own.

On the day appointed for the banquet, a grocer's van drove up from Willingdon and delivered a large wooden crate at the farmhouse. That night there was the sound of uproarious singing, which was followed by what sounded like a violent quarrel and ended at about eleven o'clock with a tremendous crash of glass. No one stirred in the farmhouse before noon on the following day, and the word went round that from somewhere or other the pigs had acquired the money to buy themselves another case of whisky.

Chapter 10

Years passed. The seasons came and went, the short animal lives fled by. A time came when there was no one who remembered the old days before the Rebellion, except Clover, Benjamin, Moses the raven, and a number of the pigs.

Muriel was dead; Bluebell, Jessie, and Pincher were dead. Jones too was dead — he had died in an inebriates' home in another part of the country. Snowball was forgotten. Boxer was forgotten, except by the few who had known him. Clover was an old stout mare now, stiff in the joints and with a tendency to rheumy eyes. She was two years past the retiring age, but in fact no animal had ever actually retired. The talk of setting aside a corner of the pasture for superannuated animals had long since been dropped. Napoleon was now a mature boar of twenty-four stone. Squealer was so fat that he could with difficulty see out of his eyes. Only old Benjamin was much the same as ever, except for being a little greyer about the muzzle, and, since Boxer's death, more morose and taciturn than ever.

There were many more creatures on the farm now, though the increase was not so great as had been expected in earlier years. Many animals had been born to whom the Rebellion was only a dim tradition, passed on by word of mouth, and others had been bought who had never heard mention of such a thing before their arrival. The farm possessed three horses now besides Clover. They were fine upstanding beasts, willing workers and good comrades, but very stupid. None of them proved able to learn the alphabet beyond the letter B. They accepted everything that they were told about the Rebellion and the principles of Animalism, especially from Clover, for whom they had an almost filial respect; but it was doubtful whether they understood very much of it.

The farm was more prosperous now, and better organised: it had even been enlarged by two fields which had been bought from Mr. Pilkington. The windmill had been successfully completed at last, and the farm possessed a threshing machine and a hay elevator of its own, and various new buildings had been added to it. Whymper had bought himself a dogcart. The windmill, however, had not after all

been used for generating electrical power. It was used for milling corn, and brought in a handsome money profit. The animals were hard at work building yet another windmill; when that one was finished, so it was said, the dynamos would be installed. But the luxuries of which Snowball had once taught the animals to dream, the stalls with electric light and hot and cold water, and the three-day week, were no longer talked about. Napoleon had denounced such ideas as contrary to the spirit of Animalism. The truest happiness, he said, lay in working hard and living frugally.

Somehow it seemed as though the farm had grown richer without making the animals themselves any richer-except, of course, for the pigs and the dogs. Perhaps this was partly because there were so many pigs and so many dogs. It was not that these creatures did not work, after their fashion. There was, as Squealer was never tired of explaining, endless work in the supervision and organisation of the farm. Much of this work was of a kind that the other animals were too ignorant to understand. For example, Squealer told them that the pigs had to expend enormous labours every day upon mysterious things called "files," "reports," "minutes," and "memoranda". These were large sheets of paper which had to be closely covered with writing, and as soon as they were so covered, they were burnt in the furnace. This was of the highest importance for the welfare of the farm, Squealer said. But still, neither pigs nor dogs produced any food by their own labour; and there were very many of them, and their appetites were always good.

As for the others, their life, so far as they knew, was as it had always been. They were generally hungry, they slept on straw, they drank from the pool, they laboured in the fields; in winter they were troubled by the cold, and in summer by the flies. Sometimes the older ones among them racked their dim memories and tried to determine whether in the early days of the Rebellion, when Jones's expulsion was still recent, things had been better or worse than now. They could not remember. There was nothing with which they could compare their present lives: they had nothing to go upon except Squealer's lists of figures, which invariably demonstrated that everything was getting better and better. The animals found the problem insoluble; in any case, they had little time for speculating on

such things now. Only old Benjamin professed to remember every detail of his long life and to know that things never had been, nor ever could be much better or much worse — hunger, hardship, and disappointment being, so he said, the unalterable law of life.

And yet the animals never gave up hope. More, they never lost, even for an instant, their sense of honour and privilege in being members of Animal Farm. They were still the only farm in the whole county — in all England! — owned and operated by animals. Not one of them, not even the youngest, not even the newcomers who had been brought from farms ten or twenty miles away, ever ceased to marvel at that. And when they heard the gun booming and saw the green flag fluttering at the masthead, their hearts swelled with imperishable pride, and the talk turned always towards the old heroic days, the expulsion of Jones, the writing of the Seven Commandments, the great battles in which the human invaders had been defeated. None of the old dreams had been abandoned. The Republic of the Animals which Major had foretold, when the green fields of England should be untrodden by human feet, was still believed in. Some day it was coming: it might not be soon, it might not be with in the lifetime of any animal now living, but still it was coming. Even the tune of 'Beasts of England' was perhaps hummed secretly here and there: at any rate, it was a fact that every animal on the farm knew it, though no one would have dared to sing it aloud. It might be that their lives were hard and that not all of their hopes had been fulfilled; but they were conscious that they were not as other animals. If they went hungry, it was not from feeding tyrannical human beings; if they worked hard, at least they worked for themselves. No creature among them went upon two legs. No creature called any other creature "Master." All animals were equal.

One day in early summer Squealer ordered the sheep to follow him, and led them out to a piece of waste ground at the other end of the farm, which had become overgrown with birch saplings. The sheep spent the whole day there browsing at the leaves under Squealer's supervision. In the evening he returned to the farmhouse himself, but, as it was warm weather, told the sheep to stay where they were. It ended by their remaining there for a whole week, during which time the other animals saw nothing of them. Squealer was

with them for the greater part of every day. He was, he said, teaching them to sing a new song, for which privacy was needed.

It was just after the sheep had returned, on a pleasant evening when the animals had finished work and were making their way back to the farm buildings, that the terrified neighing of a horse sounded from the yard. Startled, the animals stopped in their tracks. It was Clover's voice. She neighed again, and all the animals broke into a gallop and rushed into the yard. Then they saw what Clover had seen.

It was a pig walking on his hind legs.

Yes, it was Squealer. A little awkwardly, as though not quite used to supporting his considerable bulk in that position, but with perfect balance, he was strolling across the yard. And a moment later, out from the door of the farmhouse came a long file of pigs, all walking on their hind legs. Some did it better than others, one or two were even a trifle unsteady and looked as though they would have liked the support of a stick, but every one of them made his way right round the yard successfully. And finally there was a tremendous baying of dogs and a shrill crowing from the black cockerel, and out came Napoleon himself, majestically upright, casting haughty glances from side to side, and with his dogs gambolling round him.

He carried a whip in his trotter.

There was a deadly silence. Amazed, terrified, huddling together, the animals watched the long line of pigs march slowly round the yard. It was as though the world had turned upside-down. Then there came a moment when the first shock had worn off and when, in spite of everything-in spite of their terror of the dogs, and of the habit, developed through long years, of never complaining, never criticising, no matter what happened — they might have uttered some word of protest. But just at that moment, as though at a signal, all the sheep burst out into a tremendous bleating of —

"Four legs good, two legs BETTER! Four legs good, two legs BETTER! Four legs good, two legs BETTER!"

It went on for five minutes without stopping. And by the time the sheep had quieted down, the chance to utter any protest had passed, for the pigs had marched back into the farmhouse.

Benjamin felt a nose nuzzling at his shoulder. He looked round. It

was Clover. Her old eyes looked dimmer than ever. Without saying anything, she tugged gently at his mane and led him round to the end of the big barn, where the Seven Commandments were written. For a minute or two they stood gazing at the tatted wall with its white lettering.

"My sight is failing," she said finally. "Even when I was young I could not have read what was written there. But it appears to me that that wall looks different. Are the Seven Commandments the same as they used to be, Benjamin?"

For once Benjamin consented to break his rule, and he read out to her what was written on the wall. There was nothing there now except a single Commandment. It ran:

ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

After that it did not seem strange when next day the pigs who were supervising the work of the farm all carried whips in their trotters. It did not seem strange to learn that the pigs had bought themselves a wireless set, were arranging to install a telephone, and had taken out subscriptions to 'John Bull', 'Tit-Bits', and the 'Daily Mirror'. It did not seem strange when Napoleon was seen strolling in the farmhouse garden with a pipe in his mouth — no, not even when the pigs took Mr. Jones's clothes out of the wardrobes and put them on, Napoleon himself appearing in a black coat, ratcatcher breeches, and leather leggings, while his favourite sow appeared in the watered silk dress which Mrs. Jones had been used to wearing on Sundays.

A week later, in the afternoon, a number of dog-carts drove up to the farm. A deputation of neighbouring farmers had been invited to make a tour of inspection. They were shown all over the farm, and expressed great admiration for everything they saw, especially the windmill. The animals were weeding the turnip field. They worked diligently hardly raising their faces from the ground, and not knowing whether to be more frightened of the pigs or of the human visitors.

That evening loud laughter and bursts of singing came from the farmhouse. And suddenly, at the sound of the mingled voices, the

animals were stricken with curiosity. What could be happening in there, now that for the first time animals and human beings were meeting on terms of equality? With one accord they began to creep as quietly as possible into the farmhouse garden.

At the gate they paused, half frightened to go on but Clover led the way in. They tiptoed up to the house, and such animals as were tall enough peered in at the dining-room window. There, round the long table, sat half a dozen farmers and half a dozen of the more eminent pigs, Napoleon himself occupying the seat of honour at the head of the table. The pigs appeared completely at ease in their chairs. The company had been enjoying a game of cards but had broken off for the moment, evidently in order to drink a toast. A large jug was circulating, and the mugs were being refilled with beer. No one noticed the wondering faces of the animals that gazed in at the window.

Mr. Pilkington, of Foxwood, had stood up, his mug in his hand. In a moment, he said, he would ask the present company to drink a toast. But before doing so, there were a few words that he felt it incumbent upon him to say.

It was a source of great satisfaction to him, he said — and, he was sure, to all others present — to feel that a long period of mistrust and misunderstanding had now come to an end. There had been a time — not that he, or any of the present company, had shared such sentiments — but there had been a time when the respected proprietors of Animal Farm had been regarded, he would not say with hostility, but perhaps with a certain measure of misgiving, by their human neighbours. Unfortunate incidents had occurred, mistaken ideas had been current. It had been felt that the existence of a farm owned and operated by pigs was somehow abnormal and was liable to have an unsettling effect in the neighbourhood. Too many farmers had assumed, without due enquiry, that on such a farm a spirit of licence and indiscipline would prevail. They had been nervous about the effects upon their own animals, or even upon their human employees. But all such doubts were now dispelled. Today he and his friends had visited Animal Farm and inspected every inch of it with their own eyes, and what did they find? Not only the most up-to-date methods, but a discipline and an orderliness which should be

an example to all farmers everywhere. He believed that he was right in saying that the lower animals on Animal Farm did more work and received less food than any animals in the county. Indeed, he and his fellow-visitors today had observed many features which they intended to introduce on their own farms immediately.

He would end his remarks, he said, by emphasising once again the friendly feelings that subsisted, and ought to subsist, between Animal Farm and its neighbours. Between pigs and human beings there was not, and there need not be, any clash of interests whatever. Their struggles and their difficulties were one. Was not the labour problem the same everywhere? Here it became apparent that Mr. Pilkington was about to spring some carefully prepared witticism on the company, but for a moment he was too overcome by amusement to be able to utter it. After much choking, during which his various chins turned purple, he managed to get it out: "If you have your lower animals to contend with," he said, "we have our lower classes!" This BON MOT set the table in a roar; and Mr. Pilkington once again congratulated the pigs on the low rations, the long working hours, and the general absence of pampering which he had observed on Animal Farm.

And now, he said finally, he would ask the company to rise to their feet and make certain that their glasses were full. "Gentlemen," concluded Mr. Pilkington, "gentlemen, I give you a toast: To the prosperity of Animal Farm!"

There was enthusiastic cheering and stamping of feet. Napoleon was so gratified that he left his place and came round the table to clink his mug against Mr. Pilkington's before emptying it. When the cheering had died down, Napoleon, who had remained on his feet, intimated that he too had a few words to say.

Like all of Napoleon's speeches, it was short and to the point. He too, he said, was happy that the period of misunderstanding was at an end. For a long time there had been rumours — circulated, he had reason to think, by some malignant enemy — that there was something subversive and even revolutionary in the outlook of himself and his colleagues. They had been credited with attempting to stir up rebellion among the animals on neighbouring farms. Nothing could be further from the truth! Their sole wish, now and in

the past, was to live at peace and in normal business relations with their neighbours. This farm which he had the honour to control, he added, was a co-operative enterprise. The title-deeds, which were in his own possession, were owned by the pigs jointly.

He did not believe, he said, that any of the old suspicions still lingered, but certain changes had been made recently in the routine of the farm which should have the effect of promoting confidence still further. Hitherto the animals on the farm had had a rather foolish custom of addressing one another as "Comrade." This was to be suppressed. There had also been a very strange custom, whose origin was unknown, of marching every Sunday morning past a boar's skull which was nailed to a post in the garden. This, too, would be suppressed, and the skull had already been buried. His visitors might have observed, too, the green flag which flew from the masthead. If so, they would perhaps have noted that the white hoof and horn with which it had previously been marked had now been removed. It would be a plain green flag from now onwards.

He had only one criticism, he said, to make of Mr. Pilkington's excellent and neighbourly speech. Mr. Pilkington had referred throughout to "Animal Farm." He could not of course know — for he, Napoleon, was only now for the first time announcing it — that the name "Animal Farm" had been abolished. Henceforward the farm was to be known as "The Manor Farm" — which, he believed, was its correct and original name.

"Gentlemen," concluded Napoleon, "I will give you the same toast as before, but in a different form. Fill your glasses to the brim. Gentlemen, here is my toast: To the prosperity of The Manor Farm!"

There was the same hearty cheering as before, and the mugs were emptied to the dregs. But as the animals outside gazed at the scene, it seemed to them that some strange thing was happening. What was it that had altered in the faces of the pigs? Clover's old dim eyes flitted from one face to another. Some of them had five chins, some had four, some had three. But what was it that seemed to be melting and changing? Then, the applause having come to an end, the company took up their cards and continued the game that had been interrupted, and the animals crept silently away.

But they had not gone twenty yards when they stopped short. An

uproar of voices was coming from the farmhouse. They rushed back and looked through the window again. Yes, a violent quarrel was in progress. There were shoutings, bangings on the table, sharp suspicious glances, furious denials. The source of the trouble appeared to be that Napoleon and Mr. Pilkington had each played an ace of spades simultaneously.

Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.

November 1943-February 1944

NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

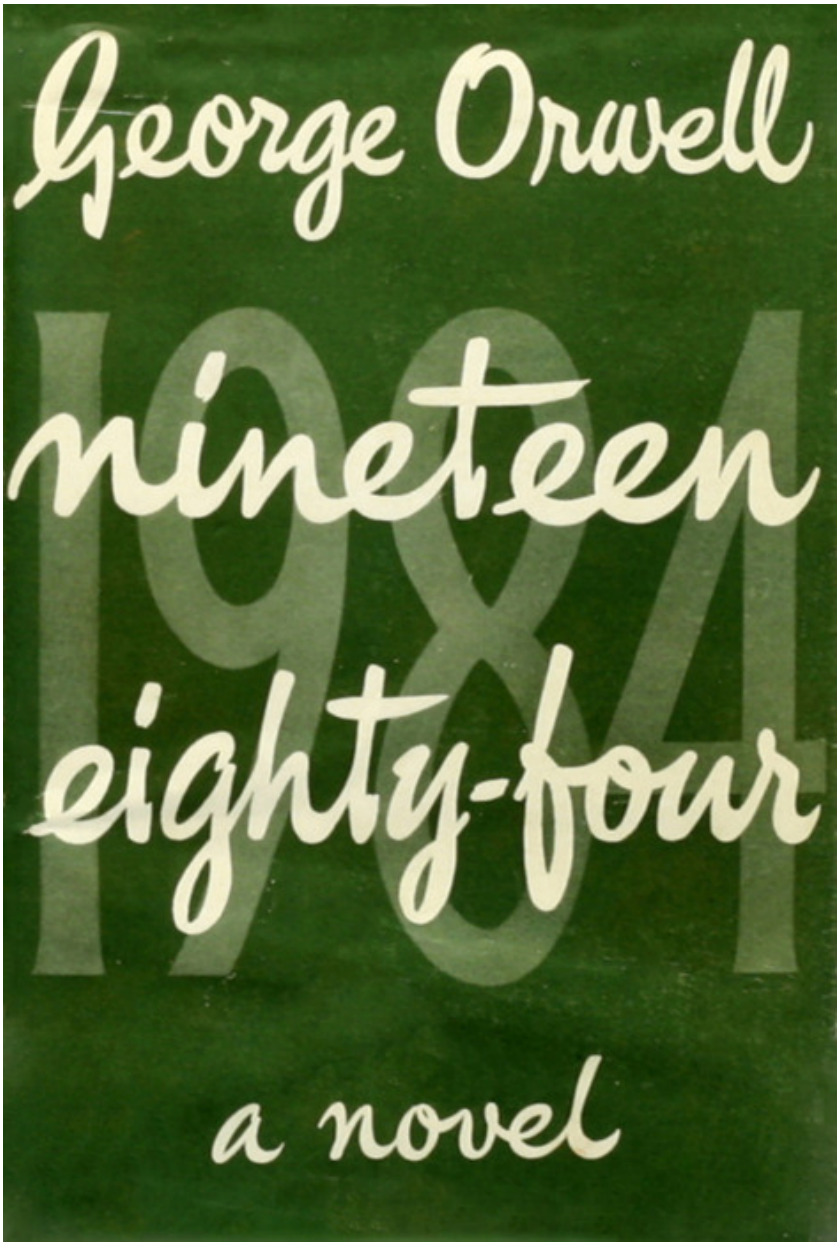
Published on the 8th of June 1949 by Secker and Warburg, the dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is widely regarded as Orwell's masterpiece. It has enjoyed a massive commercial success and has been hugely influential on popular culture over the years, having been adapted for film, television and radio and has been referenced by many writers and artists in their work. The impact of the novel is so vast that words or terms first used in the work have become part of the English language associated with authoritarian and totalitarianism. The ideas or concepts of Big Brother, the Thought-Police, Room 101, Doublespeak and thoughtcrime have all become part of the English lexicon. The central inspiration for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was the brutal, oppressive dictatorship of the Soviet Union under Stalin. The novel is the apex of Orwell's interest and exploration of the individual being trampled upon and sacrificed in the name of the greater good which is nothing but a propaganda tool of the power hungry. The horror of regime in the novel, and its objectives can perhaps be best articulated by the famous line from the interrogator O'Brien who says to Smith that, 'If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on the human face-forever'.

Winston Smith is a member of the 'Outer Party' and lives in the remains of London, which in 1984, after a global atomic war and revolution, is now in the hands of the Party. He is a civil servant who works for Ministry of Truth or the 'Minitrue' and is responsible for revising history so that everything is in concordance with what the Party says is true. Smith is quietly rebellious against the system and engages in a forbidden romance with Julia, who is not as loyal to the Party as she appears initially. The world of 1984 is divided into three superstates, Oceania, where Smith lives, Eurasia, where Russia dominates and Eastasia, which is East Asia and Indochina. These superstates exist in shifting alliances and cold wars, knowing they do not have the ability to destroy each other, but benefitting from the

state of permanent war by having a reason for living standards to remain low and instilling a form of nationalism in their people. Oceania is controlled by the 'Inner Party' and it is a society of total obedience with recorded thoughtcrimes being punishable by death and complete surveillance of people's public and private lives. The individual is denied any existence to the extent that the Thought Police arrest those who have unfavourable thoughts towards the Party. The Ministry of Love or 'Miniluv' is used to indoctrinate those who have committed thoughtcrimes and must relinquish these thoughts and replace this disobedience with love for the Party and Big Brother. The infamous Room 101 is where dissidents are sent to be tortured by their worst nightmares until they have betrayed everyone and become loyal to the Party.

There are informers everywhere in Oceania, and Smith and Julia are betrayed by people they thought were also critics of Big Brother and the regime. Many of the oppressive means employed by the Party were influenced by Stalinist policy. Big Brother represents the dictator who is always watching and has developed a cult of personality to enforce his power.

The figure of Emmanuel Goldstein, who is viewed as an enemy of the Party and the people is based on Trotsky and Goldstein's book in the novel is similar to Trotsky's highly critical book on the Soviet Union in 1936. The vicious interrogations by the Ministry of Love resemble torture practices employed by the NKVD and the spying, informing culture in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* mirrors the horrors of the Great Purges of the 1930's. Perhaps the most striking similarity is the idea of the public profession of disloyalty, where those accused of conspiring against the people are forced to confess their crimes to all. The 'Thought Criminals' that confess are based on the 'show trials' of the 1930's where prominent members of the Bolshevik Party, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, who alongside Stalin formed the ruling troika in the 1920's, were tried. These influential figures were forced to confess to untrue charges of conspiracy against the Soviet Union and then they were executed. *Nineteen – Eighty-Four* remains the quintessential novel on the horrors of a totalitarian regime and symbolic of the themes and concerns which preoccupied Orwell.



The first edition

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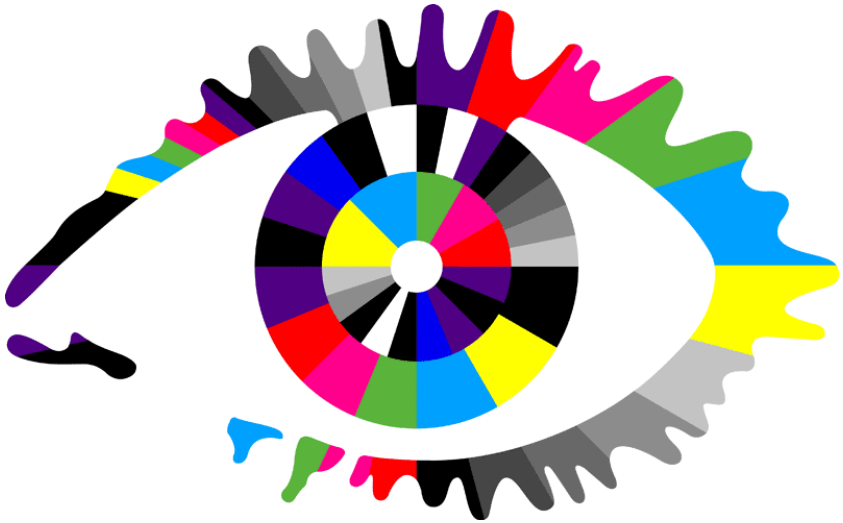
An image from the 1984 film adaptation



The icon from the reality television show Big Brother

PART ONE

Chapter 1

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of pig-iron. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended.

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and

torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The black-moustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own. Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC. In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight. It was the police patrol, snooping into people's windows. The patrols did not matter, however. Only the Thought Police mattered.

Behind Winston's back the voice from the telescreen was still babbling away about pig-iron and the overfulfilment of the Ninth Three-Year Plan. The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live — did live, from habit that became instinct — in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer; though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing. A kilometre away the Ministry of Truth, his place of work, towered vast and white above the grimy landscape. This, he thought with a sort of vague distaste — this was London, chief city of Airstrip One, itself the third most populous of the provinces of Oceania. He tried to squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite like this. Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with

baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willow-herb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger patch and there had sprung up sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken-houses? But it was no use, he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood except a series of bright-lit tableaux occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible.

The Ministry of Truth — Minitrue, in Newspeak [Newspeak was the official language of Oceania. For an account of its structure and etymology see Appendix.] — was startlingly different from any other object in sight. It was an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace, 300 metres into the air. From where Winston stood it was just possible to read, picked out on its white face in elegant lettering, the three slogans of the Party:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

The Ministry of Truth contained, it was said, three thousand rooms above ground level, and corresponding ramifications below. Scattered about London there were just three other buildings of similar appearance and size. So completely did they dwarf the surrounding architecture that from the roof of Victory Mansions you could see all four of them simultaneously. They were the homes of the four Ministries between which the entire apparatus of government was divided. The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts. The Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war. The Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order. And the Ministry of Plenty, which was responsible for economic affairs. Their names, in Newspeak: Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv, and Miniplenty.

The Ministry of Love was the really frightening one. There were no windows in it at all. Winston had never been inside the Ministry

of Love, nor within half a kilometre of it. It was a place impossible to enter except on official business, and then only by penetrating through a maze of barbed-wire entanglements, steel doors, and hidden machine-gun nests. Even the streets leading up to its outer barriers were roamed by gorilla-faced guards in black uniforms, armed with jointed truncheons.

Winston turned round abruptly. He had set his features into the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear when facing the telescreen. He crossed the room into the tiny kitchen. By leaving the Ministry at this time of day he had sacrificed his lunch in the canteen, and he was aware that there was no food in the kitchen except a hunk of dark-coloured bread which had got to be saved for tomorrow's breakfast. He took down from the shelf a bottle of colourless liquid with a plain white label marked VICTORY GIN. It gave off a sickly, oily smell, as of Chinese rice-spirit. Winston poured out nearly a teacupful, nerved himself for a shock, and gulped it down like a dose of medicine.

Instantly his face turned scarlet and the water ran out of his eyes. The stuff was like nitric acid, and moreover, in swallowing it one had the sensation of being hit on the back of the head with a rubber club. The next moment, however, the burning in his belly died down and the world began to look more cheerful. He took a cigarette from a crumpled packet marked VICTORY CIGARETTES and incautiously held it upright, whereupon the tobacco fell out on to the floor. With the next he was more successful. He went back to the living-room and sat down at a small table that stood to the left of the telescreen. From the table drawer he took out a penholder, a bottle of ink, and a thick, quarto-sized blank book with a red back and a marbled cover.

For some reason the telescreen in the living-room was in an unusual position. Instead of being placed, as was normal, in the end wall, where it could command the whole room, it was in the longer wall, opposite the window. To one side of it there was a shallow alcove in which Winston was now sitting, and which, when the flats were built, had probably been intended to hold bookshelves. By sitting in the alcove, and keeping well back, Winston was able to remain outside the range of the telescreen, so far as sight went. He could be heard, of course, but so long as he stayed in his present

position he could not be seen. It was partly the unusual geography of the room that had suggested to him the thing that he was now about to do.

But it had also been suggested by the book that he had just taken out of the drawer. It was a peculiarly beautiful book. Its smooth creamy paper, a little yellowed by age, was of a kind that had not been manufactured for at least forty years past. He could guess, however, that the book was much older than that. He had seen it lying in the window of a frowsy little junk-shop in a slummy quarter of the town (just what quarter he did not now remember) and had been stricken immediately by an overwhelming desire to possess it. Party members were supposed not to go into ordinary shops ('dealing on the free market', it was called), but the rule was not strictly kept, because there were various things, such as shoelaces and razor blades, which it was impossible to get hold of in any other way. He had given a quick glance up and down the street and then had slipped inside and bought the book for two dollars fifty. At the time he was not conscious of wanting it for any particular purpose. He had carried it guiltily home in his briefcase. Even with nothing written in it, it was a compromising possession.

The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp. Winston fitted a nib into the penholder and sucked it to get the grease off. The pen was an archaic instrument, seldom used even for signatures, and he had procured one, furtively and with some difficulty, simply because of a feeling that the beautiful creamy paper deserved to be written on with a real nib instead of being scratched with an ink-pencil. Actually he was not used to writing by hand. Apart from very short notes, it was usual to dictate everything into the speak-write which was of course impossible for his present purpose. He dipped the pen into the ink and then faltered for just a second. A tremor had gone through his bowels. To mark the paper was the decisive act. In small clumsy letters he wrote:

April 4th, 1984.

He sat back. A sense of complete helplessness had descended

upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984. It must be round about that date, since he was fairly sure that his age was thirty-nine, and he believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945; but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two.

For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary? For the future, for the unborn. His mind hovered for a moment round the doubtful date on the page, and then fetched up with a bump against the Newspeak word DOUBLETHINK. For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present, in which case it would not listen to him: or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless.

For some time he sat gazing stupidly at the paper. The telescreen had changed over to strident military music. It was curious that he seemed not merely to have lost the power of expressing himself, but even to have forgotten what it was that he had originally intended to say. For weeks past he had been making ready for this moment, and it had never crossed his mind that anything would be needed except courage. The actual writing would be easy. All he had to do was to transfer to paper the interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head, literally for years. At this moment, however, even the monologue had dried up. Moreover his varicose ulcer had begun itching unbearably. He dared not scratch it, because if he did so it always became inflamed. The seconds were ticking by. He was conscious of nothing except the blankness of the page in front of him, the itching of the skin above his ankle, the blaring of the music, and a slight booziness caused by the gin.

Suddenly he began writing in sheer panic, only imperfectly aware of what he was setting down. His small but childish handwriting straggled up and down the page, shedding first its capital letters and finally even its full stops:

April 4th, 1984. Last night to the flicks. All war films. One very good one of a ship full of refugees being bombed somewhere in the Mediterranean. Audience much amused by shots of a great huge fat man trying to swim away with a helicopter after him, first you saw

him wallowing along in the water like a porpoise, then you saw him through the helicopters gunsights, then he was full of holes and the sea round him turned pink and he sank as suddenly as though the holes had let in the water, audience shouting with laughter when he sank. then you saw a lifeboat full of children with a helicopter hovering over it. there was a middle-aged woman might have been a jewess sitting up in the bow with a little boy about three years old in her arms. little boy screaming with fright and hiding his head between her breasts as if he was trying to burrow right into her and the woman putting her arms round him and comforting him although she was blue with fright herself, all the time covering him up as much as possible as if she thought her arms could keep the bullets off him. then the helicopter planted a 20 kilo bomb in among them terrific flash and the boat went all to matchwood. then there was a wonderful shot of a child's arm going up up up right up into the air a helicopter with a camera in its nose must have followed it up and there was a lot of applause from the party seats but a woman down in the prole part of the house suddenly started kicking up a fuss and shouting they didnt oughter of showed it not in front of kids they didnt it aint right not in front of kids it aint until the police turned her turned her out i dont suppose anything happened to her nobody cares what the proles say typical prole reaction they never ——

Winston stopped writing, partly because he was suffering from cramp. He did not know what had made him pour out this stream of rubbish. But the curious thing was that while he was doing so a totally different memory had clarified itself in his mind, to the point where he almost felt equal to writing it down. It was, he now realized, because of this other incident that he had suddenly decided to come home and begin the diary today.

It had happened that morning at the Ministry, if anything so nebulous could be said to happen.

It was nearly eleven hundred, and in the Records Department, where Winston worked, they were dragging the chairs out of the cubicles and grouping them in the centre of the hall opposite the big telescreen, in preparation for the Two Minutes Hate. Winston was just taking his place in one of the middle rows when two people whom he knew by sight, but had never spoken to, came unexpectedly

into the room. One of them was a girl whom he often passed in the corridors. He did not know her name, but he knew that she worked in the Fiction Department. Presumably — since he had sometimes seen her with oily hands and carrying a spanner — she had some mechanical job on one of the novel-writing machines. She was a bold-looking girl, of about twenty-seven, with thick hair, a freckled face, and swift, athletic movements. A narrow scarlet sash, emblem of the Junior Anti-Sex League, was wound several times round the waist of her overalls, just tightly enough to bring out the shapeliness of her hips. Winston had disliked her from the very first moment of seeing her. He knew the reason. It was because of the atmosphere of hockey-fields and cold baths and community hikes and general clean-mindedness which she managed to carry about with her. He disliked nearly all women, and especially the young and pretty ones. It was always the women, and above all the young ones, who were the most bigoted adherents of the Party, the swallowers of slogans, the amateur spies and nosers-out of unorthodoxy. But this particular girl gave him the impression of being more dangerous than most. Once when they passed in the corridor she gave him a quick sidelong glance which seemed to pierce right into him and for a moment had filled him with black terror. The idea had even crossed his mind that she might be an agent of the Thought Police. That, it was true, was very unlikely. Still, he continued to feel a peculiar uneasiness, which had fear mixed up in it as well as hostility, whenever she was anywhere near him.

The other person was a man named O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party and holder of some post so important and remote that Winston had only a dim idea of its nature. A momentary hush passed over the group of people round the chairs as they saw the black overalls of an Inner Party member approaching. O'Brien was a large, burly man with a thick neck and a coarse, humorous, brutal face. In spite of his formidable appearance he had a certain charm of manner. He had a trick of resettling his spectacles on his nose which was curiously disarming — in some indefinable way, curiously civilized. It was a gesture which, if anyone had still thought in such terms, might have recalled an eighteenth-century nobleman offering his snuffbox. Winston had seen O'Brien perhaps a dozen times in almost

as many years. He felt deeply drawn to him, and not solely because he was intrigued by the contrast between O'Brien's urbane manner and his prize-fighter's physique. Much more it was because of a secretly held belief — or perhaps not even a belief, merely a hope — that O'Brien's political orthodoxy was not perfect. Something in his face suggested it irresistibly. And again, perhaps it was not even unorthodoxy that was written in his face, but simply intelligence. But at any rate he had the appearance of being a person that you could talk to if somehow you could cheat the telescreen and get him alone. Winston had never made the smallest effort to verify this guess: indeed, there was no way of doing so. At this moment O'Brien glanced at his wrist-watch, saw that it was nearly eleven hundred, and evidently decided to stay in the Records Department until the Two Minutes Hate was over. He took a chair in the same row as Winston, a couple of places away. A small, sandy-haired woman who worked in the next cubicle to Winston was between them. The girl with dark hair was sitting immediately behind.

The next moment a hideous, grinding speech, as of some monstrous machine running without oil, burst from the big telescreen at the end of the room. It was a noise that set one's teeth on edge and bristled the hair at the back of one's neck. The Hate had started.

As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed on to the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience. The little sandy-haired woman gave a squeak of mingled fear and disgust. Goldstein was the renegade and backslider who once, long ago (how long ago, nobody quite remembered), had been one of the leading figures of the Party, almost on a level with Big Brother himself, and then had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities, had been condemned to death, and had mysteriously escaped and disappeared. The programmes of the Two Minutes Hate varied from day to day, but there was none in which Goldstein was not the principal figure. He was the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the Party's purity. All subsequent crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, deviations, sprang directly out of his teaching. Somewhere or other he was still alive and hatching his conspiracies: perhaps somewhere beyond the sea, under the protection of his foreign paymasters,

perhaps even — so it was occasionally rumoured — in some hiding-place in Oceania itself.

Winston's diaphragm was constricted. He could never see the face of Goldstein without a painful mixture of emotions. It was a lean Jewish face, with a great fuzzy aureole of white hair and a small goatee beard — a clever face, and yet somehow inherently despicable, with a kind of senile silliness in the long thin nose, near the end of which a pair of spectacles was perched. It resembled the face of a sheep, and the voice, too, had a sheep-like quality. Goldstein was delivering his usual venomous attack upon the doctrines of the Party — an attack so exaggerated and perverse that a child should have been able to see through it, and yet just plausible enough to fill one with an alarmed feeling that other people, less level-headed than oneself, might be taken in by it. He was abusing Big Brother, he was denouncing the dictatorship of the Party, he was demanding the immediate conclusion of peace with Eurasia, he was advocating freedom of speech, freedom of the Press, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought, he was crying hysterically that the revolution had been betrayed — and all this in rapid polysyllabic speech which was a sort of parody of the habitual style of the orators of the Party, and even contained Newspeak words: more Newspeak words, indeed, than any Party member would normally use in real life. And all the while, lest one should be in any doubt as to the reality which Goldstein's specious claptrap covered, behind his head on the telescreen there marched the endless columns of the Eurasian army — row after row of solid-looking men with expressionless Asiatic faces, who swam up to the surface of the screen and vanished, to be replaced by others exactly similar. The dull rhythmic tramp of the soldiers' boots formed the background to Goldstein's bleating voice.

Before the Hate had proceeded for thirty seconds, uncontrollable exclamations of rage were breaking out from half the people in the room. The self-satisfied sheep-like face on the screen, and the terrifying power of the Eurasian army behind it, were too much to be borne: besides, the sight or even the thought of Goldstein produced fear and anger automatically. He was an object of hatred more constant than either Eurasia or Eastasia, since when Oceania was at

war with one of these Powers it was generally at peace with the other. But what was strange was that although Goldstein was hated and despised by everybody, although every day and a thousand times a day, on platforms, on the telescreen, in newspapers, in books, his theories were refuted, smashed, ridiculed, held up to the general gaze for the pitiful rubbish that they were — in spite of all this, his influence never seemed to grow less. Always there were fresh dupes waiting to be seduced by him. A day never passed when spies and saboteurs acting under his directions were not unmasked by the Thought Police. He was the commander of a vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State. The Brotherhood, its name was supposed to be. There were also whispered stories of a terrible book, a compendium of all the heresies, of which Goldstein was the author and which circulated clandestinely here and there. It was a book without a title. People referred to it, if at all, simply as THE BOOK. But one knew of such things only through vague rumours. Neither the Brotherhood nor THE BOOK was a subject that any ordinary Party member would mention if there was a way of avoiding it.

In its second minute the Hate rose to a frenzy. People were leaping up and down in their places and shouting at the tops of their voices in an effort to drown the maddening bleating voice that came from the screen. The little sandy-haired woman had turned bright pink, and her mouth was opening and shutting like that of a landed fish. Even O'Brien's heavy face was flushed. He was sitting very straight in his chair, his powerful chest swelling and quivering as though he were standing up to the assault of a wave. The dark-haired girl behind Winston had begun crying out 'Swine! Swine! Swine!' and suddenly she picked up a heavy Newspeak dictionary and flung it at the screen. It struck Goldstein's nose and bounced off; the voice continued inexorably. In a lucid moment Winston found that he was shouting with the others and kicking his heel violently against the rung of his chair. The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but, on the contrary, that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds any pretence was always unnecessary. A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a

sledge-hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. And yet the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp. Thus, at one moment Winston's hatred was not turned against Goldstein at all, but, on the contrary, against Big Brother, the Party, and the Thought Police; and at such moments his heart went out to the lonely, derided heretic on the screen, sole guardian of truth and sanity in a world of lies. And yet the very next instant he was at one with the people about him, and all that was said of Goldstein seemed to him to be true. At those moments his secret loathing of Big Brother changed into adoration, and Big Brother seemed to tower up, an invincible, fearless protector, standing like a rock against the hordes of Asia, and Goldstein, in spite of his isolation, his helplessness, and the doubt that hung about his very existence, seemed like some sinister enchanter, capable by the mere power of his voice of wrecking the structure of civilization.

It was even possible, at moments, to switch one's hatred this way or that by a voluntary act. Suddenly, by the sort of violent effort with which one wrenches one's head away from the pillow in a nightmare, Winston succeeded in transferring his hatred from the face on the screen to the dark-haired girl behind him. Vivid, beautiful hallucinations flashed through his mind. He would flog her to death with a rubber truncheon. He would tie her naked to a stake and shoot her full of arrows like Saint Sebastian. He would ravish her and cut her throat at the moment of climax. Better than before, moreover, he realized WHY it was that he hated her. He hated her because she was young and pretty and sexless, because he wanted to go to bed with her and would never do so, because round her sweet supple waist, which seemed to ask you to encircle it with your arm, there was only the odious scarlet sash, aggressive symbol of chastity.

The Hate rose to its climax. The voice of Goldstein had become an actual sheep's bleat, and for an instant the face changed into that of a sheep. Then the sheep-face melted into the figure of a Eurasian soldier who seemed to be advancing, huge and terrible, his submachine gun roaring, and seeming to spring out of the surface of the screen, so that some of the people in the front row actually flinched

backwards in their seats. But in the same moment, drawing a deep sigh of relief from everybody, the hostile figure melted into the face of Big Brother, black-haired, black-moustachio'd, full of power and mysterious calm, and so vast that it almost filled up the screen. Nobody heard what Big Brother was saying. It was merely a few words of encouragement, the sort of words that are uttered in the din of battle, not distinguishable individually but restoring confidence by the fact of being spoken. Then the face of Big Brother faded away again, and instead the three slogans of the Party stood out in bold capitals:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

But the face of Big Brother seemed to persist for several seconds on the screen, as though the impact that it had made on everyone's eyeballs was too vivid to wear off immediately. The little sandy-haired woman had flung herself forward over the back of the chair in front of her. With a tremulous murmur that sounded like 'My Saviour!' she extended her arms towards the screen. Then she buried her face in her hands. It was apparent that she was uttering a prayer.

At this moment the entire group of people broke into a deep, slow, rhythmical chant of 'B-B! . . . B-B!' — over and over again, very slowly, with a long pause between the first 'B' and the second — a heavy, murmurous sound, somehow curiously savage, in the background of which one seemed to hear the stamp of naked feet and the throbbing of tom-toms. For perhaps as much as thirty seconds they kept it up. It was a refrain that was often heard in moments of overwhelming emotion. Partly it was a sort of hymn to the wisdom and majesty of Big Brother, but still more it was an act of self-hypnosis, a deliberate drowning of consciousness by means of rhythmic noise. Winston's entrails seemed to grow cold. In the Two Minutes Hate he could not help sharing in the general delirium, but this sub-human chanting of 'B-B! . . . B-B!' always filled him with horror. Of course he chanted with the rest: it was impossible to do otherwise. To dissemble your feelings, to control your face, to do

what everyone else was doing, was an instinctive reaction. But there was a space of a couple of seconds during which the expression of his eyes might conceivably have betrayed him. And it was exactly at this moment that the significant thing happened — if, indeed, it did happen.

Momentarily he caught O'Brien's eye. O'Brien had stood up. He had taken off his spectacles and was in the act of resettling them on his nose with his characteristic gesture. But there was a fraction of a second when their eyes met, and for as long as it took to happen Winston knew — yes, he KNEW! — that O'Brien was thinking the same thing as himself. An unmistakable message had passed. It was as though their two minds had opened and the thoughts were flowing from one into the other through their eyes. 'I am with you,' O'Brien seemed to be saying to him. 'I know precisely what you are feeling. I know all about your contempt, your hatred, your disgust. But don't worry, I am on your side!' And then the flash of intelligence was gone, and O'Brien's face was as inscrutable as everybody else's.

That was all, and he was already uncertain whether it had happened. Such incidents never had any sequel. All that they did was to keep alive in him the belief, or hope, that others besides himself were the enemies of the Party. Perhaps the rumours of vast underground conspiracies were true after all — perhaps the Brotherhood really existed! It was impossible, in spite of the endless arrests and confessions and executions, to be sure that the Brotherhood was not simply a myth. Some days he believed in it, some days not. There was no evidence, only fleeting glimpses that might mean anything or nothing: snatches of overheard conversation, faint scribbles on lavatory walls — once, even, when two strangers met, a small movement of the hand which had looked as though it might be a signal of recognition. It was all guesswork: very likely he had imagined everything. He had gone back to his cubicle without looking at O'Brien again. The idea of following up their momentary contact hardly crossed his mind. It would have been inconceivably dangerous even if he had known how to set about doing it. For a second, two seconds, they had exchanged an equivocal glance, and that was the end of the story. But even that was a memorable event, in the locked loneliness in which one had to live.

Winston roused himself and sat up straighter. He let out a belch. The gin was rising from his stomach.

His eyes re-focused on the page. He discovered that while he sat helplessly musing he had also been writing, as though by automatic action. And it was no longer the same cramped, awkward handwriting as before. His pen had slid voluptuously over the smooth paper, printing in large neat capitals —

DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER

over and over again, filling half a page.

He could not help feeling a twinge of panic. It was absurd, since the writing of those particular words was not more dangerous than the initial act of opening the diary, but for a moment he was tempted to tear out the spoiled pages and abandon the enterprise altogether.

He did not do so, however, because he knew that it was useless. Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. Whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same. He had committed — would still have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper — the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it. Thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed for ever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you.

It was always at night — the arrests invariably happened at night. The sudden jerk out of sleep, the rough hand shaking your shoulder, the lights glaring in your eyes, the ring of hard faces round the bed. In the vast majority of cases there was no trial, no report of the arrest. People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: VAPORIZED was the

usual word.

For a moment he was seized by a kind of hysteria. He began writing in a hurried untidy scrawl:

theyll shoot me i don’t care theyll shoot me in the back of the neck i dont care down with big brother they always shoot you in the back of the neck i dont care down with big brother ——

He sat back in his chair, slightly ashamed of himself, and laid down the pen. The next moment he started violently. There was a knocking at the door.

Already! He sat as still as a mouse, in the futile hope that whoever it was might go away after a single attempt. But no, the knocking was repeated. The worst thing of all would be to delay. His heart was thumping like a drum, but his face, from long habit, was probably expressionless. He got up and moved heavily towards the door.

Chapter 2

As he put his hand to the door-knob Winston saw that he had left the diary open on the table. DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER was written all over it, in letters almost big enough to be legible across the room. It was an inconceivably stupid thing to have done. But, he realized, even in his panic he had not wanted to smudge the creamy paper by shutting the book while the ink was wet.

He drew in his breath and opened the door. Instantly a warm wave of relief flowed through him. A colourless, crushed-looking woman, with wispy hair and a lined face, was standing outside.

'Oh, comrade,' she began in a dreary, whining sort of voice, 'I thought I heard you come in. Do you think you could come across and have a look at our kitchen sink? It's got blocked up and — — '

It was Mrs Parsons, the wife of a neighbour on the same floor. ('Mrs' was a word somewhat discountenanced by the Party — you were supposed to call everyone 'comrade' — but with some women one used it instinctively.) She was a woman of about thirty, but looking much older. One had the impression that there was dust in the creases of her face. Winston followed her down the passage. These amateur repair jobs were an almost daily irritation. Victory Mansions were old flats, built in 1930 or thereabouts, and were falling to pieces. The plaster flaked constantly from ceilings and walls, the pipes burst in every hard frost, the roof leaked whenever there was snow, the heating system was usually running at half steam when it was not closed down altogether from motives of economy. Repairs, except what you could do for yourself, had to be sanctioned by remote committees which were liable to hold up even the mending of a window-pane for two years.

'Of course it's only because Tom isn't home,' said Mrs Parsons vaguely.

The Parsons' flat was bigger than Winston's, and dingy in a different way. Everything had a battered, trampled-on look, as though the place had just been visited by some large violent animal. Games impedimenta — hockey-sticks, boxing-gloves, a burst football, a pair of sweaty shorts turned inside out — lay all over the

floor, and on the table there was a litter of dirty dishes and dog-eared exercise-books. On the walls were scarlet banners of the Youth League and the Spies, and a full-sized poster of Big Brother. There was the usual boiled-cabbage smell, common to the whole building, but it was shot through by a sharper reek of sweat, which — one knew this at the first sniff, though it was hard to say how — was the sweat of some person not present at the moment. In another room someone with a comb and a piece of toilet paper was trying to keep tune with the military music which was still issuing from the telescreen.

'It's the children,' said Mrs Parsons, casting a half-apprehensive glance at the door. 'They haven't been out today. And of course — — '

She had a habit of breaking off her sentences in the middle. The kitchen sink was full nearly to the brim with filthy greenish water which smelt worse than ever of cabbage. Winston knelt down and examined the angle-joint of the pipe. He hated using his hands, and he hated bending down, which was always liable to start him coughing. Mrs Parsons looked on helplessly.

'Of course if Tom was home he'd put it right in a moment,' she said. 'He loves anything like that. He's ever so good with his hands, Tom is.'

Parsons was Winston's fellow-employee at the Ministry of Truth. He was a fattish but active man of paralysing stupidity, a mass of imbecile enthusiasms — one of those completely unquestioning, devoted drudges on whom, more even than on the Thought Police, the stability of the Party depended. At thirty-five he had just been unwillingly evicted from the Youth League, and before graduating into the Youth League he had managed to stay on in the Spies for a year beyond the statutory age. At the Ministry he was employed in some subordinate post for which intelligence was not required, but on the other hand he was a leading figure on the Sports Committee and all the other committees engaged in organizing community hikes, spontaneous demonstrations, savings campaigns, and voluntary activities generally. He would inform you with quiet pride, between whiffs of his pipe, that he had put in an appearance at the Community Centre every evening for the past four years. An

overpowering smell of sweat, a sort of unconscious testimony to the strenuousness of his life, followed him about wherever he went, and even remained behind him after he had gone.

'Have you got a spanner?' said Winston, fiddling with the nut on the angle-joint.

'A spanner,' said Mrs Parsons, immediately becoming invertebrate. 'I don't know, I'm sure. Perhaps the children — — '

There was a trampling of boots and another blast on the comb as the children charged into the living-room. Mrs Parsons brought the spanner. Winston let out the water and disgustedly removed the clot of human hair that had blocked up the pipe. He cleaned his fingers as best he could in the cold water from the tap and went back into the other room.

'Up with your hands!' yelled a savage voice.

A handsome, tough-looking boy of nine had popped up from behind the table and was menacing him with a toy automatic pistol, while his small sister, about two years younger, made the same gesture with a fragment of wood. Both of them were dressed in the blue shorts, grey shirts, and red neckerchiefs which were the uniform of the Spies. Winston raised his hands above his head, but with an uneasy feeling, so vicious was the boy's demeanour, that it was not altogether a game.

'You're a traitor!' yelled the boy. 'You're a thought-criminal! You're a Eurasian spy! I'll shoot you, I'll vaporize you, I'll send you to the salt mines!'

Suddenly they were both leaping round him, shouting 'Traitor!' and 'Thought-criminal!' the little girl imitating her brother in every movement. It was somehow slightly frightening, like the gambolling of tiger cubs which will soon grow up into man-eaters. There was a sort of calculating ferocity in the boy's eye, a quite evident desire to hit or kick Winston and a consciousness of being very nearly big enough to do so. It was a good job it was not a real pistol he was holding, Winston thought.

Mrs Parsons' eyes flitted nervously from Winston to the children, and back again. In the better light of the living-room he noticed with interest that there actually was dust in the creases of her face.

'They do get so noisy,' she said. 'They're disappointed because

they couldn't go to see the hanging, that's what it is. I'm too busy to take them. and Tom won't be back from work in time.'

'Why can't we go and see the hanging?' roared the boy in his huge voice.

'Want to see the hanging! Want to see the hanging!' chanted the little girl, still capering round.

Some Eurasian prisoners, guilty of war crimes, were to be hanged in the Park that evening, Winston remembered. This happened about once a month, and was a popular spectacle. Children always clamoured to be taken to see it. He took his leave of Mrs Parsons and made for the door. But he had not gone six steps down the passage when something hit the back of his neck an agonizingly painful blow. It was as though a red-hot wire had been jabbed into him. He spun round just in time to see Mrs Parsons dragging her son back into the doorway while the boy pocketed a catapult.

'Goldstein!' bellowed the boy as the door closed on him. But what most struck Winston was the look of helpless fright on the woman's greyish face.

Back in the flat he stepped quickly past the telescreen and sat down at the table again, still rubbing his neck. The music from the telescreen had stopped. Instead, a clipped military voice was reading out, with a sort of brutal relish, a description of the armaments of the new Floating Fortress which had just been anchored between Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

With those children, he thought, that wretched woman must lead a life of terror. Another year, two years, and they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy. Nearly all children nowadays were horrible. What was worst of all was that by means of such organizations as the Spies they were systematically turned into ungovernable little savages, and yet this produced in them no tendency whatever to rebel against the discipline of the Party. On the contrary, they adored the Party and everything connected with it. The songs, the processions, the banners, the hiking, the drilling with dummy rifles, the yelling of slogans, the worship of Big Brother — it was all a sort of glorious game to them. All their ferocity was turned outwards, against the enemies of the State, against foreigners, traitors, saboteurs, thought-criminals. It was almost normal for

people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. And with good reason, for hardly a week passed in which 'The Times' did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak— 'child hero' was the phrase generally used — had overheard some compromising remark and denounced its parents to the Thought Police.

The sting of the catapult bullet had worn off. He picked up his pen half-heartedly, wondering whether he could find something more to write in the diary. Suddenly he began thinking of O'Brien again.

Years ago — how long was it? Seven years it must be — he had dreamed that he was walking through a pitch-dark room. And someone sitting to one side of him had said as he passed: 'We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness.' It was said very quietly, almost casually — a statement, not a command. He had walked on without pausing. What was curious was that at the time, in the dream, the words had not made much impression on him. It was only later and by degrees that they had seemed to take on significance. He could not now remember whether it was before or after having the dream that he had seen O'Brien for the first time, nor could he remember when he had first identified the voice as O'Brien's. But at any rate the identification existed. It was O'Brien who had spoken to him out of the dark.

Winston had never been able to feel sure — even after this morning's flash of the eyes it was still impossible to be sure whether O'Brien was a friend or an enemy. Nor did it even seem to matter greatly. There was a link of understanding between them, more important than affection or partisanship. 'We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness,' he had said. Winston did not know what it meant, only that in some way or another it would come true.

The voice from the telescreen paused. A trumpet call, clear and beautiful, floated into the stagnant air. The voice continued raspingly:

'Attention! Your attention, please! A newsflash has this moment arrived from the Malabar front. Our forces in South India have won a glorious victory. I am authorized to say that the action we are now reporting may well bring the war within measurable distance of its end. Here is the newsflash — — '

Bad news coming, thought Winston. And sure enough, following on a gory description of the annihilation of a Eurasian army, with stupendous figures of killed and prisoners, came the announcement that, as from next week, the chocolate ration would be reduced from thirty grammes to twenty.

Winston belched again. The gin was wearing off, leaving a deflated feeling. The telescreen — perhaps to celebrate the victory, perhaps to drown the memory of the lost chocolate — crashed into 'Oceania, 'tis for thee'. You were supposed to stand to attention. However, in his present position he was invisible.

'Oceania, 'tis for thee' gave way to lighter music. Winston walked over to the window, keeping his back to the telescreen. The day was still cold and clear. Somewhere far away a rocket bomb exploded with a dull, reverberating roar. About twenty or thirty of them a week were falling on London at present.

Down in the street the wind flapped the torn poster to and fro, and the word INGSOC fitfully appeared and vanished. Ingsoc. The sacred principles of Ingsoc. Newspeak, doublethink, the mutability of the past. He felt as though he were wandering in the forests of the sea bottom, lost in a monstrous world where he himself was the monster. He was alone. The past was dead, the future was unimaginable. What certainty had he that a single human creature now living was on his side? And what way of knowing that the dominion of the Party would not endure FOR EVER? Like an answer, the three slogans on the white face of the Ministry of Truth came back to him:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

He took a twenty-five cent piece out of his pocket. There, too, in tiny clear lettering, the same slogans were inscribed, and on the other face of the coin the head of Big Brother. Even from the coin the eyes pursued you. On coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters, and on the wrappings of a cigarette packet — everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in

the bath or in bed — no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull.

The sun had shifted round, and the myriad windows of the Ministry of Truth, with the light no longer shining on them, looked grim as the loopholes of a fortress. His heart quailed before the enormous pyramidal shape. It was too strong, it could not be stormed. A thousand rocket bombs would not batter it down. He wondered again for whom he was writing the diary. For the future, for the past — for an age that might be imaginary. And in front of him there lay not death but annihilation. The diary would be reduced to ashes and himself to vapour. Only the Thought Police would read what he had written, before they wiped it out of existence and out of memory. How could you make appeal to the future when not a trace of you, not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper, could physically survive?

The telescreen struck fourteen. He must leave in ten minutes. He had to be back at work by fourteen-thirty.

Curiously, the chiming of the hour seemed to have put new heart into him. He was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage. He went back to the table, dipped his pen, and wrote:

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone — to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink — greetings!

He was already dead, he reflected. It seemed to him that it was only now, when he had begun to be able to formulate his thoughts, that he had taken the decisive step. The consequences of every act are included in the act itself. He wrote:

Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death.

Now he had recognized himself as a dead man it became important to stay alive as long as possible. Two fingers of his right hand were inkstained. It was exactly the kind of detail that might betray you. Some nosing zealot in the Ministry (a woman, probably:

someone like the little sandy-haired woman or the dark-haired girl from the Fiction Department) might start wondering why he had been writing during the lunch interval, why he had used an old-fashioned pen, WHAT he had been writing — and then drop a hint in the appropriate quarter. He went to the bathroom and carefully scrubbed the ink away with the gritty dark-brown soap which rasped your skin like sandpaper and was therefore well adapted for this purpose.

He put the diary away in the drawer. It was quite useless to think of hiding it, but he could at least make sure whether or not its existence had been discovered. A hair laid across the page-ends was too obvious. With the tip of his finger he picked up an identifiable grain of whitish dust and deposited it on the corner of the cover, where it was bound to be shaken off if the book was moved.

Chapter 3

Winston was dreaming of his mother.

He must, he thought, have been ten or eleven years old when his mother had disappeared. She was a tall, statuesque, rather silent woman with slow movements and magnificent fair hair. His father he remembered more vaguely as dark and thin, dressed always in neat dark clothes (Winston remembered especially the very thin soles of his father's shoes) and wearing spectacles. The two of them must evidently have been swallowed up in one of the first great purges of the fifties.

At this moment his mother was sitting in some place deep down beneath him, with his young sister in her arms. He did not remember his sister at all, except as a tiny, feeble baby, always silent, with large, watchful eyes. Both of them were looking up at him. They were down in some subterranean place — the bottom of a well, for instance, or a very deep grave — but it was a place which, already far below him, was itself moving downwards. They were in the saloon of a sinking ship, looking up at him through the darkening water. There was still air in the saloon, they could still see him and he them, but all the while they were sinking down, down into the green waters which in another moment must hide them from sight for ever. He was out in the light and air while they were being sucked down to death, and they were down there because he was up here. He knew it and they knew it, and he could see the knowledge in their faces. There was no reproach either in their faces or in their hearts, only the knowledge that they must die in order that he might remain alive, and that this was part of the unavoidable order of things.

He could not remember what had happened, but he knew in his dream that in some way the lives of his mother and his sister had been sacrificed to his own. It was one of those dreams which, while retaining the characteristic dream scenery, are a continuation of one's intellectual life, and in which one becomes aware of facts and ideas which still seem new and valuable after one is awake. The thing that now suddenly struck Winston was that his mother's death, nearly thirty years ago, had been tragic and sorrowful in a way that was no

longer possible. Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the ancient time, to a time when there was still privacy, love, and friendship, and when the members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason. His mother's memory tore at his heart because she had died loving him, when he was too young and selfish to love her in return, and because somehow, he did not remember how, she had sacrificed herself to a conception of loyalty that was private and unalterable. Such things, he saw, could not happen today. Today there were fear, hatred, and pain, but no dignity of emotion, no deep or complex sorrows. All this he seemed to see in the large eyes of his mother and his sister, looking up at him through the green water, hundreds of fathoms down and still sinking.

Suddenly he was standing on short springy turf, on a summer evening when the slanting rays of the sun gilded the ground. The landscape that he was looking at recurred so often in his dreams that he was never fully certain whether or not he had seen it in the real world. In his waking thoughts he called it the Golden Country. It was an old, rabbit-bitten pasture, with a foot-track wandering across it and a molehill here and there. In the ragged hedge on the opposite side of the field the boughs of the elm trees were swaying very faintly in the breeze, their leaves just stirring in dense masses like women's hair. Somewhere near at hand, though out of sight, there was a clear, slow-moving stream where dace were swimming in the pools under the willow trees.

The girl with dark hair was coming towards them across the field. With what seemed a single movement she tore off her clothes and flung them disdainfully aside. Her body was white and smooth, but it aroused no desire in him, indeed he barely looked at it. What overwhelmed him in that instant was admiration for the gesture with which she had thrown her clothes aside. With its grace and carelessness it seemed to annihilate a whole culture, a whole system of thought, as though Big Brother and the Party and the Thought Police could all be swept into nothingness by a single splendid movement of the arm. That too was a gesture belonging to the ancient time. Winston woke up with the word 'Shakespeare' on his lips.

The telescreen was giving forth an ear-splitting whistle which

continued on the same note for thirty seconds. It was nought seven fifteen, getting-up time for office workers. Winston wrenched his body out of bed — naked, for a member of the Outer Party received only 3,000 clothing coupons annually, and a suit of pyjamas was 600 — and seized a dingy singlet and a pair of shorts that were lying across a chair. The Physical Jerks would begin in three minutes. The next moment he was doubled up by a violent coughing fit which nearly always attacked him soon after waking up. It emptied his lungs so completely that he could only begin breathing again by lying on his back and taking a series of deep gasps. His veins had swelled with the effort of the cough, and the varicose ulcer had started itching.

'Thirty to forty group!' yapped a piercing female voice. 'Thirty to forty group! Take your places, please. Thirties to forties!'

Winston sprang to attention in front of the telescreen, upon which the image of a youngish woman, scrawny but muscular, dressed in tunic and gym-shoes, had already appeared.

'Arms bending and stretching!' she rapped out. 'Take your time by me. ONE, two, three, four! ONE, two, three, four! Come on, comrades, put a bit of life into it! ONE, two, three four! ONE two, three, four! . . . '

The pain of the coughing fit had not quite driven out of Winston's mind the impression made by his dream, and the rhythmic movements of the exercise restored it somewhat. As he mechanically shot his arms back and forth, wearing on his face the look of grim enjoyment which was considered proper during the Physical Jerks, he was struggling to think his way backward into the dim period of his early childhood. It was extraordinarily difficult. Beyond the late fifties everything faded. When there were no external records that you could refer to, even the outline of your own life lost its sharpness. You remembered huge events which had quite probably not happened, you remembered the detail of incidents without being able to recapture their atmosphere, and there were long blank periods to which you could assign nothing. Everything had been different then. Even the names of countries, and their shapes on the map, had been different. Airstrip One, for instance, had not been so called in those days: it had been called England or Britain, though London, he

felt fairly certain, had always been called London.

Winston could not definitely remember a time when his country had not been at war, but it was evident that there had been a fairly long interval of peace during his childhood, because one of his early memories was of an air raid which appeared to take everyone by surprise. Perhaps it was the time when the atomic bomb had fallen on Colchester. He did not remember the raid itself, but he did remember his father's hand clutching his own as they hurried down, down, down into some place deep in the earth, round and round a spiral staircase which rang under his feet and which finally so wearied his legs that he began whimpering and they had to stop and rest. His mother, in her slow, dreamy way, was following a long way behind them. She was carrying his baby sister — or perhaps it was only a bundle of blankets that she was carrying: he was not certain whether his sister had been born then. Finally they had emerged into a noisy, crowded place which he had realized to be a Tube station.

There were people sitting all over the stone-flagged floor, and other people, packed tightly together, were sitting on metal bunks, one above the other. Winston and his mother and father found themselves a place on the floor, and near them an old man and an old woman were sitting side by side on a bunk. The old man had on a decent dark suit and a black cloth cap pushed back from very white hair: his face was scarlet and his eyes were blue and full of tears. He reeked of gin. It seemed to breathe out of his skin in place of sweat, and one could have fancied that the tears welling from his eyes were pure gin. But though slightly drunk he was also suffering under some grief that was genuine and unbearable. In his childish way Winston grasped that some terrible thing, something that was beyond forgiveness and could never be remedied, had just happened. It also seemed to him that he knew what it was. Someone whom the old man loved — a little granddaughter, perhaps — had been killed. Every few minutes the old man kept repeating:

'We didn't ought to 'ave trusted 'em. I said so, Ma, didn't I? That's what comes of trusting 'em. I said so all along. We didn't ought to 'ave trusted the buggers.'

But which buggers they didn't ought to have trusted Winston could not now remember.

Since about that time, war had been literally continuous, though strictly speaking it had not always been the same war. For several months during his childhood there had been confused street fighting in London itself, some of which he remembered vividly. But to trace out the history of the whole period, to say who was fighting whom at any given moment, would have been utterly impossible, since no written record, and no spoken word, ever made mention of any other alignment than the existing one. At this moment, for example, in 1984 (if it was 1984), Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in alliance with Eastasia. In no public or private utterance was it ever admitted that the three powers had at any time been grouped along different lines. Actually, as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia. But that was merely a piece of furtive knowledge which he happened to possess because his memory was not satisfactorily under control. Officially the change of partners had never happened. Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia. The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil, and it followed that any past or future agreement with him was impossible.

The frightening thing, he reflected for the ten thousandth time as he forced his shoulders painfully backward (with hands on hips, they were gyrating their bodies from the waist, an exercise that was supposed to be good for the back muscles) — the frightening thing was that it might all be true. If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, IT NEVER HAPPENED — that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death?

The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed — if all records told the same tale — then the lie passed into history and became truth. ‘Who controls the past,’ ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’ And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to

everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. 'Reality control', they called it: in Newspeak, 'doublethink'.

'Stand easy!' barked the instructress, a little more genially.

Winston sank his arms to his sides and slowly refilled his lungs with air. His mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'doublethink' involved the use of doublethink.

The instructress had called them to attention again. 'And now let's see which of us can touch our toes!' she said enthusiastically. 'Right over from the hips, please, comrades. ONE-two! ONE-two! . . . '

Winston loathed this exercise, which sent shooting pains all the way from his heels to his buttocks and often ended by bringing on another coughing fit. The half-pleasant quality went out of his meditations. The past, he reflected, had not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed. For how could you establish even the most obvious fact when there existed no record outside your own memory? He tried to remember in what year he had first heard mention of Big Brother. He thought it must have been at some time in the sixties, but it was impossible to be certain. In the Party histories, of course, Big Brother figured as the leader and guardian of the Revolution since its very earliest days. His exploits had been gradually pushed backwards in time until already they extended into the fabulous world of the forties and the thirties, when the capitalists in their strange cylindrical hats still rode through the streets of

London in great gleaming motor-cars or horse carriages with glass sides. There was no knowing how much of this legend was true and how much invented. Winston could not even remember at what date the Party itself had come into existence. He did not believe he had ever heard the word Ingsoc before 1960, but it was possible that in its Oldspeak form— 'English Socialism', that is to say — it had been current earlier. Everything melted into mist. Sometimes, indeed, you could put your finger on a definite lie. It was not true, for example, as was claimed in the Party history books, that the Party had invented aeroplanes. He remembered aeroplanes since his earliest childhood. But you could prove nothing. There was never any evidence. Just once in his whole life he had held in his hands unmistakable documentary proof of the falsification of an historical fact. And on that occasion ——

'Smith!' screamed the shrewish voice from the telescreen. '6079 Smith W.! Yes, YOU! Bend lower, please! You can do better than that. You're not trying. Lower, please! THAT'S better, comrade. Now stand at ease, the whole squad, and watch me.'

A sudden hot sweat had broken out all over Winston's body. His face remained completely inscrutable. Never show dismay! Never show resentment! A single flicker of the eyes could give you away. He stood watching while the instructress raised her arms above her head and — one could not say gracefully, but with remarkable neatness and efficiency — bent over and tucked the first joint of her fingers under her toes.

'THERE, comrades! THAT'S how I want to see you doing it. Watch me again. I'm thirty-nine and I've had four children. Now look.' She bent over again. 'You see MY knees aren't bent. You can all do it if you want to,' she added as she straightened herself up. 'Anyone under forty-five is perfectly capable of touching his toes. We don't all have the privilege of fighting in the front line, but at least we can all keep fit. Remember our boys on the Malabar front! And the sailors in the Floating Fortresses! Just think what THEY have to put up with. Now try again. That's better, comrade, that's MUCH better,' she added encouragingly as Winston, with a violent lunge, succeeded in touching his toes with knees unbent, for the first time in several years.

Chapter 4

With the deep, unconscious sigh which not even the nearness of the telescreen could prevent him from uttering when his day's work started, Winston pulled the speakwrite towards him, blew the dust from its mouthpiece, and put on his spectacles. Then he unrolled and clipped together four small cylinders of paper which had already flopped out of the pneumatic tube on the right-hand side of his desk.

In the walls of the cubicle there were three orifices. To the right of the speakwrite, a small pneumatic tube for written messages, to the left, a larger one for newspapers; and in the side wall, within easy reach of Winston's arm, a large oblong slit protected by a wire grating. This last was for the disposal of waste paper. Similar slits existed in thousands or tens of thousands throughout the building, not only in every room but at short intervals in every corridor. For some reason they were nicknamed memory holes. When one knew that any document was due for destruction, or even when one saw a scrap of waste paper lying about, it was an automatic action to lift the flap of the nearest memory hole and drop it in, whereupon it would be whirled away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building.

Winston examined the four slips of paper which he had unrolled. Each contained a message of only one or two lines, in the abbreviated jargon — not actually Newspeak, but consisting largely of Newspeak words — which was used in the Ministry for internal purposes. They ran:

times 17.3.84 bb speech malreported africa rectify

times 19.12.83 forecasts 3 yp 4th quarter 83 misprints verify current issue

times 14.2.84 miniplenty malquoted chocolate rectify

times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusungood refs unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling

With a faint feeling of satisfaction Winston laid the fourth message aside. It was an intricate and responsible job and had better be dealt with last. The other three were routine matters, though the second one would probably mean some tedious wading through lists

of figures.

Winston dialled ‘back numbers’ on the telescreen and called for the appropriate issues of ‘The Times’, which slid out of the pneumatic tube after only a few minutes’ delay. The messages he had received referred to articles or news items which for one reason or another it was thought necessary to alter, or, as the official phrase had it, to rectify. For example, it appeared from ‘The Times’ of the seventeenth of March that Big Brother, in his speech of the previous day, had predicted that the South Indian front would remain quiet but that a Eurasian offensive would shortly be launched in North Africa. As it happened, the Eurasian Higher Command had launched its offensive in South India and left North Africa alone. It was therefore necessary to rewrite a paragraph of Big Brother’s speech, in such a way as to make him predict the thing that had actually happened. Or again, ‘The Times’ of the nineteenth of December had published the official forecasts of the output of various classes of consumption goods in the fourth quarter of 1983, which was also the sixth quarter of the Ninth Three-Year Plan. Today’s issue contained a statement of the actual output, from which it appeared that the forecasts were in every instance grossly wrong. Winston’s job was to rectify the original figures by making them agree with the later ones. As for the third message, it referred to a very simple error which could be set right in a couple of minutes. As short a time ago as February, the Ministry of Plenty had issued a promise (a ‘categorical pledge’ were the official words) that there would be no reduction of the chocolate ration during 1984. Actually, as Winston was aware, the chocolate ration was to be reduced from thirty grammes to twenty at the end of the present week. All that was needed was to substitute for the original promise a warning that it would probably be necessary to reduce the ration at some time in April.

As soon as Winston had dealt with each of the messages, he clipped his speakwritten corrections to the appropriate copy of ‘The Times’ and pushed them into the pneumatic tube. Then, with a movement which was as nearly as possible unconscious, he crumpled up the original message and any notes that he himself had made, and dropped them into the memory hole to be devoured by the flames.

What happened in the unseen labyrinth to which the pneumatic

tubes led, he did not know in detail, but he did know in general terms. As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of 'The Times' had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs — to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct, nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place. The largest section of the Records Department, far larger than the one on which Winston worked, consisted simply of persons whose duty it was to track down and collect all copies of books, newspapers, and other documents which had been superseded and were due for destruction. A number of 'The Times' which might, because of changes in political alignment, or mistaken prophecies uttered by Big Brother, have been rewritten a dozen times still stood on the files bearing its original date, and no other copy existed to contradict it. Books, also, were recalled and rewritten again and again, and were invariably reissued without any admission that any alteration had been made. Even the written instructions which Winston received, and which he invariably got rid of as soon as he had dealt with them, never stated or implied that an act of forgery was to be committed: always the reference was to slips, errors, misprints, or misquotations which it was necessary to put right in the interests of accuracy.

But actually, he thought as he re-adjusted the Ministry of Plenty's figures, it was not even forgery. It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for another. Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connexion with anything in the real world, not

even the kind of connexion that is contained in a direct lie. Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version. A great deal of the time you were expected to make them up out of your head. For example, the Ministry of Plenty's forecast had estimated the output of boots for the quarter at 145 million pairs. The actual output was given as sixty-two millions. Winston, however, in rewriting the forecast, marked the figure down to fifty-seven millions, so as to allow for the usual claim that the quota had been overfulfilled. In any case, sixty-two millions was no nearer the truth than fifty-seven millions, or than 145 millions. Very likely no boots had been produced at all. Likelier still, nobody knew how many had been produced, much less cared. All one knew was that every quarter astronomical numbers of boots were produced on paper, while perhaps half the population of Oceania went barefoot. And so it was with every class of recorded fact, great or small. Everything faded away into a shadow-world in which, finally, even the date of the year had become uncertain.

Winston glanced across the hall. In the corresponding cubicle on the other side a small, precise-looking, dark-chinned man named Tillotson was working steadily away, with a folded newspaper on his knee and his mouth very close to the mouthpiece of the speakwrite. He had the air of trying to keep what he was saying a secret between himself and the telescreen. He looked up, and his spectacles darted a hostile flash in Winston's direction.

Winston hardly knew Tillotson, and had no idea what work he was employed on. People in the Records Department did not readily talk about their jobs. In the long, windowless hall, with its double row of cubicles and its endless rustle of papers and hum of voices murmuring into speakwrites, there were quite a dozen people whom Winston did not even know by name, though he daily saw them hurrying to and fro in the corridors or gesticulating in the Two Minutes Hate. He knew that in the cubicle next to him the little woman with sandy hair toiled day in day out, simply at tracking down and deleting from the Press the names of people who had been vaporized and were therefore considered never to have existed. There was a certain fitness in this, since her own husband had been vaporized a couple of years earlier. And a few cubicles away a mild,

ineffectual, dreamy creature named Ampleforth, with very hairy ears and a surprising talent for juggling with rhymes and metres, was engaged in producing garbled versions — definitive texts, they were called — of poems which had become ideologically offensive, but which for one reason or another were to be retained in the anthologies. And this hall, with its fifty workers or thereabouts, was only one sub-section, a single cell, as it were, in the huge complexity of the Records Department. Beyond, above, below, were other swarms of workers engaged in an unimaginable multitude of jobs. There were the huge printing-shops with their sub-editors, their typography experts, and their elaborately equipped studios for the faking of photographs. There was the tele-programmes section with its engineers, its producers, and its teams of actors specially chosen for their skill in imitating voices. There were the armies of reference clerks whose job was simply to draw up lists of books and periodicals which were due for recall. There were the vast repositories where the corrected documents were stored, and the hidden furnaces where the original copies were destroyed. And somewhere or other, quite anonymous, there were the directing brains who co-ordinated the whole effort and laid down the lines of policy which made it necessary that this fragment of the past should be preserved, that one falsified, and the other rubbed out of existence.

And the Records Department, after all, was itself only a single branch of the Ministry of Truth, whose primary job was not to reconstruct the past but to supply the citizens of Oceania with newspapers, films, textbooks, telescreen programmes, plays, novels — with every conceivable kind of information, instruction, or entertainment, from a statue to a slogan, from a lyric poem to a biological treatise, and from a child's spelling-book to a Newspeak dictionary. And the Ministry had not only to supply the multifarious needs of the party, but also to repeat the whole operation at a lower level for the benefit of the proletariat. There was a whole chain of separate departments dealing with proletarian literature, music, drama, and entertainment generally. Here were produced rubbishy newspapers containing almost nothing except sport, crime and astrology, sensational five-cent novelettes, films oozing with sex, and sentimental songs which were composed entirely by mechanical

means on a special kind of kaleidoscope known as a versificator. There was even a whole sub-section — Pornosec, it was called in Newspeak — engaged in producing the lowest kind of pornography, which was sent out in sealed packets and which no Party member, other than those who worked on it, was permitted to look at.

Three messages had slid out of the pneumatic tube while Winston was working, but they were simple matters, and he had disposed of them before the Two Minutes Hate interrupted him. When the Hate was over he returned to his cubicle, took the Newspeak dictionary from the shelf, pushed the speakwrite to one side, cleaned his spectacles, and settled down to his main job of the morning.

Winston's greatest pleasure in life was in his work. Most of it was a tedious routine, but included in it there were also jobs so difficult and intricate that you could lose yourself in them as in the depths of a mathematical problem — delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say. Winston was good at this kind of thing. On occasion he had even been entrusted with the rectification of 'The Times' leading articles, which were written entirely in Newspeak. He unrolled the message that he had set aside earlier. It ran:

times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusungood refs unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling

In Oldspeak (or standard English) this might be rendered:

The reporting of Big Brother's Order for the Day in 'The Times' of December 3rd 1983 is extremely unsatisfactory and makes references to non-existent persons. Rewrite it in full and submit your draft to higher authority before filing.

Winston read through the offending article. Big Brother's Order for the Day, it seemed, had been chiefly devoted to praising the work of an organization known as FFCC, which supplied cigarettes and other comforts to the sailors in the Floating Fortresses. A certain Comrade Withers, a prominent member of the Inner Party, had been singled out for special mention and awarded a decoration, the Order of Conspicuous Merit, Second Class.

Three months later FFCC had suddenly been dissolved with no reasons given. One could assume that Withers and his associates

were now in disgrace, but there had been no report of the matter in the Press or on the telescreen. That was to be expected, since it was unusual for political offenders to be put on trial or even publicly denounced. The great purges involving thousands of people, with public trials of traitors and thought-criminals who made abject confession of their crimes and were afterwards executed, were special show-pieces not occurring oftener than once in a couple of years. More commonly, people who had incurred the displeasure of the Party simply disappeared and were never heard of again. One never had the smallest clue as to what had happened to them. In some cases they might not even be dead. Perhaps thirty people personally known to Winston, not counting his parents, had disappeared at one time or another.

Winston stroked his nose gently with a paper-clip. In the cubicle across the way Comrade Tillotson was still crouching secretively over his speakwrite. He raised his head for a moment: again the hostile spectacle-flash. Winston wondered whether Comrade Tillotson was engaged on the same job as himself. It was perfectly possible. So tricky a piece of work would never be entrusted to a single person: on the other hand, to turn it over to a committee would be to admit openly that an act of fabrication was taking place. Very likely as many as a dozen people were now working away on rival versions of what Big Brother had actually said. And presently some master brain in the Inner Party would select this version or that, would re-edit it and set in motion the complex processes of cross-referencing that would be required, and then the chosen lie would pass into the permanent records and become truth.

Winston did not know why Withers had been disgraced. Perhaps it was for corruption or incompetence. Perhaps Big Brother was merely getting rid of a too-popular subordinate. Perhaps Withers or someone close to him had been suspected of heretical tendencies. Or perhaps — what was likeliest of all — the thing had simply happened because purges and vaporizations were a necessary part of the mechanics of government. The only real clue lay in the words ‘refs unpersons’, which indicated that Withers was already dead. You could not invariably assume this to be the case when people were arrested. Sometimes they were released and allowed to remain at

liberty for as much as a year or two years before being executed. Very occasionally some person whom you had believed dead long since would make a ghostly reappearance at some public trial where he would implicate hundreds of others by his testimony before vanishing, this time for ever. Withers, however, was already an UNPERSON. He did not exist: he had never existed. Winston decided that it would not be enough simply to reverse the tendency of Big Brother's speech. It was better to make it deal with something totally unconnected with its original subject.

He might turn the speech into the usual denunciation of traitors and thought-criminals, but that was a little too obvious, while to invent a victory at the front, or some triumph of over-production in the Ninth Three-Year Plan, might complicate the records too much. What was needed was a piece of pure fantasy. Suddenly there sprang into his mind, ready made as it were, the image of a certain Comrade Ogilvy, who had recently died in battle, in heroic circumstances. There were occasions when Big Brother devoted his Order for the Day to commemorating some humble, rank-and-file Party member whose life and death he held up as an example worthy to be followed. Today he should commemorate Comrade Ogilvy. It was true that there was no such person as Comrade Ogilvy, but a few lines of print and a couple of faked photographs would soon bring him into existence.

Winston thought for a moment, then pulled the speakwrite towards him and began dictating in Big Brother's familiar style: a style at once military and pedantic, and, because of a trick of asking questions and then promptly answering them ('What lessons do we learn from this fact, comrades? The lesson — which is also one of the fundamental principles of Ingsoc — that,' etc., etc.), easy to imitate.

At the age of three Comrade Ogilvy had refused all toys except a drum, a sub-machine gun, and a model helicopter. At six — a year early, by a special relaxation of the rules — he had joined the Spies, at nine he had been a troop leader. At eleven he had denounced his uncle to the Thought Police after overhearing a conversation which appeared to him to have criminal tendencies. At seventeen he had been a district organizer of the Junior Anti-Sex League. At nineteen

he had designed a hand-grenade which had been adopted by the Ministry of Peace and which, at its first trial, had killed thirty-one Eurasian prisoners in one burst. At twenty-three he had perished in action. Pursued by enemy jet planes while flying over the Indian Ocean with important despatches, he had weighted his body with his machine gun and leapt out of the helicopter into deep water, despatches and all — an end, said Big Brother, which it was impossible to contemplate without feelings of envy. Big Brother added a few remarks on the purity and single-mindedness of Comrade Ogilvy's life. He was a total abstainer and a nonsmoker, had no recreations except a daily hour in the gymnasium, and had taken a vow of celibacy, believing marriage and the care of a family to be incompatible with a twenty-four-hour-a-day devotion to duty. He had no subjects of conversation except the principles of Ingsoc, and no aim in life except the defeat of the Eurasian enemy and the hunting-down of spies, saboteurs, thought-criminals, and traitors generally.

Winston debated with himself whether to award Comrade Ogilvy the Order of Conspicuous Merit: in the end he decided against it because of the unnecessary cross-referencing that it would entail.

Once again he glanced at his rival in the opposite cubicle. Something seemed to tell him with certainty that Tillotson was busy on the same job as himself. There was no way of knowing whose job would finally be adopted, but he felt a profound conviction that it would be his own. Comrade Ogilvy, unimagined an hour ago, was now a fact. It struck him as curious that you could create dead men but not living ones. Comrade Ogilvy, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar.

Chapter 5

In the low-ceilinged canteen, deep underground, the lunch queue jerked slowly forward. The room was already very full and deafeningly noisy. From the grille at the counter the steam of stew came pouring forth, with a sour metallic smell which did not quite overcome the fumes of Victory Gin. On the far side of the room there was a small bar, a mere hole in the wall, where gin could be bought at ten cents the large nip.

'Just the man I was looking for,' said a voice at Winston's back.

He turned round. It was his friend Syme, who worked in the Research Department. Perhaps 'friend' was not exactly the right word. You did not have friends nowadays, you had comrades: but there were some comrades whose society was pleasanter than that of others. Syme was a philologist, a specialist in Newspeak. Indeed, he was one of the enormous team of experts now engaged in compiling the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary. He was a tiny creature, smaller than Winston, with dark hair and large, protuberant eyes, at once mournful and derisive, which seemed to search your face closely while he was speaking to you.

'I wanted to ask you whether you'd got any razor blades,' he said.

'Not one!' said Winston with a sort of guilty haste. 'I've tried all over the place. They don't exist any longer.'

Everyone kept asking you for razor blades. Actually he had two unused ones which he was hoarding up. There had been a famine of them for months past. At any given moment there was some necessary article which the Party shops were unable to supply. Sometimes it was buttons, sometimes it was darning wool, sometimes it was shoelaces; at present it was razor blades. You could only get hold of them, if at all, by scrounging more or less furtively on the 'free' market.

'I've been using the same blade for six weeks,' he added untruthfully.

The queue gave another jerk forward. As they halted he turned and faced Syme again. Each of them took a greasy metal tray from a pile at the end of the counter.

‘Did you go and see the prisoners hanged yesterday?’ said Syme.

‘I was working,’ said Winston indifferently. ‘I shall see it on the flicks, I suppose.’

‘A very inadequate substitute,’ said Syme.

His mocking eyes roved over Winston’s face. ‘I know you,’ the eyes seemed to say, ‘I see through you. I know very well why you didn’t go to see those prisoners hanged.’ In an intellectual way, Syme was venomously orthodox. He would talk with a disagreeable gloating satisfaction of helicopter raids on enemy villages, and trials and confessions of thought-criminals, the executions in the cellars of the Ministry of Love. Talking to him was largely a matter of getting him away from such subjects and entangling him, if possible, in the technicalities of Newspeak, on which he was authoritative and interesting. Winston turned his head a little aside to avoid the scrutiny of the large dark eyes.

‘It was a good hanging,’ said Syme reminiscently. ‘I think it spoils it when they tie their feet together. I like to see them kicking. And above all, at the end, the tongue sticking right out, and blue — a quite bright blue. That’s the detail that appeals to me.’

‘Nex’, please!’ yelled the white-aproned prole with the ladle.

Winston and Syme pushed their trays beneath the grille. On to each was dumped swiftly the regulation lunch — a metal pannikin of pinkish-grey stew, a hunk of bread, a cube of cheese, a mug of milkless Victory Coffee, and one saccharine tablet.

‘There’s a table over there, under that telescreen,’ said Syme. ‘Let’s pick up a gin on the way.’

The gin was served out to them in handleless china mugs. They threaded their way across the crowded room and unpacked their trays on to the metal-topped table, on one corner of which someone had left a pool of stew, a filthy liquid mess that had the appearance of vomit. Winston took up his mug of gin, paused for an instant to collect his nerve, and gulped the oily-tasting stuff down. When he had winked the tears out of his eyes he suddenly discovered that he was hungry. He began swallowing spoonfuls of the stew, which, in among its general sloppiness, had cubes of spongy pinkish stuff which was probably a preparation of meat. Neither of them spoke again till they had emptied their pannikins. From the table at

Winston's left, a little behind his back, someone was talking rapidly and continuously, a harsh gabble almost like the quacking of a duck, which pierced the general uproar of the room.

'How is the Dictionary getting on?' said Winston, raising his voice to overcome the noise.

'Slowly,' said Syme. 'I'm on the adjectives. It's fascinating.'

He had brightened up immediately at the mention of Newspeak. He pushed his pannikin aside, took up his hunk of bread in one delicate hand and his cheese in the other, and leaned across the table so as to be able to speak without shouting.

'The Eleventh Edition is the definitive edition,' he said. 'We're getting the language into its final shape — the shape it's going to have when nobody speaks anything else. When we've finished with it, people like you will have to learn it all over again. You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words — scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won't contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050.'

He bit hungrily into his bread and swallowed a couple of mouthfuls, then continued speaking, with a sort of pedant's passion. His thin dark face had become animated, his eyes had lost their mocking expression and grown almost dreamy.

'It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take "good", for instance. If you have a word like "good", what need is there for a word like "bad"? "Ungood" will do just as well — better, because it's an exact opposite, which the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of "good", what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like "excellent" and "splendid" and all the rest of them? "Plusgood" covers the meaning, or "doubleplusgood" if you want something stronger still. Of course we use those forms already. but in the final version of Newspeak there'll be nothing else. In the end the whole

notion of goodness and badness will be covered by only six words — in reality, only one word. Don't you see the beauty of that, Winston? It was B.B.'s idea originally, of course,' he added as an afterthought.

A sort of vapid eagerness flitted across Winston's face at the mention of Big Brother. Nevertheless Syme immediately detected a certain lack of enthusiasm.

'You haven't a real appreciation of Newspeak, Winston,' he said almost sadly. 'Even when you write it you're still thinking in Oldspeak. I've read some of those pieces that you write in "The Times" occasionally. They're good enough, but they're translations. In your heart you'd prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning. You don't grasp the beauty of the destruction of words. Do you know that Newspeak is the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year?'

Winston did know that, of course. He smiled, sympathetically he hoped, not trusting himself to speak. Syme bit off another fragment of the dark-coloured bread, chewed it briefly, and went on:

'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. Already, in the Eleventh Edition, we're not far from that point. But the process will still be continuing long after you and I are dead. Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. Even now, of course, there's no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It's merely a question of self-discipline, reality-control. But in the end there won't be any need even for that. The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak,' he added with a sort of mystical satisfaction. 'Has it ever occurred to you, Winston, that by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now?'

'Except — — ' began Winston doubtfully, and he stopped.

It had been on the tip of his tongue to say 'Except the proles,' but he checked himself, not feeling fully certain that this remark was not

in some way unorthodox. Syme, however, had divined what he was about to say.

'The proles are not human beings,' he said carelessly. 'By 2050 — earlier, probably — all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron — they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be. Even the literature of the Party will change. Even the slogans will change. How could you have a slogan like "freedom is slavery" when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking — not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.'

One of these days, thought Winston with sudden deep conviction, Syme will be vaporized. He is too intelligent. He sees too clearly and speaks too plainly. The Party does not like such people. One day he will disappear. It is written in his face.

Winston had finished his bread and cheese. He turned a little sideways in his chair to drink his mug of coffee. At the table on his left the man with the strident voice was still talking remorselessly away. A young woman who was perhaps his secretary, and who was sitting with her back to Winston, was listening to him and seemed to be eagerly agreeing with everything that he said. From time to time Winston caught some such remark as 'I think you're so right, I do so agree with you', uttered in a youthful and rather silly feminine voice. But the other voice never stopped for an instant, even when the girl was speaking. Winston knew the man by sight, though he knew no more about him than that he held some important post in the Fiction Department. He was a man of about thirty, with a muscular throat and a large, mobile mouth. His head was thrown back a little, and because of the angle at which he was sitting, his spectacles caught the light and presented to Winston two blank discs instead of eyes. What was slightly horrible, was that from the stream of sound that poured out of his mouth it was almost impossible to distinguish a single word. Just once Winston caught a phrase— 'complete and final elimination of Goldsteinism' — jerked out very rapidly and, as

it seemed, all in one piece, like a line of type cast solid. For the rest it was just a noise, a quack-quack-quacking. And yet, though you could not actually hear what the man was saying, you could not be in any doubt about its general nature. He might be denouncing Goldstein and demanding sterner measures against thought-criminals and saboteurs, he might be fulminating against the atrocities of the Eurasian army, he might be praising Big Brother or the heroes on the Malabar front — it made no difference. Whatever it was, you could be certain that every word of it was pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc. As he watched the eyeless face with the jaw moving rapidly up and down, Winston had a curious feeling that this was not a real human being but some kind of dummy. It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx. The stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech in the true sense: it was a noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck.

Syme had fallen silent for a moment, and with the handle of his spoon was tracing patterns in the puddle of stew. The voice from the other table quacked rapidly on, easily audible in spite of the surrounding din.

'There is a word in Newspeak,' said Syme, 'I don't know whether you know it: DUCKSPEAK, to quack like a duck. It is one of those interesting words that have two contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it is abuse, applied to someone you agree with, it is praise.'

Unquestionably Syme will be vaporized, Winston thought again. He thought it with a kind of sadness, although well knowing that Syme despised him and slightly disliked him, and was fully capable of denouncing him as a thought-criminal if he saw any reason for doing so. There was something subtly wrong with Syme. There was something that he lacked: discretion, aloofness, a sort of saving stupidity. You could not say that he was unorthodox. He believed in the principles of Ingsoc, he venerated Big Brother, he rejoiced over victories, he hated heretics, not merely with sincerity but with a sort of restless zeal, an up-to-dateness of information, which the ordinary Party member did not approach. Yet a faint air of disreputability always clung to him. He said things that would have been better unsaid, he had read too many books, he frequented the Chestnut Tree

Cafe, haunt of painters and musicians. There was no law, not even an unwritten law, against frequenting the Chestnut Tree Cafe, yet the place was somehow ill-omened. The old, discredited leaders of the Party had been used to gather there before they were finally purged. Goldstein himself, it was said, had sometimes been seen there, years and decades ago. Syme's fate was not difficult to foresee. And yet it was a fact that if Syme grasped, even for three seconds, the nature of his, Winston's, secret opinions, he would betray him instantly to the Thought Police. So would anybody else, for that matter: but Syme more than most. Zeal was not enough. Orthodoxy was unconsciousness.

Syme looked up. 'Here comes Parsons,' he said.

Something in the tone of his voice seemed to add, 'that bloody fool'. Parsons, Winston's fellow-tenant at Victory Mansions, was in fact threading his way across the room — a tubby, middle-sized man with fair hair and a froglike face. At thirty-five he was already putting on rolls of fat at neck and waistline, but his movements were brisk and boyish. His whole appearance was that of a little boy grown large, so much so that although he was wearing the regulation overalls, it was almost impossible not to think of him as being dressed in the blue shorts, grey shirt, and red neckerchief of the Spies. In visualizing him one saw always a picture of dimpled knees and sleeves rolled back from pudgy forearms. Parsons did, indeed, invariably revert to shorts when a community hike or any other physical activity gave him an excuse for doing so. He greeted them both with a cheery 'Hullo, hullo!' and sat down at the table, giving off an intense smell of sweat. Beads of moisture stood out all over his pink face. His powers of sweating were extraordinary. At the Community Centre you could always tell when he had been playing table-tennis by the dampness of the bat handle. Syme had produced a strip of paper on which there was a long column of words, and was studying it with an ink-pencil between his fingers.

'Look at him working away in the lunch hour,' said Parsons, nudging Winston. 'Keenness, eh? What's that you've got there, old boy? Something a bit too brainy for me, I expect. Smith, old boy, I'll tell you why I'm chasing you. It's that sub you forgot to give me.'

'Which sub is that?' said Winston, automatically feeling for

money. About a quarter of one's salary had to be earmarked for voluntary subscriptions, which were so numerous that it was difficult to keep track of them.

'For Hate Week. You know — the house-by-house fund. I'm treasurer for our block. We're making an all-out effort — going to put on a tremendous show. I tell you, it won't be my fault if old Victory Mansions doesn't have the biggest outfit of flags in the whole street. Two dollars you promised me.'

Winston found and handed over two creased and filthy notes, which Parsons entered in a small notebook, in the neat handwriting of the illiterate.

'By the way, old boy,' he said. 'I hear that little beggar of mine let fly at you with his catapult yesterday. I gave him a good dressing-down for it. In fact I told him I'd take the catapult away if he does it again.'

'I think he was a little upset at not going to the execution,' said Winston.

'Ah, well — what I mean to say, shows the right spirit, doesn't it? Mischievous little beggars they are, both of them, but talk about keenness! All they think about is the Spies, and the war, of course. D'you know what that little girl of mine did last Saturday, when her troop was on a hike out Berkhamsted way? She got two other girls to go with her, slipped off from the hike, and spent the whole afternoon following a strange man. They kept on his tail for two hours, right through the woods, and then, when they got into Amersham, handed him over to the patrols.'

'What did they do that for?' said Winston, somewhat taken aback. Parsons went on triumphantly:

'My kid made sure he was some kind of enemy agent — might have been dropped by parachute, for instance. But here's the point, old boy. What do you think put her on to him in the first place? She spotted he was wearing a funny kind of shoes — said she'd never seen anyone wearing shoes like that before. So the chances were he was a foreigner. Pretty smart for a nipper of seven, eh?'

'What happened to the man?' said Winston.

'Ah, that I couldn't say, of course. But I wouldn't be altogether surprised if — — ' Parsons made the motion of aiming a rifle, and

clicked his tongue for the explosion.

'Good,' said Syme abstractedly, without looking up from his strip of paper.

'Of course we can't afford to take chances,' agreed Winston dutifully.

'What I mean to say, there is a war on,' said Parsons.

As though in confirmation of this, a trumpet call floated from the telescreen just above their heads. However, it was not the proclamation of a military victory this time, but merely an announcement from the Ministry of Plenty.

'Comrades!' cried an eager youthful voice. 'Attention, comrades! We have glorious news for you. We have won the battle for production! Returns now completed of the output of all classes of consumption goods show that the standard of living has risen by no less than 20 per cent over the past year. All over Oceania this morning there were irrepressible spontaneous demonstrations when workers marched out of factories and offices and paraded through the streets with banners voicing their gratitude to Big Brother for the new, happy life which his wise leadership has bestowed upon us. Here are some of the completed figures. Foodstuffs — — '

The phrase 'our new, happy life' recurred several times. It had been a favourite of late with the Ministry of Plenty. Parsons, his attention caught by the trumpet call, sat listening with a sort of gaping solemnity, a sort of edified boredom. He could not follow the figures, but he was aware that they were in some way a cause for satisfaction. He had lugged out a huge and filthy pipe which was already half full of charred tobacco. With the tobacco ration at 100 grammes a week it was seldom possible to fill a pipe to the top. Winston was smoking a Victory Cigarette which he held carefully horizontal. The new ration did not start till tomorrow and he had only four cigarettes left. For the moment he had shut his ears to the remoter noises and was listening to the stuff that streamed out of the telescreen. It appeared that there had even been demonstrations to thank Big Brother for raising the chocolate ration to twenty grammes a week. And only yesterday, he reflected, it had been announced that the ration was to be REDUCED to twenty grammes a week. Was it possible that they could swallow that, after only twenty-four hours?

Yes, they swallowed it. Parsons swallowed it easily, with the stupidity of an animal. The eyeless creature at the other table swallowed it fanatically, passionately, with a furious desire to track down, denounce, and vaporize anyone who should suggest that last week the ration had been thirty grammes. Syme, too — in some more complex way, involving doublethink, Syme swallowed it. Was he, then, ALONE in the possession of a memory?

The fabulous statistics continued to pour out of the telescreen. As compared with last year there was more food, more clothes, more houses, more furniture, more cooking-pots, more fuel, more ships, more helicopters, more books, more babies — more of everything except disease, crime, and insanity. Year by year and minute by minute, everybody and everything was whizzing rapidly upwards. As Syme had done earlier Winston had taken up his spoon and was dabbling in the pale-coloured gravy that dribbled across the table, drawing a long streak of it out into a pattern. He meditated resentfully on the physical texture of life. Had it always been like this? Had food always tasted like this? He looked round the canteen. A low-ceilinged, crowded room, its walls grimy from the contact of innumerable bodies; battered metal tables and chairs, placed so close together that you sat with elbows touching; bent spoons, dented trays, coarse white mugs; all surfaces greasy, grime in every crack; and a sourish, composite smell of bad gin and bad coffee and metallic stew and dirty clothes. Always in your stomach and in your skin there was a sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something that you had a right to. It was true that he had no memories of anything greatly different. In any time that he could accurately remember, there had never been quite enough to eat, one had never had socks or underclothes that were not full of holes, furniture had always been battered and rickety, rooms underheated, tube trains crowded, houses falling to pieces, bread dark-coloured, tea a rarity, coffee filthy-tasting, cigarettes insufficient — nothing cheap and plentiful except synthetic gin. And though, of course, it grew worse as one's body aged, was it not a sign that this was NOT the natural order of things, if one's heart sickened at the discomfort and dirt and scarcity, the interminable winters, the stickiness of one's socks, the lifts that never worked, the cold water, the gritty soap, the

cigarettes that came to pieces, the food with its strange evil tastes? Why should one feel it to be intolerable unless one had some kind of ancestral memory that things had once been different?

He looked round the canteen again. Nearly everyone was ugly, and would still have been ugly even if dressed otherwise than in the uniform blue overalls. On the far side of the room, sitting at a table alone, a small, curiously beetle-like man was drinking a cup of coffee, his little eyes darting suspicious glances from side to side. How easy it was, thought Winston, if you did not look about you, to believe that the physical type set up by the Party as an ideal — tall muscular youths and deep-bosomed maidens, blond-haired, vital, sunburnt, carefree — existed and even predominated. Actually, so far as he could judge, the majority of people in Airstrip One were small, dark, and ill-favoured. It was curious how that beetle-like type proliferated in the Ministries: little dumpy men, growing stout very early in life, with short legs, swift scuttling movements, and fat inscrutable faces with very small eyes. It was the type that seemed to flourish best under the dominion of the Party.

The announcement from the Ministry of Plenty ended on another trumpet call and gave way to tinny music. Parsons, stirred to vague enthusiasm by the bombardment of figures, took his pipe out of his mouth.

'The Ministry of Plenty's certainly done a good job this year,' he said with a knowing shake of his head. 'By the way, Smith old boy, I suppose you haven't got any razor blades you can let me have?'

'Not one,' said Winston. 'I've been using the same blade for six weeks myself.'

'Ah, well — just thought I'd ask you, old boy.'

'Sorry,' said Winston.

The quacking voice from the next table, temporarily silenced during the Ministry's announcement, had started up again, as loud as ever. For some reason Winston suddenly found himself thinking of Mrs Parsons, with her wispy hair and the dust in the creases of her face. Within two years those children would be denouncing her to the Thought Police. Mrs Parsons would be vaporized. Syme would be vaporized. Winston would be vaporized. O'Brien would be vaporized. Parsons, on the other hand, would never be vaporized.

The eyeless creature with the quacking voice would never be vaporized. The little beetle-like men who scuttle so nimbly through the labyrinthine corridors of Ministries they, too, would never be vaporized. And the girl with dark hair, the girl from the Fiction Department — she would never be vaporized either. It seemed to him that he knew instinctively who would survive and who would perish: though just what it was that made for survival, it was not easy to say.

At this moment he was dragged out of his reverie with a violent jerk. The girl at the next table had turned partly round and was looking at him. It was the girl with dark hair. She was looking at him in a sidelong way, but with curious intensity. The instant she caught his eye she looked away again.

The sweat started out on Winston's backbone. A horrible pang of terror went through him. It was gone almost at once, but it left a sort of nagging uneasiness behind. Why was she watching him? Why did she keep following him about? Unfortunately he could not remember whether she had already been at the table when he arrived, or had come there afterwards. But yesterday, at any rate, during the Two Minutes Hate, she had sat immediately behind him when there was no apparent need to do so. Quite likely her real object had been to listen to him and make sure whether he was shouting loudly enough.

His earlier thought returned to him: probably she was not actually a member of the Thought Police, but then it was precisely the amateur spy who was the greatest danger of all. He did not know how long she had been looking at him, but perhaps for as much as five minutes, and it was possible that his features had not been perfectly under control. It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away. A nervous tic, an unconscious look of anxiety, a habit of muttering to yourself — anything that carried with it the suggestion of abnormality, of having something to hide. In any case, to wear an improper expression on your face (to look incredulous when a victory was announced, for example) was itself a punishable offence. There was even a word for it in Newspeak: FACECRIME, it was called.

The girl had turned her back on him again. Perhaps after all she

was not really following him about, perhaps it was coincidence that she had sat so close to him two days running. His cigarette had gone out, and he laid it carefully on the edge of the table. He would finish smoking it after work, if he could keep the tobacco in it. Quite likely the person at the next table was a spy of the Thought Police, and quite likely he would be in the cellars of the Ministry of Love within three days, but a cigarette end must not be wasted. Syme had folded up his strip of paper and stowed it away in his pocket. Parsons had begun talking again.

'Did I ever tell you, old boy,' he said, chuckling round the stem of his pipe, 'about the time when those two nippers of mine set fire to the old market-woman's skirt because they saw her wrapping up sausages in a poster of B.B.? Sneaked up behind her and set fire to it with a box of matches. Burned her quite badly, I believe. Little beggars, eh? But keen as mustard! That's a first-rate training they give them in the Spies nowadays — better than in my day, even. What d'you think's the latest thing they've served them out with? Ear trumpets for listening through keyholes! My little girl brought one home the other night — tried it out on our sitting-room door, and reckoned she could hear twice as much as with her ear to the hole. Of course it's only a toy, mind you. Still, gives 'em the right idea, eh?'

At this moment the telescreen let out a piercing whistle. It was the signal to return to work. All three men sprang to their feet to join in the struggle round the lifts, and the remaining tobacco fell out of Winston's cigarette.

Chapter 6

Winston was writing in his diary:

It was three years ago. It was on a dark evening, in a narrow side-street near one of the big railway stations. She was standing near a doorway in the wall, under a street lamp that hardly gave any light. She had a young face, painted very thick. It was really the paint that appealed to me, the whiteness of it, like a mask, and the bright red lips. Party women never paint their faces. There was nobody else in the street, and no telescreens. She said two dollars. I ——

For the moment it was too difficult to go on. He shut his eyes and pressed his fingers against them, trying to squeeze out the vision that kept recurring. He had an almost overwhelming temptation to shout a string of filthy words at the top of his voice. Or to bang his head against the wall, to kick over the table, and hurl the inkpot through the window — to do any violent or noisy or painful thing that might black out the memory that was tormenting him.

Your worst enemy, he reflected, was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom. He thought of a man whom he had passed in the street a few weeks back; a quite ordinary-looking man, a Party member, aged thirty-five to forty, tallish and thin, carrying a brief-case. They were a few metres apart when the left side of the man's face was suddenly contorted by a sort of spasm. It happened again just as they were passing one another: it was only a twitch, a quiver, rapid as the clicking of a camera shutter, but obviously habitual. He remembered thinking at the time: That poor devil is done for. And what was frightening was that the action was quite possibly unconscious. The most deadly danger of all was talking in your sleep. There was no way of guarding against that, so far as he could see.

He drew his breath and went on writing:

I went with her through the doorway and across a backyard into a basement kitchen. There was a bed against the wall, and a lamp on the table, turned down very low. She ——

His teeth were set on edge. He would have liked to spit.

Simultaneously with the woman in the basement kitchen he thought of Katharine, his wife. Winston was married — had been married, at any rate: probably he still was married, so far as he knew his wife was not dead. He seemed to breathe again the warm stuffy odour of the basement kitchen, an odour compounded of bugs and dirty clothes and villainous cheap scent, but nevertheless alluring, because no woman of the Party ever used scent, or could be imagined as doing so. Only the proles used scent. In his mind the smell of it was inextricably mixed up with fornication.

When he had gone with that woman it had been his first lapse in two years or thereabouts. Consorting with prostitutes was forbidden, of course, but it was one of those rules that you could occasionally nerve yourself to break. It was dangerous, but it was not a life-and-death matter. To be caught with a prostitute might mean five years in a forced-labour camp: not more, if you had committed no other offence. And it was easy enough, provided that you could avoid being caught in the act. The poorer quarters swarmed with women who were ready to sell themselves. Some could even be purchased for a bottle of gin, which the proles were not supposed to drink. Tacitly the Party was even inclined to encourage prostitution, as an outlet for instincts which could not be altogether suppressed. Mere debauchery did not matter very much, so long as it was furtive and joyless and only involved the women of a submerged and despised class. The unforgivable crime was promiscuity between Party members. But — though this was one of the crimes that the accused in the great purges invariably confessed to — it was difficult to imagine any such thing actually happening.

The aim of the Party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act. Not love so much as eroticism was the enemy, inside marriage as well as outside it. All marriages between Party members had to be approved by a committee appointed for the purpose, and — though the principle was never clearly stated — permission was always refused if the couple concerned gave the impression of being physically attracted to one another. The only recognized purpose of marriage was to beget children for the service of the Party. Sexual

intercourse was to be looked on as a slightly disgusting minor operation, like having an enema. This again was never put into plain words, but in an indirect way it was rubbed into every Party member from childhood onwards. There were even organizations such as the Junior Anti-Sex League, which advocated complete celibacy for both sexes. All children were to be begotten by artificial insemination (ARTSEM, it was called in Newspeak) and brought up in public institutions. This, Winston was aware, was not meant altogether seriously, but somehow it fitted in with the general ideology of the Party. The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it. He did not know why this was so, but it seemed natural that it should be so. And as far as the women were concerned, the Party's efforts were largely successful.

He thought again of Katharine. It must be nine, ten — nearly eleven years since they had parted. It was curious how seldom he thought of her. For days at a time he was capable of forgetting that he had ever been married. They had only been together for about fifteen months. The Party did not permit divorce, but it rather encouraged separation in cases where there were no children.

Katharine was a tall, fair-haired girl, very straight, with splendid movements. She had a bold, aquiline face, a face that one might have called noble until one discovered that there was as nearly as possible nothing behind it. Very early in her married life he had decided — though perhaps it was only that he knew her more intimately than he knew most people — that she had without exception the most stupid, vulgar, empty mind that he had ever encountered. She had not a thought in her head that was not a slogan, and there was no imbecility, absolutely none that she was not capable of swallowing if the Party handed it out to her. 'The human sound-track' he nicknamed her in his own mind. Yet he could have endured living with her if it had not been for just one thing — sex.

As soon as he touched her she seemed to wince and stiffen. To embrace her was like embracing a jointed wooden image. And what was strange was that even when she was clasping him against her he had the feeling that she was simultaneously pushing him away with all her strength. The rigidity of her muscles managed to convey that impression. She would lie there with shut eyes, neither resisting nor

co-operating but SUBMITTING. It was extraordinarily embarrassing, and, after a while, horrible. But even then he could have borne living with her if it had been agreed that they should remain celibate. But curiously enough it was Katharine who refused this. They must, she said, produce a child if they could. So the performance continued to happen, once a week quite regularly, whenever it was not impossible. She even used to remind him of it in the morning, as something which had to be done that evening and which must not be forgotten. She had two names for it. One was 'making a baby', and the other was 'our duty to the Party' (yes, she had actually used that phrase). Quite soon he grew to have a feeling of positive dread when the appointed day came round. But luckily no child appeared, and in the end she agreed to give up trying, and soon afterwards they parted.

Winston sighed inaudibly. He picked up his pen again and wrote:

She threw herself down on the bed, and at once, without any kind of preliminary in the most coarse, horrible way you can imagine, pulled up her skirt. I ——

He saw himself standing there in the dim lamplight, with the smell of bugs and cheap scent in his nostrils, and in his heart a feeling of defeat and resentment which even at that moment was mixed up with the thought of Katharine's white body, frozen for ever by the hypnotic power of the Party. Why did it always have to be like this? Why could he not have a woman of his own instead of these filthy scuffles at intervals of years? But a real love affair was an almost unthinkable event. The women of the Party were all alike. Chastity was as deep ingrained in them as Party loyalty. By careful early conditioning, by games and cold water, by the rubbish that was dinned into them at school and in the Spies and the Youth League, by lectures, parades, songs, slogans, and martial music, the natural feeling had been driven out of them. His reason told him that there must be exceptions, but his heart did not believe it. They were all impregnable, as the Party intended that they should be. And what he wanted, more even than to be loved, was to break down that wall of virtue, even if it were only once in his whole life. The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime. Even to have awakened Katharine, if he could have achieved it,

would have been like a seduction, although she was his wife.

But the rest of the story had got to be written down. He wrote:

I turned up the lamp. When I saw her in the light ——

After the darkness the feeble light of the paraffin lamp had seemed very bright. For the first time he could see the woman properly. He had taken a step towards her and then halted, full of lust and terror. He was painfully conscious of the risk he had taken in coming here. It was perfectly possible that the patrols would catch him on the way out: for that matter they might be waiting outside the door at this moment. If he went away without even doing what he had come here to do —— !

It had got to be written down, it had got to be confessed. What he had suddenly seen in the lamplight was that the woman was OLD. The paint was plastered so thick on her face that it looked as though it might crack like a cardboard mask. There were streaks of white in her hair; but the truly dreadful detail was that her mouth had fallen a little open, revealing nothing except a cavernous blackness. She had no teeth at all.

He wrote hurriedly, in scrabbling handwriting:

When I saw her in the light she was quite an old woman, fifty years old at least. But I went ahead and did it just the same.

He pressed his fingers against his eyelids again. He had written it down at last, but it made no difference. The therapy had not worked. The urge to shout filthy words at the top of his voice was as strong as ever.

Chapter 7

‘If there is hope,’ wrote Winston, ‘it lies in the proles.’

If there was hope, it MUST lie in the proles, because only there in those swarming disregarded masses, 85 per cent of the population of Oceania, could the force to destroy the Party ever be generated. The Party could not be overthrown from within. Its enemies, if it had any enemies, had no way of coming together or even of identifying one another. Even if the legendary Brotherhood existed, as just possibly it might, it was inconceivable that its members could ever assemble in larger numbers than twos and threes. Rebellion meant a look in the eyes, an inflexion of the voice, at the most, an occasional whispered word. But the proles, if only they could somehow become conscious of their own strength. would have no need to conspire. They needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies. If they chose they could blow the Party to pieces tomorrow morning. Surely sooner or later it must occur to them to do it? And yet —— !

He remembered how once he had been walking down a crowded street when a tremendous shout of hundreds of voices women’s voices — had burst from a side-street a little way ahead. It was a great formidable cry of anger and despair, a deep, loud ‘Oh-o-o-o-oh!’ that went humming on like the reverberation of a bell. His heart had leapt. It’s started! he had thought. A riot! The proles are breaking loose at last! When he had reached the spot it was to see a mob of two or three hundred women crowding round the stalls of a street market, with faces as tragic as though they had been the doomed passengers on a sinking ship. But at this moment the general despair broke down into a multitude of individual quarrels. It appeared that one of the stalls had been selling tin saucepans. They were wretched, flimsy things, but cooking-pots of any kind were always difficult to get. Now the supply had unexpectedly given out. The successful women, bumped and jostled by the rest, were trying to make off with their saucepans while dozens of others clamoured round the stall, accusing the stall-keeper of favouritism and of having more saucepans somewhere in reserve. There was a fresh outburst of yells. Two bloated women, one of them with her hair coming down, had

got hold of the same saucepan and were trying to tear it out of one another's hands. For a moment they were both tugging, and then the handle came off. Winston watched them disgustedly. And yet, just for a moment, what almost frightening power had sounded in that cry from only a few hundred throats! Why was it that they could never shout like that about anything that mattered?

He wrote:

Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.

That, he reflected, might almost have been a transcription from one of the Party textbooks. The Party claimed, of course, to have liberated the proles from bondage. Before the Revolution they had been hideously oppressed by the capitalists, they had been starved and flogged, women had been forced to work in the coal mines (women still did work in the coal mines, as a matter of fact), children had been sold into the factories at the age of six. But simultaneously, true to the Principles of doublethink, the Party taught that the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals, by the application of a few simple rules. In reality very little was known about the proles. It was not necessary to know much. So long as they continued to work and breed, their other activities were without importance. Left to themselves, like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern. They were born, they grew up in the gutters, they went to work at twelve, they passed through a brief blossoming-period of beauty and sexual desire, they married at twenty, they were middle-aged at thirty, they died, for the most part, at sixty. Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer, and above all, gambling, filled up the horizon of their minds. To keep them in control was not difficult. A few agents of the Thought Police moved always among them, spreading false rumours and marking down and eliminating the few individuals who were judged capable of becoming dangerous; but no attempt was made to indoctrinate them with the ideology of the Party. It was not desirable that the proles should have strong political feelings. All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed

to whenever it was necessary to make them accept longer working-hours or shorter rations. And even when they became discontented, as they sometimes did, their discontent led nowhere, because being without general ideas, they could only focus it on petty specific grievances. The larger evils invariably escaped their notice. The great majority of proles did not even have telescreens in their homes. Even the civil police interfered with them very little. There was a vast amount of criminality in London, a whole world-within-a-world of thieves, bandits, prostitutes, drug-peddlers, and racketeers of every description; but since it all happened among the proles themselves, it was of no importance. In all questions of morals they were allowed to follow their ancestral code. The sexual puritanism of the Party was not imposed upon them. Promiscuity went unpunished, divorce was permitted. For that matter, even religious worship would have been permitted if the proles had shown any sign of needing or wanting it. They were beneath suspicion. As the Party slogan put it: 'Proles and animals are free.'

Winston reached down and cautiously scratched his varicose ulcer. It had begun itching again. The thing you invariably came back to was the impossibility of knowing what life before the Revolution had really been like. He took out of the drawer a copy of a children's history textbook which he had borrowed from Mrs Parsons, and began copying a passage into the diary:

In the old days (it ran), before the glorious Revolution, London was not the beautiful city that we know today. It was a dark, dirty, miserable place where hardly anybody had enough to eat and where hundreds and thousands of poor people had no boots on their feet and not even a roof to sleep under. Children no older than you had to work twelve hours a day for cruel masters who flogged them with whips if they worked too slowly and fed them on nothing but stale breadcrusts and water. But in among all this terrible poverty there were just a few great big beautiful houses that were lived in by rich men who had as many as thirty servants to look after them. These rich men were called capitalists. They were fat, ugly men with wicked faces, like the one in the picture on the opposite page. You can see that he is dressed in a long black coat which was called a frock coat, and a queer, shiny hat shaped like a stovepipe, which was

called a top hat. This was the uniform of the capitalists, and no one else was allowed to wear it. The capitalists owned everything in the world, and everyone else was their slave. They owned all the land, all the houses, all the factories, and all the money. If anyone disobeyed them they could throw them into prison, or they could take his job away and starve him to death. When any ordinary person spoke to a capitalist he had to cringe and bow to him, and take off his cap and address him as 'Sir'. The chief of all the capitalists was called the King, and ——

But he knew the rest of the catalogue. There would be mention of the bishops in their lawn sleeves, the judges in their ermine robes, the pillory, the stocks, the treadmill, the cat-o'-nine tails, the Lord Mayor's Banquet, and the practice of kissing the Pope's toe. There was also something called the JUS PRIMAE NOCTIS, which would probably not be mentioned in a textbook for children. It was the law by which every capitalist had the right to sleep with any woman working in one of his factories.

How could you tell how much of it was lies? It MIGHT be true that the average human being was better off now than he had been before the Revolution. The only evidence to the contrary was the mute protest in your own bones, the instinctive feeling that the conditions you lived in were intolerable and that at some other time they must have been different. It struck him that the truly characteristic thing about modern life was not its cruelty and insecurity, but simply its bareness, its dinginess, its listlessness. Life, if you looked about you, bore no resemblance not only to the lies that streamed out of the telescreens, but even to the ideals that the Party was trying to achieve. Great areas of it, even for a Party member, were neutral and non-political, a matter of slogging through dreary jobs, fighting for a place on the Tube, darning a worn-out sock, cadging a saccharine tablet, saving a cigarette end. The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible, and glittering — a world of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons — a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting — three hundred million people all with the same face. The reality was

decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth-century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories. He seemed to see a vision of London, vast and ruinous, city of a million dustbins, and mixed up with it was a picture of Mrs Parsons, a woman with lined face and wispy hair, fiddling helplessly with a blocked waste-pipe.

He reached down and scratched his ankle again. Day and night the telescreens bruised your ears with statistics proving that people today had more food, more clothes, better houses, better recreations — that they lived longer, worked shorter hours, were bigger, healthier, stronger, happier, more intelligent, better educated, than the people of fifty years ago. Not a word of it could ever be proved or disproved. The Party claimed, for example, that today 40 per cent of adult proles were literate: before the Revolution, it was said, the number had only been 15 per cent. The Party claimed that the infant mortality rate was now only 160 per thousand, whereas before the Revolution it had been 300 — and so it went on. It was like a single equation with two unknowns. It might very well be that literally every word in the history books, even the things that one accepted without question, was pure fantasy. For all he knew there might never have been any such law as the JUS PRIMAE NOCTIS, or any such creature as a capitalist, or any such garment as a top hat.

Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth. Just once in his life he had possessed — AFTER the event: that was what counted — concrete, unmistakable evidence of an act of falsification. He had held it between his fingers for as long as thirty seconds. In 1973, it must have been — at any rate, it was at about the time when he and Katharine had parted. But the really relevant date was seven or eight years earlier.

The story really began in the middle sixties, the period of the great purges in which the original leaders of the Revolution were wiped out once and for all. By 1970 none of them was left, except Big Brother himself. All the rest had by that time been exposed as traitors and counter-revolutionaries. Goldstein had fled and was hiding no one knew where, and of the others, a few had simply disappeared, while the majority had been executed after spectacular public trials at

which they made confession of their crimes. Among the last survivors were three men named Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford. It must have been in 1965 that these three had been arrested. As often happened, they had vanished for a year or more, so that one did not know whether they were alive or dead, and then had suddenly been brought forth to incriminate themselves in the usual way. They had confessed to intelligence with the enemy (at that date, too, the enemy was Eurasia), embezzlement of public funds, the murder of various trusted Party members, intrigues against the leadership of Big Brother which had started long before the Revolution happened, and acts of sabotage causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people. After confessing to these things they had been pardoned, reinstated in the Party, and given posts which were in fact sinecures but which sounded important. All three had written long, abject articles in 'The Times', analysing the reasons for their defection and promising to make amends.

Some time after their release Winston had actually seen all three of them in the Chestnut Tree Cafe. He remembered the sort of terrified fascination with which he had watched them out of the corner of his eye. They were men far older than himself, relics of the ancient world, almost the last great figures left over from the heroic days of the Party. The glamour of the underground struggle and the civil war still faintly clung to them. He had the feeling, though already at that time facts and dates were growing blurry, that he had known their names years earlier than he had known that of Big Brother. But also they were outlaws, enemies, untouchables, doomed with absolute certainty to extinction within a year or two. No one who had once fallen into the hands of the Thought Police ever escaped in the end. They were corpses waiting to be sent back to the grave.

There was no one at any of the tables nearest to them. It was not wise even to be seen in the neighbourhood of such people. They were sitting in silence before glasses of the gin flavoured with cloves which was the speciality of the cafe. Of the three, it was Rutherford whose appearance had most impressed Winston. Rutherford had once been a famous caricaturist, whose brutal cartoons had helped to inflame popular opinion before and during the Revolution. Even

now, at long intervals, his cartoons were appearing in The Times. They were simply an imitation of his earlier manner, and curiously lifeless and unconvincing. Always they were a rehashing of the ancient themes — slum tenements, starving children, street battles, capitalists in top hats — even on the barricades the capitalists still seemed to cling to their top hats an endless, hopeless effort to get back into the past. He was a monstrous man, with a mane of greasy grey hair, his face pouched and seamed, with thick negroid lips. At one time he must have been immensely strong; now his great body was sagging, sloping, bulging, falling away in every direction. He seemed to be breaking up before one's eyes, like a mountain crumbling.

It was the lonely hour of fifteen. Winston could not now remember how he had come to be in the cafe at such a time. The place was almost empty. A tinny music was trickling from the telescreens. The three men sat in their corner almost motionless, never speaking. Uncommanded, the waiter brought fresh glasses of gin. There was a chessboard on the table beside them, with the pieces set out but no game started. And then, for perhaps half a minute in all, something happened to the telescreens. The tune that they were playing changed, and the tone of the music changed too. There came into it — but it was something hard to describe. It was a peculiar, cracked, braying, jeering note: in his mind Winston called it a yellow note. And then a voice from the telescreen was singing:

Under the spreading chestnut tree
I sold you and you sold me:
There lie they, and here lie we
Under the spreading chestnut tree.

The three men never stirred. But when Winston glanced again at Rutherford's ruinous face, he saw that his eyes were full of tears. And for the first time he noticed, with a kind of inward shudder, and yet not knowing AT WHAT he shuddered, that both Aaronson and Rutherford had broken noses.

A little later all three were re-arrested. It appeared that they had engaged in fresh conspiracies from the very moment of their release. At their second trial they confessed to all their old crimes over again, with a whole string of new ones. They were executed, and their fate

was recorded in the Party histories, a warning to posterity. About five years after this, in 1973, Winston was unrolling a wad of documents which had just flopped out of the pneumatic tube on to his desk when he came on a fragment of paper which had evidently been slipped in among the others and then forgotten. The instant he had flattened it out he saw its significance. It was a half-page torn out of 'The Times' of about ten years earlier — the top half of the page, so that it included the date — and it contained a photograph of the delegates at some Party function in New York. Prominent in the middle of the group were Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford. There was no mistaking them, in any case their names were in the caption at the bottom.

The point was that at both trials all three men had confessed that on that date they had been on Eurasian soil. They had flown from a secret airfield in Canada to a rendezvous somewhere in Siberia, and had conferred with members of the Eurasian General Staff, to whom they had betrayed important military secrets. The date had stuck in Winston's memory because it chanced to be midsummer day; but the whole story must be on record in countless other places as well. There was only one possible conclusion: the confessions were lies.

Of course, this was not in itself a discovery. Even at that time Winston had not imagined that the people who were wiped out in the purges had actually committed the crimes that they were accused of. But this was concrete evidence; it was a fragment of the abolished past, like a fossil bone which turns up in the wrong stratum and destroys a geological theory. It was enough to blow the Party to atoms, if in some way it could have been published to the world and its significance made known.

He had gone straight on working. As soon as he saw what the photograph was, and what it meant, he had covered it up with another sheet of paper. Luckily, when he unrolled it, it had been upside-down from the point of view of the telescreen.

He took his scribbling pad on his knee and pushed back his chair so as to get as far away from the telescreen as possible. To keep your face expressionless was not difficult, and even your breathing could be controlled, with an effort: but you could not control the beating of your heart, and the telescreen was quite delicate enough to pick it up.

He let what he judged to be ten minutes go by, tormented all the while by the fear that some accident — a sudden draught blowing across his desk, for instance — would betray him. Then, without uncovering it again, he dropped the photograph into the memory hole, along with some other waste papers. Within another minute, perhaps, it would have crumbled into ashes.

That was ten — eleven years ago. Today, probably, he would have kept that photograph. It was curious that the fact of having held it in his fingers seemed to him to make a difference even now, when the photograph itself, as well as the event it recorded, was only memory. Was the Party's hold upon the past less strong, he wondered, because a piece of evidence which existed no longer HAD ONCE existed?

But today, supposing that it could be somehow resurrected from its ashes, the photograph might not even be evidence. Already, at the time when he made his discovery, Oceania was no longer at war with Eurasia, and it must have been to the agents of Eastasia that the three dead men had betrayed their country. Since then there had been other changes — two, three, he could not remember how many. Very likely the confessions had been rewritten and rewritten until the original facts and dates no longer had the smallest significance. The past not only changed, but changed continuously. What most afflicted him with the sense of nightmare was that he had never clearly understood why the huge imposture was undertaken. The immediate advantages of falsifying the past were obvious, but the ultimate motive was mysterious. He took up his pen again and wrote:

I understand HOW: I do not understand WHY.

He wondered, as he had many times wondered before, whether he himself was a lunatic. Perhaps a lunatic was simply a minority of one. At one time it had been a sign of madness to believe that the earth goes round the sun; today, to believe that the past is unalterable. He might be ALONE in holding that belief, and if alone, then a lunatic. But the thought of being a lunatic did not greatly trouble him: the horror was that he might also be wrong.

He picked up the children's history book and looked at the portrait of Big Brother which formed its frontispiece. The hypnotic eyes gazed into his own. It was as though some huge force were pressing

down upon you — something that penetrated inside your skull, battering against your brain, frightening you out of your beliefs, persuading you, almost, to deny the evidence of your senses. In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. It was inevitable that they should make that claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it. Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality, was tacitly denied by their philosophy. The heresy of heresies was common sense. And what was terrifying was not that they would kill you for thinking otherwise, but that they might be right. For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? Or that the force of gravity works? Or that the past is unchangeable? If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable what then?

But no! His courage seemed suddenly to stiffen of its own accord. The face of O'Brien, not called up by any obvious association, had floated into his mind. He knew, with more certainty than before, that O'Brien was on his side. He was writing the diary for O'Brien — TO O'Brien: it was like an interminable letter which no one would ever read, but which was addressed to a particular person and took its colour from that fact.

The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command. His heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease with which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate, the subtle arguments which he would not be able to understand, much less answer. And yet he was in the right! They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly, and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's centre. With the feeling that he was speaking to O'Brien, and also that he was setting forth an important axiom, he wrote:

Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.

Chapter 8

From somewhere at the bottom of a passage the smell of roasting coffee — real coffee, not Victory Coffee — came floating out into the street. Winston paused involuntarily. For perhaps two seconds he was back in the half-forgotten world of his childhood. Then a door banged, seeming to cut off the smell as abruptly as though it had been a sound.

He had walked several kilometres over pavements, and his varicose ulcer was throbbing. This was the second time in three weeks that he had missed an evening at the Community Centre: a rash act, since you could be certain that the number of your attendances at the Centre was carefully checked. In principle a Party member had no spare time, and was never alone except in bed. It was assumed that when he was not working, eating, or sleeping he would be taking part in some kind of communal recreation: to do anything that suggested a taste for solitude, even to go for a walk by yourself, was always slightly dangerous. There was a word for it in Newspeak: OWNLIFE, it was called, meaning individualism and eccentricity. But this evening as he came out of the Ministry the balminess of the April air had tempted him. The sky was a warmer blue than he had seen it that year, and suddenly the long, noisy evening at the Centre, the boring, exhausting games, the lectures, the creaking camaraderie oiled by gin, had seemed intolerable. On impulse he had turned away from the bus-stop and wandered off into the labyrinth of London, first south, then east, then north again, losing himself among unknown streets and hardly bothering in which direction he was going.

'If there is hope,' he had written in the diary, 'it lies in the proles.' The words kept coming back to him, statement of a mystical truth and a palpable absurdity. He was somewhere in the vague, brown-coloured slums to the north and east of what had once been Saint Pancras Station. He was walking up a cobbled street of little two-storey houses with battered doorways which gave straight on the pavement and which were somehow curiously suggestive of ratholes. There were puddles of filthy water here and there among the cobbles.

In and out of the dark doorways, and down narrow alley-ways that branched off on either side, people swarmed in astonishing numbers — girls in full bloom, with crudely lipsticked mouths, and youths who chased the girls, and swollen waddling women who showed you what the girls would be like in ten years' time, and old bent creatures shuffling along on splayed feet, and ragged barefooted children who played in the puddles and then scattered at angry yells from their mothers. Perhaps a quarter of the windows in the street were broken and boarded up. Most of the people paid no attention to Winston; a few eyed him with a sort of guarded curiosity. Two monstrous women with brick-red forearms folded across their aprons were talking outside a doorway. Winston caught scraps of conversation as he approached.

'"Yes," I says to 'er, "that's all very well," I says. "But if you'd of been in my place you'd of done the same as what I done. It's easy to criticize," I says, "but you ain't got the same problems as what I got."'

'Ah,' said the other, 'that's jest it. That's jest where it is.'

The strident voices stopped abruptly. The women studied him in hostile silence as he went past. But it was not hostility, exactly; merely a kind of wariness, a momentary stiffening, as at the passing of some unfamiliar animal. The blue overalls of the Party could not be a common sight in a street like this. Indeed, it was unwise to be seen in such places, unless you had definite business there. The patrols might stop you if you happened to run into them. 'May I see your papers, comrade? What are you doing here? What time did you leave work? Is this your usual way home?' — and so on and so forth. Not that there was any rule against walking home by an unusual route: but it was enough to draw attention to you if the Thought Police heard about it.

Suddenly the whole street was in commotion. There were yells of warning from all sides. People were shooting into the doorways like rabbits. A young woman leapt out of a doorway a little ahead of Winston, grabbed up a tiny child playing in a puddle, whipped her apron round it, and leapt back again, all in one movement. At the same instant a man in a concertina-like black suit, who had emerged from a side alley, ran towards Winston, pointing excitedly to the sky.

‘Steamer!’ he yelled. ‘Look out, guv’nor! Bang over’ead! Lay down quick!’

‘Steamer’ was a nickname which, for some reason, the proles applied to rocket bombs. Winston promptly flung himself on his face. The proles were nearly always right when they gave you a warning of this kind. They seemed to possess some kind of instinct which told them several seconds in advance when a rocket was coming, although the rockets supposedly travelled faster than sound. Winston clasped his forearms above his head. There was a roar that seemed to make the pavement heave; a shower of light objects pattered on to his back. When he stood up he found that he was covered with fragments of glass from the nearest window.

He walked on. The bomb had demolished a group of houses 200 metres up the street. A black plume of smoke hung in the sky, and below it a cloud of plaster dust in which a crowd was already forming around the ruins. There was a little pile of plaster lying on the pavement ahead of him, and in the middle of it he could see a bright red streak. When he got up to it he saw that it was a human hand severed at the wrist. Apart from the bloody stump, the hand was so completely whitened as to resemble a plaster cast.

He kicked the thing into the gutter, and then, to avoid the crowd, turned down a side-street to the right. Within three or four minutes he was out of the area which the bomb had affected, and the sordid swarming life of the streets was going on as though nothing had happened. It was nearly twenty hours, and the drinking-shops which the proles frequented (‘pubs’, they called them) were choked with customers. From their grimy swing doors, endlessly opening and shutting, there came forth a smell of urine, sawdust, and sour beer. In an angle formed by a projecting house-front three men were standing very close together, the middle one of them holding a folded-up newspaper which the other two were studying over his shoulder. Even before he was near enough to make out the expression on their faces, Winston could see absorption in every line of their bodies. It was obviously some serious piece of news that they were reading. He was a few paces away from them when suddenly the group broke up and two of the men were in violent altercation. For a moment they seemed almost on the point of blows.

‘Can’t you bleeding well listen to what I say? I tell you no number ending in seven ain’t won for over fourteen months!’

‘Yes, it ‘as, then!’

‘No, it ‘as not! Back ‘ome I got the ‘ole lot of ‘em for over two years wrote down on a piece of paper. I takes ‘em down reg’lar as the clock. An’ I tell you, no number ending in seven — — ‘

‘Yes, a seven ‘AS won! I could pretty near tell you the bleeding number. Four oh seven, it ended in. It were in February — second week in February.’

‘February your grandmother! I got it all down in black and white. An’ I tell you, no number — — ‘

‘Oh, pack it in!’ said the third man.

They were talking about the Lottery. Winston looked back when he had gone thirty metres. They were still arguing, with vivid, passionate faces. The Lottery, with its weekly pay-out of enormous prizes, was the one public event to which the proles paid serious attention. It was probable that there were some millions of proles for whom the Lottery was the principal if not the only reason for remaining alive. It was their delight, their folly, their anodyne, their intellectual stimulant. Where the Lottery was concerned, even people who could barely read and write seemed capable of intricate calculations and staggering feats of memory. There was a whole tribe of men who made a living simply by selling systems, forecasts, and lucky amulets. Winston had nothing to do with the running of the Lottery, which was managed by the Ministry of Plenty, but he was aware (indeed everyone in the party was aware) that the prizes were largely imaginary. Only small sums were actually paid out, the winners of the big prizes being non-existent persons. In the absence of any real intercommunication between one part of Oceania and another, this was not difficult to arrange.

But if there was hope, it lay in the proles. You had to cling on to that. When you put it in words it sounded reasonable: it was when you looked at the human beings passing you on the pavement that it became an act of faith. The street into which he had turned ran downhill. He had a feeling that he had been in this neighbourhood before, and that there was a main thoroughfare not far away. From somewhere ahead there came a din of shouting voices. The street

took a sharp turn and then ended in a flight of steps which led down into a sunken alley where a few stall-keepers were selling tired-looking vegetables. At this moment Winston remembered where he was. The alley led out into the main street, and down the next turning, not five minutes away, was the junk-shop where he had bought the blank book which was now his diary. And in a small stationer's shop not far away he had bought his penholder and his bottle of ink.

He paused for a moment at the top of the steps. On the opposite side of the alley there was a dingy little pub whose windows appeared to be frosted over but in reality were merely coated with dust. A very old man, bent but active, with white moustaches that bristled forward like those of a prawn, pushed open the swing door and went in. As Winston stood watching, it occurred to him that the old man, who must be eighty at the least, had already been middle-aged when the Revolution happened. He and a few others like him were the last links that now existed with the vanished world of capitalism. In the Party itself there were not many people left whose ideas had been formed before the Revolution. The older generation had mostly been wiped out in the great purges of the fifties and sixties, and the few who survived had long ago been terrified into complete intellectual surrender. If there was any one still alive who could give you a truthful account of conditions in the early part of the century, it could only be a prole. Suddenly the passage from the history book that he had copied into his diary came back into Winston's mind, and a lunatic impulse took hold of him. He would go into the pub, he would scrape acquaintance with that old man and question him. He would say to him: 'Tell me about your life when you were a boy. What was it like in those days? Were things better than they are now, or were they worse?'

Hurriedly, lest he should have time to become frightened, he descended the steps and crossed the narrow street. It was madness of course. As usual, there was no definite rule against talking to proles and frequenting their pubs, but it was far too unusual an action to pass unnoticed. If the patrols appeared he might plead an attack of faintness, but it was not likely that they would believe him. He pushed open the door, and a hideous cheesy smell of sour beer hit

him in the face. As he entered the din of voices dropped to about half its volume. Behind his back he could feel everyone eyeing his blue overalls. A game of darts which was going on at the other end of the room interrupted itself for perhaps as much as thirty seconds. The old man whom he had followed was standing at the bar, having some kind of altercation with the barman, a large, stout, hook-nosed young man with enormous forearms. A knot of others, standing round with glasses in their hands, were watching the scene.

'I arst you civil enough, didn't I?' said the old man, straightening his shoulders pugnaciously. 'You telling me you ain't got a pint mug in the 'ole bleeding boozer?'

'And what in hell's name IS a pint?' said the barman, leaning forward with the tips of his fingers on the counter.

''Ark at 'im! Calls 'isself a barman and don't know what a pint is! Why, a pint's the 'alf of a quart, and there's four quarts to the gallon. 'Ave to teach you the A, B, C next.'

'Never heard of 'em,' said the barman shortly. 'Litre and half litre — that's all we serve. There's the glasses on the shelf in front of you.'

'I likes a pint,' persisted the old man. 'You could 'a drawed me off a pint easy enough. We didn't 'ave these bleeding litres when I was a young man.'

'When you were a young man we were all living in the treetops,' said the barman, with a glance at the other customers.

There was a shout of laughter, and the uneasiness caused by Winston's entry seemed to disappear. The old man's white-stubbled face had flushed pink. He turned away, muttering to himself, and bumped into Winston. Winston caught him gently by the arm.

'May I offer you a drink?' he said.

'You're a gent,' said the other, straightening his shoulders again. He appeared not to have noticed Winston's blue overalls. 'Pint!' he added aggressively to the barman. 'Pint of wallop.'

The barman swished two half-litres of dark-brown beer into thick glasses which he had rinsed in a bucket under the counter. Beer was the only drink you could get in prole pubs. The proles were supposed not to drink gin, though in practice they could get hold of it easily enough. The game of darts was in full swing again, and the knot of

men at the bar had begun talking about lottery tickets. Winston's presence was forgotten for a moment. There was a deal table under the window where he and the old man could talk without fear of being overheard. It was horribly dangerous, but at any rate there was no telescreen in the room, a point he had made sure of as soon as he came in.

''E could 'a drawed me off a pint,' grumbled the old man as he settled down behind a glass. 'A 'alf litre ain't enough. It don't satisfy. And a 'ole litre's too much. It starts my bladder running. Let alone the price.'

'You must have seen great changes since you were a young man,' said Winston tentatively.

The old man's pale blue eyes moved from the darts board to the bar, and from the bar to the door of the Gents, as though it were in the bar-room that he expected the changes to have occurred.

'The beer was better,' he said finally. 'And cheaper! When I was a young man, mild beer — wallop we used to call it — was fourpence a pint. That was before the war, of course.'

'Which war was that?' said Winston.

'It's all wars,' said the old man vaguely. He took up his glass, and his shoulders straightened again. ''Ere's wishing you the very best of 'ealth!'

In his lean throat the sharp-pointed Adam's apple made a surprisingly rapid up-and-down movement, and the beer vanished. Winston went to the bar and came back with two more half-litres. The old man appeared to have forgotten his prejudice against drinking a full litre.

'You are very much older than I am,' said Winston. 'You must have been a grown man before I was born. You can remember what it was like in the old days, before the Revolution. People of my age don't really know anything about those times. We can only read about them in books, and what it says in the books may not be true. I should like your opinion on that. The history books say that life before the Revolution was completely different from what it is now. There was the most terrible oppression, injustice, poverty worse than anything we can imagine. Here in London, the great mass of the people never had enough to eat from birth to death. Half of them

hadn't even boots on their feet. They worked twelve hours a day, they left school at nine, they slept ten in a room. And at the same time there were a very few people, only a few thousands — the capitalists, they were called — who were rich and powerful. They owned everything that there was to own. They lived in great gorgeous houses with thirty servants, they rode about in motor-cars and four-horse carriages, they drank champagne, they wore top hats — — '

The old man brightened suddenly.

'Top 'ats!' he said. 'Funny you should mention 'em. The same thing come into my 'ead only yesterday, I dono why. I was jest thinking, I ain't seen a top 'at in years. Gorn right out, they 'ave. The last time I wore one was at my sister-in-law's funeral. And that was — well, I couldn't give you the date, but it must'a been fifty years ago. Of course it was only 'ired for the occasion, you understand.'

'It isn't very important about the top hats,' said Winston patiently. 'The point is, these capitalists — they and a few lawyers and priests and so forth who lived on them — were the lords of the earth. Everything existed for their benefit. You — the ordinary people, the workers — were their slaves. They could do what they liked with you. They could ship you off to Canada like cattle. They could sleep with your daughters if they chose. They could order you to be flogged with something called a cat-o'-nine tails. You had to take your cap off when you passed them. Every capitalist went about with a gang of lackeys who — — '

The old man brightened again.

'Lackeys!' he said. 'Now there's a word I ain't 'eard since ever so long. Lackeys! That reg'lar takes me back, that does. I recollect — oh, donkey's years ago — I used to sometimes go to 'Yde Park of a Sunday afternoon to 'ear the blokes making speeches. Salvation Army, Roman Catholics, Jews, Indians — all sorts there was. And there was one bloke — well, I couldn't give you 'is name, but a real powerful speaker 'e was. 'E didn't 'alf give it 'em! "Lackeys!" 'e says, "lackeys of the bourgeoisie! Flunkies of the ruling class!" Parasites — that was another of them. And 'yenas— 'e definitely called 'em 'yenas. Of course 'e was referring to the Labour Party, you understand.'

Winston had the feeling that they were talking at cross-purposes.

'What I really wanted to know was this,' he said. 'Do you feel that you have more freedom now than you had in those days? Are you treated more like a human being? In the old days, the rich people, the people at the top — — '

'The 'Ouse of Lords,' put in the old man reminiscently.

'The House of Lords, if you like. What I am asking is, were these people able to treat you as an inferior, simply because they were rich and you were poor? Is it a fact, for instance, that you had to call them "Sir" and take off your cap when you passed them?'

The old man appeared to think deeply. He drank off about a quarter of his beer before answering.

'Yes,' he said. 'They liked you to touch your cap to 'em. It showed respect, like. I didn't agree with it, myself, but I done it often enough. Had to, as you might say.'

'And was it usual — I'm only quoting what I've read in history books — was it usual for these people and their servants to push you off the pavement into the gutter?'

'One of 'em pushed me once,' said the old man. 'I recollect it as if it was yesterday. It was Boat Race night — terribly rowdy they used to get on Boat Race night — and I bumps into a young bloke on Shaftesbury Avenue. Quite a gent, 'e was — dress shirt, top 'at, black overcoat. 'E was kind of zig-zagging across the pavement, and I bumps into 'im accidental-like. 'E says, "Why can't you look where you're going?" 'e says. I say, "Ju think you've bought the bleeding pavement?" 'E says, "I'll twist your bloody 'ead off if you get fresh with me." I says, "You're drunk. I'll give you in charge in 'alf a minute," I says. An' if you'll believe me, 'e puts 'is 'and on my chest and gives me a shove as pretty near sent me under the wheels of a bus. Well, I was young in them days, and I was going to 'ave fetched 'im one, only — — '

A sense of helplessness took hold of Winston. The old man's memory was nothing but a rubbish-heap of details. One could question him all day without getting any real information. The party histories might still be true, after a fashion: they might even be completely true. He made a last attempt.

'Perhaps I have not made myself clear,' he said. 'What I'm trying

to say is this. You have been alive a very long time; you lived half your life before the Revolution. In 1925, for instance, you were already grown up. Would you say from what you can remember, that life in 1925 was better than it is now, or worse? If you could choose, would you prefer to live then or now?'

The old man looked meditatively at the darts board. He finished up his beer, more slowly than before. When he spoke it was with a tolerant philosophical air, as though the beer had mellowed him.

'I know what you expect me to say,' he said. 'You expect me to say as I'd sooner be young again. Most people'd say they'd sooner be young, if you arst 'em. You got your 'ealth and strength when you're young. When you get to my time of life you ain't never well. I suffer something wicked from my feet, and my bladder's jest terrible. Six and seven times a night it 'as me out of bed. On the other 'and, there's great advantages in being a old man. You ain't got the same worries. No truck with women, and that's a great thing. I ain't 'ad a woman for near on thirty year, if you'd credit it. Nor wanted to, what's more.'

Winston sat back against the window-sill. It was no use going on. He was about to buy some more beer when the old man suddenly got up and shuffled rapidly into the stinking urinal at the side of the room. The extra half-litre was already working on him. Winston sat for a minute or two gazing at his empty glass, and hardly noticed when his feet carried him out into the street again. Within twenty years at the most, he reflected, the huge and simple question, 'Was life better before the Revolution than it is now?' would have ceased once and for all to be answerable. But in effect it was unanswerable even now, since the few scattered survivors from the ancient world were incapable of comparing one age with another. They remembered a million useless things, a quarrel with a workmate, a hunt for a lost bicycle pump, the expression on a long-dead sister's face, the swirls of dust on a windy morning seventy years ago: but all the relevant facts were outside the range of their vision. They were like the ant, which can see small objects but not large ones. And when memory failed and written records were falsified — when that happened, the claim of the Party to have improved the conditions of human life had got to be accepted, because there did not exist, and

never again could exist, any standard against which it could be tested.

At this moment his train of thought stopped abruptly. He halted and looked up. He was in a narrow street, with a few dark little shops, interspersed among dwelling-houses. Immediately above his head there hung three discoloured metal balls which looked as if they had once been gilded. He seemed to know the place. Of course! He was standing outside the junk-shop where he had bought the diary.

A twinge of fear went through him. It had been a sufficiently rash act to buy the book in the beginning, and he had sworn never to come near the place again. And yet the instant that he allowed his thoughts to wander, his feet had brought him back here of their own accord. It was precisely against suicidal impulses of this kind that he had hoped to guard himself by opening the diary. At the same time he noticed that although it was nearly twenty-one hours the shop was still open. With the feeling that he would be less conspicuous inside than hanging about on the pavement, he stepped through the doorway. If questioned, he could plausibly say that he was trying to buy razor blades.

The proprietor had just lighted a hanging oil lamp which gave off an unclean but friendly smell. He was a man of perhaps sixty, frail and bowed, with a long, benevolent nose, and mild eyes distorted by thick spectacles. His hair was almost white, but his eyebrows were bushy and still black. His spectacles, his gentle, fussy movements, and the fact that he was wearing an aged jacket of black velvet, gave him a vague air of intellectuality, as though he had been some kind of literary man, or perhaps a musician. His voice was soft, as though faded, and his accent less debased than that of the majority of proles.

‘I recognized you on the pavement,’ he said immediately. ‘You’re the gentleman that bought the young lady’s keepsake album. That was a beautiful bit of paper, that was. Cream-laid, it used to be called. There’s been no paper like that made for — oh, I dare say fifty years.’ He peered at Winston over the top of his spectacles. ‘Is there anything special I can do for you? Or did you just want to look round?’

‘I was passing,’ said Winston vaguely. ‘I just looked in. I don’t want anything in particular.’

‘It’s just as well,’ said the other, ‘because I don’t suppose I could have satisfied you.’ He made an apologetic gesture with his softpalmed hand. ‘You see how it is; an empty shop, you might say. Between you and me, the antique trade’s just about finished. No demand any longer, and no stock either. Furniture, china, glass it’s all been broken up by degrees. And of course the metal stuff’s mostly been melted down. I haven’t seen a brass candlestick in years.’

The tiny interior of the shop was in fact uncomfortably full, but there was almost nothing in it of the slightest value. The floorspace was very restricted, because all round the walls were stacked innumerable dusty picture-frames. In the window there were trays of nuts and bolts, worn-out chisels, penknives with broken blades, tarnished watches that did not even pretend to be in going order, and other miscellaneous rubbish. Only on a small table in the corner was there a litter of odds and ends — lacquered snuffboxes, agate brooches, and the like — which looked as though they might include something interesting. As Winston wandered towards the table his eye was caught by a round, smooth thing that gleamed softly in the lamplight, and he picked it up.

It was a heavy lump of glass, curved on one side, flat on the other, making almost a hemisphere. There was a peculiar softness, as of rainwater, in both the colour and the texture of the glass. At the heart of it, magnified by the curved surface, there was a strange, pink, convoluted object that recalled a rose or a sea anemone.

‘What is it?’ said Winston, fascinated.

‘That’s coral, that is,’ said the old man. ‘It must have come from the Indian Ocean. They used to kind of embed it in the glass. That wasn’t made less than a hundred years ago. More, by the look of it.’

‘It’s a beautiful thing,’ said Winston.

‘It is a beautiful thing,’ said the other appreciatively. ‘But there’s not many that’d say so nowadays.’ He coughed. ‘Now, if it so happened that you wanted to buy it, that’d cost you four dollars. I can remember when a thing like that would have fetched eight pounds, and eight pounds was — well, I can’t work it out, but it was a lot of money. But who cares about genuine antiques nowadays — even the few that’s left?’

Winston immediately paid over the four dollars and slid the

coveted thing into his pocket. What appealed to him about it was not so much its beauty as the air it seemed to possess of belonging to an age quite different from the present one. The soft, rainwatery glass was not like any glass that he had ever seen. The thing was doubly attractive because of its apparent uselessness, though he could guess that it must once have been intended as a paperweight. It was very heavy in his pocket, but fortunately it did not make much of a bulge. It was a queer thing, even a compromising thing, for a Party member to have in his possession. Anything old, and for that matter anything beautiful, was always vaguely suspect. The old man had grown noticeably more cheerful after receiving the four dollars. Winston realized that he would have accepted three or even two.

'There's another room upstairs that you might care to take a look at,' he said. 'There's not much in it. Just a few pieces. We'll do with a light if we're going upstairs.'

He lit another lamp, and, with bowed back, led the way slowly up the steep and worn stairs and along a tiny passage, into a room which did not give on the street but looked out on a cobbled yard and a forest of chimney-pots. Winston noticed that the furniture was still arranged as though the room were meant to be lived in. There was a strip of carpet on the floor, a picture or two on the walls, and a deep, slatternly arm-chair drawn up to the fireplace. An old-fashioned glass clock with a twelve-hour face was ticking away on the mantelpiece. Under the window, and occupying nearly a quarter of the room, was an enormous bed with the mattress still on it.

'We lived here till my wife died,' said the old man half apologetically. 'I'm selling the furniture off by little and little. Now that's a beautiful mahogany bed, or at least it would be if you could get the bugs out of it. But I dare say you'd find it a little bit cumbersome.'

He was holding the lamp high up, so as to illuminate the whole room, and in the warm dim light the place looked curiously inviting. The thought flitted through Winston's mind that it would probably be quite easy to rent the room for a few dollars a week, if he dared to take the risk. It was a wild, impossible notion, to be abandoned as soon as thought of; but the room had awakened in him a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory. It seemed to him that he knew

exactly what it felt like to sit in a room like this, in an arm-chair beside an open fire with your feet in the fender and a kettle on the hob; utterly alone, utterly secure, with nobody watching you, no voice pursuing you, no sound except the singing of the kettle and the friendly ticking of the clock.

'There's no telescreen!' he could not help murmuring.

'Ah,' said the old man, 'I never had one of those things. Too expensive. And I never seemed to feel the need of it, somehow. Now that's a nice gateleg table in the corner there. Though of course you'd have to put new hinges on it if you wanted to use the flaps.'

There was a small bookcase in the other corner, and Winston had already gravitated towards it. It contained nothing but rubbish. The hunting-down and destruction of books had been done with the same thoroughness in the prole quarters as everywhere else. It was very unlikely that there existed anywhere in Oceania a copy of a book printed earlier than 1960. The old man, still carrying the lamp, was standing in front of a picture in a rosewood frame which hung on the other side of the fireplace, opposite the bed.

'Now, if you happen to be interested in old prints at all — — ' he began delicately.

Winston came across to examine the picture. It was a steel engraving of an oval building with rectangular windows, and a small tower in front. There was a railing running round the building, and at the rear end there was what appeared to be a statue. Winston gazed at it for some moments. It seemed vaguely familiar, though he did not remember the statue.

'The frame's fixed to the wall,' said the old man, 'but I could unscrew it for you, I dare say.'

'I know that building,' said Winston finally. 'It's a ruin now. It's in the middle of the street outside the Palace of Justice.'

'That's right. Outside the Law Courts. It was bombed in — oh, many years ago. It was a church at one time, St Clement Danes, its name was.' He smiled apologetically, as though conscious of saying something slightly ridiculous, and added: 'Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement's!'

'What's that?' said Winston.

'Oh— "Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement's." That

was a rhyme we had when I was a little boy. How it goes on I don't remember, but I do know it ended up, "Here comes a candle to light you to bed, Here comes a chopper to chop off your head." It was a kind of a dance. They held out their arms for you to pass under, and when they came to "Here comes a chopper to chop off your head" they brought their arms down and caught you. It was just names of churches. All the London churches were in it — all the principal ones, that is.'

Winston wondered vaguely to what century the church belonged. It was always difficult to determine the age of a London building. Anything large and impressive, if it was reasonably new in appearance, was automatically claimed as having been built since the Revolution, while anything that was obviously of earlier date was ascribed to some dim period called the Middle Ages. The centuries of capitalism were held to have produced nothing of any value. One could not learn history from architecture any more than one could learn it from books. Statues, inscriptions, memorial stones, the names of streets — anything that might throw light upon the past had been systematically altered.

'I never knew it had been a church,' he said.

'There's a lot of them left, really,' said the old man, 'though they've been put to other uses. Now, how did that rhyme go? Ah! I've got it!

"Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement's,

You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St Martin's — — "

there, now, that's as far as I can get. A farthing, that was a small copper coin, looked something like a cent.'

'Where was St Martin's?' said Winston.

'St Martin's? That's still standing. It's in Victory Square, alongside the picture gallery. A building with a kind of a triangular porch and pillars in front, and a big flight of steps.'

Winston knew the place well. It was a museum used for propaganda displays of various kinds — scale models of rocket bombs and Floating Fortresses, waxwork tableaux illustrating enemy atrocities, and the like.

'St Martin's-in-the-Fields it used to be called,' supplemented the old man, 'though I don't recollect any fields anywhere in those

parts.'

Winston did not buy the picture. It would have been an even more incongruous possession than the glass paperweight, and impossible to carry home, unless it were taken out of its frame. But he lingered for some minutes more, talking to the old man, whose name, he discovered, was not Weeks — as one might have gathered from the inscription over the shop-front — but Charrington. Mr Charrington, it seemed, was a widower aged sixty-three and had inhabited this shop for thirty years. Throughout that time he had been intending to alter the name over the window, but had never quite got to the point of doing it. All the while that they were talking the half-remembered rhyme kept running through Winston's head. Oranges and lemons say the bells of St Clement's, You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St Martin's! It was curious, but when you said it to yourself you had the illusion of actually hearing bells, the bells of a lost London that still existed somewhere or other, disguised and forgotten. From one ghostly steeple after another he seemed to hear them pealing forth. Yet so far as he could remember he had never in real life heard church bells ringing.

He got away from Mr Charrington and went down the stairs alone, so as not to let the old man see him reconnoitring the street before stepping out of the door. He had already made up his mind that after a suitable interval — a month, say — he would take the risk of visiting the shop again. It was perhaps not more dangerous than shirking an evening at the Centre. The serious piece of folly had been to come back here in the first place, after buying the diary and without knowing whether the proprietor of the shop could be trusted. However —— !

Yes, he thought again, he would come back. He would buy further scraps of beautiful rubbish. He would buy the engraving of St Clement Danes, take it out of its frame, and carry it home concealed under the jacket of his overalls. He would drag the rest of that poem out of Mr Charrington's memory. Even the lunatic project of renting the room upstairs flashed momentarily through his mind again. For perhaps five seconds exaltation made him careless, and he stepped out on to the pavement without so much as a preliminary glance through the window. He had even started humming to an improvised

tune

Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement's,

You owe me three farthings, say the ——

Suddenly his heart seemed to turn to ice and his bowels to water. A figure in blue overalls was coming down the pavement, not ten metres away. It was the girl from the Fiction Department, the girl with dark hair. The light was failing, but there was no difficulty in recognizing her. She looked him straight in the face, then walked quickly on as though she had not seen him.

For a few seconds Winston was too paralysed to move. Then he turned to the right and walked heavily away, not noticing for the moment that he was going in the wrong direction. At any rate, one question was settled. There was no doubting any longer that the girl was spying on him. She must have followed him here, because it was not credible that by pure chance she should have happened to be walking on the same evening up the same obscure backstreet, kilometres distant from any quarter where Party members lived. It was too great a coincidence. Whether she was really an agent of the Thought Police, or simply an amateur spy actuated by officiousness, hardly mattered. It was enough that she was watching him. Probably she had seen him go into the pub as well.

It was an effort to walk. The lump of glass in his pocket banged against his thigh at each step, and he was half minded to take it out and throw it away. The worst thing was the pain in his belly. For a couple of minutes he had the feeling that he would die if he did not reach a lavatory soon. But there would be no public lavatories in a quarter like this. Then the spasm passed, leaving a dull ache behind.

The street was a blind alley. Winston halted, stood for several seconds wondering vaguely what to do, then turned round and began to retrace his steps. As he turned it occurred to him that the girl had only passed him three minutes ago and that by running he could probably catch up with her. He could keep on her track till they were in some quiet place, and then smash her skull in with a cobblestone. The piece of glass in his pocket would be heavy enough for the job. But he abandoned the idea immediately, because even the thought of making any physical effort was unbearable. He could not run, he could not strike a blow. Besides, she was young and lusty and would

defend herself. He thought also of hurrying to the Community Centre and staying there till the place closed, so as to establish a partial alibi for the evening. But that too was impossible. A deadly lassitude had taken hold of him. All he wanted was to get home quickly and then sit down and be quiet.

It was after twenty-two hours when he got back to the flat. The lights would be switched off at the main at twenty-three thirty. He went into the kitchen and swallowed nearly a teacupful of Victory Gin. Then he went to the table in the alcove, sat down, and took the diary out of the drawer. But he did not open it at once. From the telescreen a brassy female voice was squalling a patriotic song. He sat staring at the marbled cover of the book, trying without success to shut the voice out of his consciousness.

It was at night that they came for you, always at night. The proper thing was to kill yourself before they got you. Undoubtedly some people did so. Many of the disappearances were actually suicides. But it needed desperate courage to kill yourself in a world where firearms, or any quick and certain poison, were completely unprocurable. He thought with a kind of astonishment of the biological uselessness of pain and fear, the treachery of the human body which always freezes into inertia at exactly the moment when a special effort is needed. He might have silenced the dark-haired girl if only he had acted quickly enough: but precisely because of the extremity of his danger he had lost the power to act. It struck him that in moments of crisis one is never fighting against an external enemy, but always against one's own body. Even now, in spite of the gin, the dull ache in his belly made consecutive thought impossible. And it is the same, he perceived, in all seemingly heroic or tragic situations. On the battlefield, in the torture chamber, on a sinking ship, the issues that you are fighting for are always forgotten, because the body swells up until it fills the universe, and even when you are not paralysed by fright or screaming with pain, life is a moment-to-moment struggle against hunger or cold or sleeplessness, against a sour stomach or an aching tooth.

He opened the diary. It was important to write something down. The woman on the telescreen had started a new song. Her voice seemed to stick into his brain like jagged splinters of glass. He tried

to think of O'Brien, for whom, or to whom, the diary was written, but instead he began thinking of the things that would happen to him after the Thought Police took him away. It would not matter if they killed you at once. To be killed was what you expected. But before death (nobody spoke of such things, yet everybody knew of them) there was the routine of confession that had to be gone through: the grovelling on the floor and screaming for mercy, the crack of broken bones, the smashed teeth and bloody clots of hair.

Why did you have to endure it, since the end was always the same? Why was it not possible to cut a few days or weeks out of your life? Nobody ever escaped detection, and nobody ever failed to confess. When once you had succumbed to thoughtcrime it was certain that by a given date you would be dead. Why then did that horror, which altered nothing, have to lie embedded in future time?

He tried with a little more success than before to summon up the image of O'Brien. 'We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness,' O'Brien had said to him. He knew what it meant, or thought he knew. The place where there is no darkness was the imagined future, which one would never see, but which, by foreknowledge, one could mystically share in. But with the voice from the telescreen nagging at his ears he could not follow the train of thought further. He put a cigarette in his mouth. Half the tobacco promptly fell out on to his tongue, a bitter dust which was difficult to spit out again. The face of Big Brother swam into his mind, displacing that of O'Brien. Just as he had done a few days earlier, he slid a coin out of his pocket and looked at it. The face gazed up at him, heavy, calm, protecting: but what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache? Like a leaden knell the words came back at him:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

PART TWO

Chapter 1

It was the middle of the morning, and Winston had left the cubicle to go to the lavatory.

A solitary figure was coming towards him from the other end of the long, brightly-lit corridor. It was the girl with dark hair. Four days had gone past since the evening when he had run into her outside the junk-shop. As she came nearer he saw that her right arm was in a sling, not noticeable at a distance because it was of the same colour as her overalls. Probably she had crushed her hand while swinging round one of the big kaleidoscopes on which the plots of novels were 'roughed in'. It was a common accident in the Fiction Department.

They were perhaps four metres apart when the girl stumbled and fell almost flat on her face. A sharp cry of pain was wrung out of her. She must have fallen right on the injured arm. Winston stopped short. The girl had risen to her knees. Her face had turned a milky yellow colour against which her mouth stood out redder than ever. Her eyes were fixed on his, with an appealing expression that looked more like fear than pain.

A curious emotion stirred in Winston's heart. In front of him was an enemy who was trying to kill him: in front of him, also, was a human creature, in pain and perhaps with a broken bone. Already he had instinctively started forward to help her. In the moment when he had seen her fall on the bandaged arm, it had been as though he felt the pain in his own body.

'You're hurt?' he said.

'It's nothing. My arm. It'll be all right in a second.'

She spoke as though her heart were fluttering. She had certainly turned very pale.

'You haven't broken anything?'

'No, I'm all right. It hurt for a moment, that's all.'

She held out her free hand to him, and he helped her up. She had regained some of her colour, and appeared very much better.

'It's nothing,' she repeated shortly. 'I only gave my wrist a bit of a bang. Thanks, comrade!'

And with that she walked on in the direction in which she had been going, as briskly as though it had really been nothing. The whole incident could not have taken as much as half a minute. Not to let one's feelings appear in one's face was a habit that had acquired the status of an instinct, and in any case they had been standing straight in front of a telescreen when the thing happened. Nevertheless it had been very difficult not to betray a momentary surprise, for in the two or three seconds while he was helping her up the girl had slipped something into his hand. There was no question that she had done it intentionally. It was something small and flat. As he passed through the lavatory door he transferred it to his pocket and felt it with the tips of his fingers. It was a scrap of paper folded into a square.

While he stood at the urinal he managed, with a little more fingering, to get it unfolded. Obviously there must be a message of some kind written on it. For a moment he was tempted to take it into one of the water-closets and read it at once. But that would be shocking folly, as he well knew. There was no place where you could be more certain that the telescreens were watched continuously.

He went back to his cubicle, sat down, threw the fragment of paper casually among the other papers on the desk, put on his spectacles and hitched the speakwrite towards him. 'Five minutes,' he told himself, 'five minutes at the very least!' His heart bumped in his breast with frightening loudness. Fortunately the piece of work he was engaged on was mere routine, the rectification of a long list of figures, not needing close attention.

Whatever was written on the paper, it must have some kind of political meaning. So far as he could see there were two possibilities. One, much the more likely, was that the girl was an agent of the Thought Police, just as he had feared. He did not know why the Thought Police should choose to deliver their messages in such a fashion, but perhaps they had their reasons. The thing that was written on the paper might be a threat, a summons, an order to commit suicide, a trap of some description. But there was another, wilder possibility that kept raising its head, though he tried vainly to suppress it. This was, that the message did not come from the Thought Police at all, but from some kind of underground

organization. Perhaps the Brotherhood existed after all! Perhaps the girl was part of it! No doubt the idea was absurd, but it had sprung into his mind in the very instant of feeling the scrap of paper in his hand. It was not till a couple of minutes later that the other, more probable explanation had occurred to him. And even now, though his intellect told him that the message probably meant death — still, that was not what he believed, and the unreasonable hope persisted, and his heart banged, and it was with difficulty that he kept his voice from trembling as he murmured his figures into the speakwrite.

He rolled up the completed bundle of work and slid it into the pneumatic tube. Eight minutes had gone by. He re-adjusted his spectacles on his nose, sighed, and drew the next batch of work towards him, with the scrap of paper on top of it. He flattened it out. On it was written, in a large unformed handwriting:

I LOVE YOU.

For several seconds he was too stunned even to throw the incriminating thing into the memory hole. When he did so, although he knew very well the danger of showing too much interest, he could not resist reading it once again, just to make sure that the words were really there.

For the rest of the morning it was very difficult to work. What was even worse than having to focus his mind on a series of niggling jobs was the need to conceal his agitation from the telescreen. He felt as though a fire were burning in his belly. Lunch in the hot, crowded, noise-filled canteen was torment. He had hoped to be alone for a little while during the lunch hour, but as bad luck would have it the imbecile Parsons flopped down beside him, the tang of his sweat almost defeating the tinny smell of stew, and kept up a stream of talk about the preparations for Hate Week. He was particularly enthusiastic about a papier-mache model of Big Brother's head, two metres wide, which was being made for the occasion by his daughter's troop of Spies. The irritating thing was that in the racket of voices Winston could hardly hear what Parsons was saying, and was constantly having to ask for some fatuous remark to be repeated. Just once he caught a glimpse of the girl, at a table with two other girls at the far end of the room. She appeared not to have seen him, and he did not look in that direction again.

The afternoon was more bearable. Immediately after lunch there arrived a delicate, difficult piece of work which would take several hours and necessitated putting everything else aside. It consisted in falsifying a series of production reports of two years ago, in such a way as to cast discredit on a prominent member of the Inner Party, who was now under a cloud. This was the kind of thing that Winston was good at, and for more than two hours he succeeded in shutting the girl out of his mind altogether. Then the memory of her face came back, and with it a raging, intolerable desire to be alone. Until he could be alone it was impossible to think this new development out. Tonight was one of his nights at the Community Centre. He wolfed another tasteless meal in the canteen, hurried off to the Centre, took part in the solemn foolery of a 'discussion group', played two games of table tennis, swallowed several glasses of gin, and sat for half an hour through a lecture entitled 'Ingsoc in relation to chess'. His soul writhed with boredom, but for once he had had no impulse to shirk his evening at the Centre. At the sight of the words I LOVE YOU the desire to stay alive had welled up in him, and the taking of minor risks suddenly seemed stupid. It was not till twenty-three hours, when he was home and in bed — in the darkness, where you were safe even from the telescreen so long as you kept silent — that he was able to think continuously.

It was a physical problem that had to be solved: how to get in touch with the girl and arrange a meeting. He did not consider any longer the possibility that she might be laying some kind of trap for him. He knew that it was not so, because of her unmistakable agitation when she handed him the note. Obviously she had been frightened out of her wits, as well she might be. Nor did the idea of refusing her advances even cross his mind. Only five nights ago he had contemplated smashing her skull in with a cobblestone, but that was of no importance. He thought of her naked, youthful body, as he had seen it in his dream. He had imagined her a fool like all the rest of them, her head stuffed with lies and hatred, her belly full of ice. A kind of fever seized him at the thought that he might lose her, the white youthful body might slip away from him! What he feared more than anything else was that she would simply change her mind if he did not get in touch with her quickly. But the physical difficulty of

meeting was enormous. It was like trying to make a move at chess when you were already mated. Whichever way you turned, the telescreen faced you. Actually, all the possible ways of communicating with her had occurred to him within five minutes of reading the note; but now, with time to think, he went over them one by one, as though laying out a row of instruments on a table.

Obviously the kind of encounter that had happened this morning could not be repeated. If she had worked in the Records Department it might have been comparatively simple, but he had only a very dim idea whereabouts in the building the Fiction Department lay, and he had no pretext for going there. If he had known where she lived, and at what time she left work, he could have contrived to meet her somewhere on her way home; but to try to follow her home was not safe, because it would mean loitering about outside the Ministry, which was bound to be noticed. As for sending a letter through the mails, it was out of the question. By a routine that was not even secret, all letters were opened in transit. Actually, few people ever wrote letters. For the messages that it was occasionally necessary to send, there were printed postcards with long lists of phrases, and you struck out the ones that were inapplicable. In any case he did not know the girl's name, let alone her address. Finally he decided that the safest place was the canteen. If he could get her at a table by herself, somewhere in the middle of the room, not too near the telescreens, and with a sufficient buzz of conversation all round — if these conditions endured for, say, thirty seconds, it might be possible to exchange a few words.

For a week after this, life was like a restless dream. On the next day she did not appear in the canteen until he was leaving it, the whistle having already blown. Presumably she had been changed on to a later shift. They passed each other without a glance. On the day after that she was in the canteen at the usual time, but with three other girls and immediately under a telescreen. Then for three dreadful days she did not appear at all. His whole mind and body seemed to be afflicted with an unbearable sensitivity, a sort of transparency, which made every movement, every sound, every contact, every word that he had to speak or listen to, an agony. Even in sleep he could not altogether escape from her image. He did not

touch the diary during those days. If there was any relief, it was in his work, in which he could sometimes forget himself for ten minutes at a stretch. He had absolutely no clue as to what had happened to her. There was no enquiry he could make. She might have been vaporized, she might have committed suicide, she might have been transferred to the other end of Oceania: worst and likeliest of all, she might simply have changed her mind and decided to avoid him.

The next day she reappeared. Her arm was out of the sling and she had a band of sticking-plaster round her wrist. The relief of seeing her was so great that he could not resist staring directly at her for several seconds. On the following day he very nearly succeeded in speaking to her. When he came into the canteen she was sitting at a table well out from the wall, and was quite alone. It was early, and the place was not very full. The queue edged forward till Winston was almost at the counter, then was held up for two minutes because someone in front was complaining that he had not received his tablet of saccharine. But the girl was still alone when Winston secured his tray and began to make for her table. He walked casually towards her, his eyes searching for a place at some table beyond her. She was perhaps three metres away from him. Another two seconds would do it. Then a voice behind him called, 'Smith!' He pretended not to hear. 'Smith!' repeated the voice, more loudly. It was no use. He turned round. A blond-headed, silly-faced young man named Wilsher, whom he barely knew, was inviting him with a smile to a vacant place at his table. It was not safe to refuse. After having been recognized, he could not go and sit at a table with an unattended girl. It was too noticeable. He sat down with a friendly smile. The silly blond face beamed into his. Winston had a hallucination of himself smashing a pick-axe right into the middle of it. The girl's table filled up a few minutes later.

But she must have seen him coming towards her, and perhaps she would take the hint. Next day he took care to arrive early. Surely enough, she was at a table in about the same place, and again alone. The person immediately ahead of him in the queue was a small, swiftly-moving, beetle-like man with a flat face and tiny, suspicious eyes. As Winston turned away from the counter with his tray, he saw that the little man was making straight for the girl's table. His hopes

sank again. There was a vacant place at a table further away, but something in the little man's appearance suggested that he would be sufficiently attentive to his own comfort to choose the emptiest table. With ice at his heart Winston followed. It was no use unless he could get the girl alone. At this moment there was a tremendous crash. The little man was sprawling on all fours, his tray had gone flying, two streams of soup and coffee were flowing across the floor. He started to his feet with a malignant glance at Winston, whom he evidently suspected of having tripped him up. But it was all right. Five seconds later, with a thundering heart, Winston was sitting at the girl's table.

He did not look at her. He unpacked his tray and promptly began eating. It was all-important to speak at once, before anyone else came, but now a terrible fear had taken possession of him. A week had gone by since she had first approached him. She would have changed her mind, she must have changed her mind! It was impossible that this affair should end successfully; such things did not happen in real life. He might have flinched altogether from speaking if at this moment he had not seen Ampleforth, the hairy-eared poet, wandering limply round the room with a tray, looking for a place to sit down. In his vague way Ampleforth was attached to Winston, and would certainly sit down at his table if he caught sight of him. There was perhaps a minute in which to act. Both Winston and the girl were eating steadily. The stuff they were eating was a thin stew, actually a soup, of haricot beans. In a low murmur Winston began speaking. Neither of them looked up; steadily they spooned the watery stuff into their mouths, and between spoonfuls exchanged the few necessary words in low expressionless voices.

'What time do you leave work?'

'Eighteen-thirty.'

'Where can we meet?'

'Victory Square, near the monument.'

'It's full of telescreens.'

'It doesn't matter if there's a crowd.'

'Any signal?'

'No. Don't come up to me until you see me among a lot of people. And don't look at me. Just keep somewhere near me.'

'What time?'

‘Nineteen hours.’

‘All right.’

Ampleforth failed to see Winston and sat down at another table. They did not speak again, and, so far as it was possible for two people sitting on opposite sides of the same table, they did not look at one another. The girl finished her lunch quickly and made off, while Winston stayed to smoke a cigarette.

Winston was in Victory Square before the appointed time. He wandered round the base of the enormous fluted column, at the top of which Big Brother’s statue gazed southward towards the skies where he had vanquished the Eurasian aeroplanes (the Eastasian aeroplanes, it had been, a few years ago) in the Battle of Airstrip One. In the street in front of it there was a statue of a man on horseback which was supposed to represent Oliver Cromwell. At five minutes past the hour the girl had still not appeared. Again the terrible fear seized upon Winston. She was not coming, she had changed her mind! He walked slowly up to the north side of the square and got a sort of pale-coloured pleasure from identifying St Martin’s Church, whose bells, when it had bells, had chimed ‘You owe me three farthings.’ Then he saw the girl standing at the base of the monument, reading or pretending to read a poster which ran spirally up the column. It was not safe to go near her until some more people had accumulated. There were telescreens all round the pediment. But at this moment there was a din of shouting and a zoom of heavy vehicles from somewhere to the left. Suddenly everyone seemed to be running across the square. The girl nipped nimbly round the lions at the base of the monument and joined in the rush. Winston followed. As he ran, he gathered from some shouted remarks that a convoy of Eurasian prisoners was passing.

Already a dense mass of people was blocking the south side of the square. Winston, at normal times the kind of person who gravitates to the outer edge of any kind of scrimmage, shoved, butted, squirmed his way forward into the heart of the crowd. Soon he was within arm’s length of the girl, but the way was blocked by an enormous prole and an almost equally enormous woman, presumably his wife, who seemed to form an impenetrable wall of flesh. Winston wriggled himself sideways, and with a violent lunge managed to drive his

shoulder between them. For a moment it felt as though his entrails were being ground to pulp between the two muscular hips, then he had broken through, sweating a little. He was next to the girl. They were shoulder to shoulder, both staring fixedly in front of them.

A long line of trucks, with wooden-faced guards armed with sub-machine guns standing upright in each corner, was passing slowly down the street. In the trucks little yellow men in shabby greenish uniforms were squatting, jammed close together. Their sad, Mongolian faces gazed out over the sides of the trucks utterly incurious. Occasionally when a truck jolted there was a clank-clank of metal: all the prisoners were wearing leg-irons. Truck-load after truck-load of the sad faces passed. Winston knew they were there but he saw them only intermittently. The girl's shoulder, and her arm right down to the elbow, were pressed against his. Her cheek was almost near enough for him to feel its warmth. She had immediately taken charge of the situation, just as she had done in the canteen. She began speaking in the same expressionless voice as before, with lips barely moving, a mere murmur easily drowned by the din of voices and the rumbling of the trucks.

'Can you hear me?'

'Yes.'

'Can you get Sunday afternoon off?'

'Yes.'

'Then listen carefully. You'll have to remember this. Go to Paddington Station — — '

With a sort of military precision that astonished him, she outlined the route that he was to follow. A half-hour railway journey; turn left outside the station; two kilometres along the road; a gate with the top bar missing; a path across a field; a grass-grown lane; a track between bushes; a dead tree with moss on it. It was as though she had a map inside her head. 'Can you remember all that?' she murmured finally.

'Yes.'

'You turn left, then right, then left again. And the gate's got no top bar.'

'Yes. What time?'

'About fifteen. You may have to wait. I'll get there by another

way. Are you sure you remember everything?'

'Yes.'

'Then get away from me as quick as you can.'

She need not have told him that. But for the moment they could not extricate themselves from the crowd. The trucks were still filing past, the people still insatiably gaping. At the start there had been a few boos and hisses, but it came only from the Party members among the crowd, and had soon stopped. The prevailing emotion was simply curiosity. Foreigners, whether from Eurasia or from Eastasia, were a kind of strange animal. One literally never saw them except in the guise of prisoners, and even as prisoners one never got more than a momentary glimpse of them. Nor did one know what became of them, apart from the few who were hanged as war-criminals: the others simply vanished, presumably into forced-labour camps. The round Mogol faces had given way to faces of a more European type, dirty, bearded and exhausted. From over scrubby cheekbones eyes looked into Winston's, sometimes with strange intensity, and flashed away again. The convoy was drawing to an end. In the last truck he could see an aged man, his face a mass of grizzled hair, standing upright with wrists crossed in front of him, as though he were used to having them bound together. It was almost time for Winston and the girl to part. But at the last moment, while the crowd still hemmed them in, her hand felt for his and gave it a fleeting squeeze.

It could not have been ten seconds, and yet it seemed a long time that their hands were clasped together. He had time to learn every detail of her hand. He explored the long fingers, the shapely nails, the work-hardened palm with its row of callouses, the smooth flesh under the wrist. Merely from feeling it he would have known it by sight. In the same instant it occurred to him that he did not know what colour the girl's eyes were. They were probably brown, but people with dark hair sometimes had blue eyes. To turn his head and look at her would have been inconceivable folly. With hands locked together, invisible among the press of bodies, they stared steadily in front of them, and instead of the eyes of the girl, the eyes of the aged prisoner gazed mournfully at Winston out of nests of hair.

Chapter 2

Winston picked his way up the lane through dappled light and shade, stepping out into pools of gold wherever the boughs parted. Under the trees to the left of him the ground was misty with bluebells. The air seemed to kiss one's skin. It was the second of May. From somewhere deeper in the heart of the wood came the droning of ring-doves.

He was a bit early. There had been no difficulties about the journey, and the girl was so evidently experienced that he was less frightened than he would normally have been. Presumably she could be trusted to find a safe place. In general you could not assume that you were much safer in the country than in London. There were no telescreens, of course, but there was always the danger of concealed microphones by which your voice might be picked up and recognized; besides, it was not easy to make a journey by yourself without attracting attention. For distances of less than 100 kilometres it was not necessary to get your passport endorsed, but sometimes there were patrols hanging about the railway stations, who examined the papers of any Party member they found there and asked awkward questions. However, no patrols had appeared, and on the walk from the station he had made sure by cautious backward glances that he was not being followed. The train was full of proles, in holiday mood because of the summery weather. The wooden-seated carriage in which he travelled was filled to overflowing by a single enormous family, ranging from a toothless great-grandmother to a month-old baby, going out to spend an afternoon with 'in-laws' in the country, and, as they freely explained to Winston, to get hold of a little black-market butter.

The lane widened, and in a minute he came to the footpath she had told him of, a mere cattle-track which plunged between the bushes. He had no watch, but it could not be fifteen yet. The bluebells were so thick underfoot that it was impossible not to tread on them. He knelt down and began picking some partly to pass the time away, but also from a vague idea that he would like to have a bunch of flowers to offer to the girl when they met. He had got

together a big bunch and was smelling their faint sickly scent when a sound at his back froze him, the unmistakable crackle of a foot on twigs. He went on picking bluebells. It was the best thing to do. It might be the girl, or he might have been followed after all. To look round was to show guilt. He picked another and another. A hand fell lightly on his shoulder.

He looked up. It was the girl. She shook her head, evidently as a warning that he must keep silent, then parted the bushes and quickly led the way along the narrow track into the wood. Obviously she had been that way before, for she dodged the boggy bits as though by habit. Winston followed, still clasping his bunch of flowers. His first feeling was relief, but as he watched the strong slender body moving in front of him, with the scarlet sash that was just tight enough to bring out the curve of her hips, the sense of his own inferiority was heavy upon him. Even now it seemed quite likely that when she turned round and looked at him she would draw back after all. The sweetness of the air and the greenness of the leaves daunted him. Already on the walk from the station the May sunshine had made him feel dirty and etiolated, a creature of indoors, with the sooty dust of London in the pores of his skin. It occurred to him that till now she had probably never seen him in broad daylight in the open. They came to the fallen tree that she had spoken of. The girl hopped over and forced apart the bushes, in which there did not seem to be an opening. When Winston followed her, he found that they were in a natural clearing, a tiny grassy knoll surrounded by tall saplings that shut it in completely. The girl stopped and turned.

'Here we are,' she said.

He was facing her at several paces' distance. As yet he did not dare move nearer to her.

'I didn't want to say anything in the lane,' she went on, 'in case there's a mike hidden there. I don't suppose there is, but there could be. There's always the chance of one of those swine recognizing your voice. We're all right here.'

He still had not the courage to approach her. 'We're all right here?' he repeated stupidly.

'Yes. Look at the trees.' They were small ashes, which at some time had been cut down and had sprouted up again into a forest of

poles, none of them thicker than one's wrist. 'There's nothing big enough to hide a mike in. Besides, I've been here before.'

They were only making conversation. He had managed to move closer to her now. She stood before him very upright, with a smile on her face that looked faintly ironical, as though she were wondering why he was so slow to act. The bluebells had cascaded on to the ground. They seemed to have fallen of their own accord. He took her hand.

'Would you believe,' he said, 'that till this moment I didn't know what colour your eyes were?' They were brown, he noted, a rather light shade of brown, with dark lashes. 'Now that you've seen what I'm really like, can you still bear to look at me?'

'Yes, easily.'

'I'm thirty-nine years old. I've got a wife that I can't get rid of. I've got varicose veins. I've got five false teeth.'

'I couldn't care less,' said the girl.

The next moment, it was hard to say by whose act, she was in his his arms. At the beginning he had no feeling except sheer incredulity. The youthful body was strained against his own, the mass of dark hair was against his face, and yes! actually she had turned her face up and he was kissing the wide red mouth. She had clasped her arms about his neck, she was calling him darling, precious one, loved one. He had pulled her down on to the ground, she was utterly unresisting, he could do what he liked with her. But the truth was that he had no physical sensation, except that of mere contact. All he felt was incredulity and pride. He was glad that this was happening, but he had no physical desire. It was too soon, her youth and prettiness had frightened him, he was too much used to living without women — he did not know the reason. The girl picked herself up and pulled a bluebell out of her hair. She sat against him, putting her arm round his waist.

'Never mind, dear. There's no hurry. We've got the whole afternoon. Isn't this a splendid hide-out? I found it when I got lost once on a community hike. If anyone was coming you could hear them a hundred metres away.'

'What is your name?' said Winston.

'Julia. I know yours. It's Winston — Winston Smith.'

‘How did you find that out?’

‘I expect I’m better at finding things out than you are, dear. Tell me, what did you think of me before that day I gave you the note?’

He did not feel any temptation to tell lies to her. It was even a sort of love-offering to start off by telling the worst.

‘I hated the sight of you,’ he said. ‘I wanted to rape you and then murder you afterwards. Two weeks ago I thought seriously of smashing your head in with a cobblestone. If you really want to know, I imagined that you had something to do with the Thought Police.’

The girl laughed delightedly, evidently taking this as a tribute to the excellence of her disguise.

‘Not the Thought Police! You didn’t honestly think that?’

‘Well, perhaps not exactly that. But from your general appearance — merely because you’re young and fresh and healthy, you understand — I thought that probably — — ‘

‘You thought I was a good Party member. Pure in word and deed. Banners, processions, slogans, games, community hikes all that stuff. And you thought that if I had a quarter of a chance I’d denounce you as a thought-criminal and get you killed off?’

‘Yes, something of that kind. A great many young girls are like that, you know.’

‘It’s this bloody thing that does it,’ she said, ripping off the scarlet sash of the Junior Anti-Sex League and flinging it on to a bough. Then, as though touching her waist had reminded her of something, she felt in the pocket of her overalls and produced a small slab of chocolate. She broke it in half and gave one of the pieces to Winston. Even before he had taken it he knew by the smell that it was very unusual chocolate. It was dark and shiny, and was wrapped in silver paper. Chocolate normally was dull-brown crumbly stuff that tasted, as nearly as one could describe it, like the smoke of a rubbish fire. But at some time or another he had tasted chocolate like the piece she had given him. The first whiff of its scent had stirred up some memory which he could not pin down, but which was powerful and troubling.

‘Where did you get this stuff?’ he said.

‘Black market,’ she said indifferently. ‘Actually I am that sort of

girl, to look at. I'm good at games. I was a troop-leader in the Spies. I do voluntary work three evenings a week for the Junior Anti-Sex League. Hours and hours I've spent pasting their bloody rot all over London. I always carry one end of a banner in the processions. I always look cheerful and I never shirk anything. Always yell with the crowd, that's what I say. It's the only way to be safe.'

The first fragment of chocolate had melted on Winston's tongue. The taste was delightful. But there was still that memory moving round the edges of his consciousness, something strongly felt but not reducible to definite shape, like an object seen out of the corner of one's eye. He pushed it away from him, aware only that it was the memory of some action which he would have liked to undo but could not.

'You are very young,' he said. 'You are ten or fifteen years younger than I am. What could you see to attract you in a man like me?'

'It was something in your face. I thought I'd take a chance. I'm good at spotting people who don't belong. As soon as I saw you I knew you were against THEM.'

THEM, it appeared, meant the Party, and above all the Inner Party, about whom she talked with an open jeering hatred which made Winston feel uneasy, although he knew that they were safe here if they could be safe anywhere. A thing that astonished him about her was the coarseness of her language. Party members were supposed not to swear, and Winston himself very seldom did swear, aloud, at any rate. Julia, however, seemed unable to mention the Party, and especially the Inner Party, without using the kind of words that you saw chalked up in dripping alley-ways. He did not dislike it. It was merely one symptom of her revolt against the Party and all its ways, and somehow it seemed natural and healthy, like the sneeze of a horse that smells bad hay. They had left the clearing and were wandering again through the chequered shade, with their arms round each other's waists whenever it was wide enough to walk two abreast. He noticed how much softer her waist seemed to feel now that the sash was gone. They did not speak above a whisper. Outside the clearing, Julia said, it was better to go quietly. Presently they had reached the edge of the little wood. She stopped him.

‘Don’t go out into the open. There might be someone watching. We’re all right if we keep behind the boughs.’

They were standing in the shade of hazel bushes. The sunlight, filtering through innumerable leaves, was still hot on their faces. Winston looked out into the field beyond, and underwent a curious, slow shock of recognition. He knew it by sight. An old, close-bitten pasture, with a footpath wandering across it and a molehill here and there. In the ragged hedge on the opposite side the boughs of the elm trees swayed just perceptibly in the breeze, and their leaves stirred faintly in dense masses like women’s hair. Surely somewhere nearby, but out of sight, there must be a stream with green pools where dace were swimming?

‘Isn’t there a stream somewhere near here?’ he whispered.

‘That’s right, there is a stream. It’s at the edge of the next field, actually. There are fish in it, great big ones. You can watch them lying in the pools under the willow trees, waving their tails.’

‘It’s the Golden Country — almost,’ he murmured.

‘The Golden Country?’

‘It’s nothing, really. A landscape I’ve seen sometimes in a dream.’

‘Look!’ whispered Julia.

A thrush had alighted on a bough not five metres away, almost at the level of their faces. Perhaps it had not seen them. It was in the sun, they in the shade. It spread out its wings, fitted them carefully into place again, ducked its head for a moment, as though making a sort of obeisance to the sun, and then began to pour forth a torrent of song. In the afternoon hush the volume of sound was startling. Winston and Julia clung together, fascinated. The music went on and on, minute after minute, with astonishing variations, never once repeating itself, almost as though the bird were deliberately showing off its virtuosity. Sometimes it stopped for a few seconds, spread out and resettled its wings, then swelled its speckled breast and again burst into song. Winston watched it with a sort of vague reverence. For whom, for what, was that bird singing? No mate, no rival was watching it. What made it sit at the edge of the lonely wood and pour its music into nothingness? He wondered whether after all there was a microphone hidden somewhere near. He and Julia had spoken only in low whispers, and it would not pick up what they had said, but it

would pick up the thrush. Perhaps at the other end of the instrument some small, beetle-like man was listening intently — listening to that. But by degrees the flood of music drove all speculations out of his mind. It was as though it were a kind of liquid stuff that poured all over him and got mixed up with the sunlight that filtered through the leaves. He stopped thinking and merely felt. The girl's waist in the bend of his arm was soft and warm. He pulled her round so that they were breast to breast; her body seemed to melt into his. Wherever his hands moved it was all as yielding as water. Their mouths clung together; it was quite different from the hard kisses they had exchanged earlier. When they moved their faces apart again both of them sighed deeply. The bird took fright and fled with a clatter of wings.

Winston put his lips against her ear. 'NOW,' he whispered.

'Not here,' she whispered back. 'Come back to the hide-out. It's safer.'

Quickly, with an occasional crackle of twigs, they threaded their way back to the clearing. When they were once inside the ring of saplings she turned and faced him. They were both breathing fast, but the smile had reappeared round the corners of her mouth. She stood looking at him for an instant, then felt at the zipper of her overalls. And, yes! it was almost as in his dream. Almost as swiftly as he had imagined it, she had torn her clothes off, and when she flung them aside it was with that same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilization seemed to be annihilated. Her body gleamed white in the sun. But for a moment he did not look at her body; his eyes were anchored by the freckled face with its faint, bold smile. He knelt down before her and took her hands in his.

'Have you done this before?'

'Of course. Hundreds of times — well, scores of times, anyway.'

'With Party members?'

'Yes, always with Party members.'

'With members of the Inner Party?'

'Not with those swine, no. But there's plenty that WOULD if they got half a chance. They're not so holy as they make out.'

His heart leapt. Scores of times she had done it: he wished it had been hundreds — thousands. Anything that hinted at corruption

always filled him with a wild hope. Who knew, perhaps the Party was rotten under the surface, its cult of strenuousness and self-denial simply a sham concealing iniquity. If he could have infected the whole lot of them with leprosy or syphilis, how gladly he would have done so! Anything to rot, to weaken, to undermine! He pulled her down so that they were kneeling face to face.

'Listen. The more men you've had, the more I love you. Do you understand that?'

'Yes, perfectly.'

'I hate purity, I hate goodness! I don't want any virtue to exist anywhere. I want everyone to be corrupt to the bones.'

'Well then, I ought to suit you, dear. I'm corrupt to the bones.'

'You like doing this? I don't mean simply me: I mean the thing in itself?'

'I adore it.'

That was above all what he wanted to hear. Not merely the love of one person but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces. He pressed her down upon the grass, among the fallen bluebells. This time there was no difficulty. Presently the rising and falling of their breasts slowed to normal speed, and in a sort of pleasant helplessness they fell apart. The sun seemed to have grown hotter. They were both sleepy. He reached out for the discarded overalls and pulled them partly over her. Almost immediately they fell asleep and slept for about half an hour.

Winston woke first. He sat up and watched the freckled face, still peacefully asleep, pillowed on the palm of her hand. Except for her mouth, you could not call her beautiful. There was a line or two round the eyes, if you looked closely. The short dark hair was extraordinarily thick and soft. It occurred to him that he still did not know her surname or where she lived.

The young, strong body, now helpless in sleep, awoke in him a pitying, protecting feeling. But the mindless tenderness that he had felt under the hazel tree, while the thrush was singing, had not quite come back. He pulled the overalls aside and studied her smooth white flank. In the old days, he thought, a man looked at a girl's body and saw that it was desirable, and that was the end of the story. But

you could not have pure love or pure lust nowadays. No emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred. Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act.

Chapter 3

‘We can come here once again,’ said Julia. ‘It’s generally safe to use any hide-out twice. But not for another month or two, of course.’

As soon as she woke up her demeanour had changed. She became alert and business-like, put her clothes on, knotted the scarlet sash about her waist, and began arranging the details of the journey home. It seemed natural to leave this to her. She obviously had a practical cunning which Winston lacked, and she seemed also to have an exhaustive knowledge of the countryside round London, stored away from innumerable community hikes. The route she gave him was quite different from the one by which he had come, and brought him out at a different railway station. ‘Never go home the same way as you went out,’ she said, as though enunciating an important general principle. She would leave first, and Winston was to wait half an hour before following her.

She had named a place where they could meet after work, four evenings hence. It was a street in one of the poorer quarters, where there was an open market which was generally crowded and noisy. She would be hanging about among the stalls, pretending to be in search of shoelaces or sewing-thread. If she judged that the coast was clear she would blow her nose when he approached; otherwise he was to walk past her without recognition. But with luck, in the middle of the crowd, it would be safe to talk for a quarter of an hour and arrange another meeting.

‘And now I must go,’ she said as soon as he had mastered his instructions. ‘I’m due back at nineteen-thirty. I’ve got to put in two hours for the Junior Anti-Sex League, handing out leaflets, or something. Isn’t it bloody? Give me a brush-down, would you? Have I got any twigs in my hair? Are you sure? Then good-bye, my love, good-bye!’

She flung herself into his arms, kissed him almost violently, and a moment later pushed her way through the saplings and disappeared into the wood with very little noise. Even now he had not found out her surname or her address. However, it made no difference, for it was inconceivable that they could ever meet indoors or exchange any

kind of written communication.

As it happened, they never went back to the clearing in the wood. During the month of May there was only one further occasion on which they actually succeeded in making love. That was in another hiding-place known to Julia, the belfry of a ruinous church in an almost-deserted stretch of country where an atomic bomb had fallen thirty years earlier. It was a good hiding-place when once you got there, but the getting there was very dangerous. For the rest they could meet only in the streets, in a different place every evening and never for more than half an hour at a time. In the street it was usually possible to talk, after a fashion. As they drifted down the crowded pavements, not quite abreast and never looking at one another, they carried on a curious, intermittent conversation which flicked on and off like the beams of a lighthouse, suddenly nipped into silence by the approach of a Party uniform or the proximity of a telescreen, then taken up again minutes later in the middle of a sentence, then abruptly cut short as they parted at the agreed spot, then continued almost without introduction on the following day. Julia appeared to be quite used to this kind of conversation, which she called 'talking by instalments'. She was also surprisingly adept at speaking without moving her lips. Just once in almost a month of nightly meetings they managed to exchange a kiss. They were passing in silence down a side-street (Julia would never speak when they were away from the main streets) when there was a deafening roar, the earth heaved, and the air darkened, and Winston found himself lying on his side, bruised and terrified. A rocket bomb must have dropped quite near at hand. Suddenly he became aware of Julia's face a few centimetres from his own, deathly white, as white as chalk. Even her lips were white. She was dead! He clasped her against him and found that he was kissing a live warm face. But there was some powdery stuff that got in the way of his lips. Both of their faces were thickly coated with plaster.

There were evenings when they reached their rendezvous and then had to walk past one another without a sign, because a patrol had just come round the corner or a helicopter was hovering overhead. Even if it had been less dangerous, it would still have been difficult to find time to meet. Winston's working week was sixty hours, Julia's was

even longer, and their free days varied according to the pressure of work and did not often coincide. Julia, in any case, seldom had an evening completely free. She spent an astonishing amount of time in attending lectures and demonstrations, distributing literature for the junior Anti-Sex League, preparing banners for Hate Week, making collections for the savings campaign, and such-like activities. It paid, she said, it was camouflage. If you kept the small rules, you could break the big ones. She even induced Winston to mortgage yet another of his evenings by enrolling himself for the part-time munition work which was done voluntarily by zealous Party members. So, one evening every week, Winston spent four hours of paralysing boredom, screwing together small bits of metal which were probably parts of bomb fuses, in a draughty, ill-lit workshop where the knocking of hammers mingled drearily with the music of the telescreens.

When they met in the church tower the gaps in their fragmentary conversation were filled up. It was a blazing afternoon. The air in the little square chamber above the bells was hot and stagnant, and smelt overpoweringly of pigeon dung. They sat talking for hours on the dusty, twig-littered floor, one or other of them getting up from time to time to cast a glance through the arrowslits and make sure that no one was coming.

Julia was twenty-six years old. She lived in a hostel with thirty other girls (‘Always in the stink of women! How I hate women!’ she said parenthetically), and she worked, as he had guessed, on the novel-writing machines in the Fiction Department. She enjoyed her work, which consisted chiefly in running and servicing a powerful but tricky electric motor. She was ‘not clever’, but was fond of using her hands and felt at home with machinery. She could describe the whole process of composing a novel, from the general directive issued by the Planning Committee down to the final touching-up by the Rewrite Squad. But she was not interested in the finished product. She ‘didn’t much care for reading,’ she said. Books were just a commodity that had to be produced, like jam or bootlaces.

She had no memories of anything before the early sixties and the only person she had ever known who talked frequently of the days before the Revolution was a grandfather who had disappeared when

she was eight. At school she had been captain of the hockey team and had won the gymnastics trophy two years running. She had been a troop-leader in the Spies and a branch secretary in the Youth League before joining the Junior Anti-Sex League. She had always borne an excellent character. She had even (an infallible mark of good reputation) been picked out to work in Pornosec, the sub-section of the Fiction Department which turned out cheap pornography for distribution among the proles. It was nicknamed Muck House by the people who worked in it, she remarked. There she had remained for a year, helping to produce booklets in sealed packets with titles like 'Spanking Stories' or 'One Night in a Girls' School', to be bought furtively by proletarian youths who were under the impression that they were buying something illegal.

'What are these books like?' said Winston curiously.

'Oh, ghastly rubbish. They're boring, really. They only have six plots, but they swap them round a bit. Of course I was only on the kaleidoscopes. I was never in the Rewrite Squad. I'm not literary, dear — not even enough for that.'

He learned with astonishment that all the workers in Pornosec, except the heads of the departments, were girls. The theory was that men, whose sex instincts were less controllable than those of women, were in greater danger of being corrupted by the filth they handled.

'They don't even like having married women there,' she added. Girls are always supposed to be so pure. Here's one who isn't, anyway.

She had had her first love-affair when she was sixteen, with a Party member of sixty who later committed suicide to avoid arrest. 'And a good job too,' said Julia, 'otherwise they'd have had my name out of him when he confessed.' Since then there had been various others. Life as she saw it was quite simple. You wanted a good time; 'they', meaning the Party, wanted to stop you having it; you broke the rules as best you could. She seemed to think it just as natural that 'they' should want to rob you of your pleasures as that you should want to avoid being caught. She hated the Party, and said so in the crudest words, but she made no general criticism of it. Except where it touched upon her own life she had no interest in Party doctrine. He noticed that she never used Newspeak words

except the ones that had passed into everyday use. She had never heard of the Brotherhood, and refused to believe in its existence. Any kind of organized revolt against the Party, which was bound to be a failure, struck her as stupid. The clever thing was to break the rules and stay alive all the same. He wondered vaguely how many others like her there might be in the younger generation people who had grown up in the world of the Revolution, knowing nothing else, accepting the Party as something unalterable, like the sky, not rebelling against its authority but simply evading it, as a rabbit dodges a dog.

They did not discuss the possibility of getting married. It was too remote to be worth thinking about. No imaginable committee would ever sanction such a marriage even if Katharine, Winston's wife, could somehow have been got rid of. It was hopeless even as a daydream.

'What was she like, your wife?' said Julia.

'She was — do you know the Newspeak word GOODTHINKFUL? Meaning naturally orthodox, incapable of thinking a bad thought?'

'No, I didn't know the word, but I know the kind of person, right enough.'

He began telling her the story of his married life, but curiously enough she appeared to know the essential parts of it already. She described to him, almost as though she had seen or felt it, the stiffening of Katharine's body as soon as he touched her, the way in which she still seemed to be pushing him from her with all her strength, even when her arms were clasped tightly round him. With Julia he felt no difficulty in talking about such things: Katharine, in any case, had long ceased to be a painful memory and became merely a distasteful one.

'I could have stood it if it hadn't been for one thing,' he said. He told her about the frigid little ceremony that Katharine had forced him to go through on the same night every week. 'She hated it, but nothing would make her stop doing it. She used to call it — but you'll never guess.'

'Our duty to the Party,' said Julia promptly.

'How did you know that?'

‘I’ve been at school too, dear. Sex talks once a month for the over-sixteens. And in the Youth Movement. They rub it into you for years. I dare say it works in a lot of cases. But of course you can never tell; people are such hypocrites.’

She began to enlarge upon the subject. With Julia, everything came back to her own sexuality. As soon as this was touched upon in any way she was capable of great acuteness. Unlike Winston, she had grasped the inner meaning of the Party’s sexual puritanism. It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party’s control and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship. The way she put it was:

‘When you make love you’re using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don’t give a damn for anything. They can’t bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. All this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply sex gone sour. If you’re happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?’

That was very true, he thought. There was a direct intimate connexion between chastity and political orthodoxy. For how could the fear, the hatred, and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch, except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force? The sex impulse was dangerous to the Party, and the Party had turned it to account. They had played a similar trick with the instinct of parenthood. The family could not actually be abolished, and, indeed, people were encouraged to be fond of their children, in almost the old-fashioned way. The children, on the other hand, were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations. The family had become in effect an extension of the Thought Police. It was a device by means of which everyone could be surrounded night and day by informers who knew him intimately.

Abruptly his mind went back to Katharine. Katharine would unquestionably have denounced him to the Thought Police if she had

not happened to be too stupid to detect the unorthodoxy of his opinions. But what really recalled her to him at this moment was the stifling heat of the afternoon, which had brought the sweat out on his forehead. He began telling Julia of something that had happened, or rather had failed to happen, on another sweltering summer afternoon, eleven years ago.

It was three or four months after they were married. They had lost their way on a community hike somewhere in Kent. They had only lagged behind the others for a couple of minutes, but they took a wrong turning, and presently found themselves pulled up short by the edge of an old chalk quarry. It was a sheer drop of ten or twenty metres, with boulders at the bottom. There was nobody of whom they could ask the way. As soon as she realized that they were lost Katharine became very uneasy. To be away from the noisy mob of hikers even for a moment gave her a feeling of wrong-doing. She wanted to hurry back by the way they had come and start searching in the other direction. But at this moment Winston noticed some tufts of loosestrife growing in the cracks of the cliff beneath them. One tuft was of two colours, magenta and brick-red, apparently growing on the same root. He had never seen anything of the kind before, and he called to Katharine to come and look at it.

'Look, Katharine! Look at those flowers. That clump down near the bottom. Do you see they're two different colours?'

She had already turned to go, but she did rather fretfully come back for a moment. She even leaned out over the cliff face to see where he was pointing. He was standing a little behind her, and he put his hand on her waist to steady her. At this moment it suddenly occurred to him how completely alone they were. There was not a human creature anywhere, not a leaf stirring, not even a bird awake. In a place like this the danger that there would be a hidden microphone was very small, and even if there was a microphone it would only pick up sounds. It was the hottest sleepiest hour of the afternoon. The sun blazed down upon them, the sweat tickled his face. And the thought struck him . . .

'Why didn't you give her a good shove?' said Julia. 'I would have.'

'Yes, dear, you would have. I would, if I'd been the same person

then as I am now. Or perhaps I would — I'm not certain.'

'Are you sorry you didn't?'

'Yes. On the whole I'm sorry I didn't.'

They were sitting side by side on the dusty floor. He pulled her closer against him. Her head rested on his shoulder, the pleasant smell of her hair conquering the pigeon dung. She was very young, he thought, she still expected something from life, she did not understand that to push an inconvenient person over a cliff solves nothing.

'Actually it would have made no difference,' he said.

'Then why are you sorry you didn't do it?'

'Only because I prefer a positive to a negative. In this game that we're playing, we can't win. Some kinds of failure are better than other kinds, that's all.'

He felt her shoulders give a wriggle of dissent. She always contradicted him when he said anything of this kind. She would not accept it as a law of nature that the individual is always defeated. In a way she realized that she herself was doomed, that sooner or later the Thought Police would catch her and kill her, but with another part of her mind she believed that it was somehow possible to construct a secret world in which you could live as you chose. All you needed was luck and cunning and boldness. She did not understand that there was no such thing as happiness, that the only victory lay in the far future, long after you were dead, that from the moment of declaring war on the Party it was better to think of yourself as a corpse.

'We are the dead,' he said.

'We're not dead yet,' said Julia prosaically.

'Not physically. Six months, a year — five years, conceivably. I am afraid of death. You are young, so presumably you're more afraid of it than I am. Obviously we shall put it off as long as we can. But it makes very little difference. So long as human beings stay human, death and life are the same thing.'

'Oh, rubbish! Which would you sooner sleep with, me or a skeleton? Don't you enjoy being alive? Don't you like feeling: This is me, this is my hand, this is my leg, I'm real, I'm solid, I'm alive! Don't you like THIS?'

She twisted herself round and pressed her bosom against him. He

could feel her breasts, ripe yet firm, through her overalls. Her body seemed to be pouring some of its youth and vigour into his.

'Yes, I like that,' he said.

'Then stop talking about dying. And now listen, dear, we've got to fix up about the next time we meet. We may as well go back to the place in the wood. We've given it a good long rest. But you must get there by a different way this time. I've got it all planned out. You take the train — but look, I'll draw it out for you.'

And in her practical way she scraped together a small square of dust, and with a twig from a pigeon's nest began drawing a map on the floor.

Chapter 4

Winston looked round the shabby little room above Mr Charrington's shop. Beside the window the enormous bed was made up, with ragged blankets and a coverless bolster. The old-fashioned clock with the twelve-hour face was ticking away on the mantelpiece. In the corner, on the gateleg table, the glass paperweight which he had bought on his last visit gleamed softly out of the half-darkness.

In the fender was a battered tin oilstove, a saucepan, and two cups, provided by Mr Charrington. Winston lit the burner and set a pan of water to boil. He had brought an envelope full of Victory Coffee and some saccharine tablets. The clock's hands said seventeen-twenty: it was nineteen-twenty really. She was coming at nineteen-thirty.

Folly, folly, his heart kept saying: conscious, gratuitous, suicidal folly. Of all the crimes that a Party member could commit, this one was the least possible to conceal. Actually the idea had first floated into his head in the form of a vision, of the glass paperweight mirrored by the surface of the gateleg table. As he had foreseen, Mr Charrington had made no difficulty about letting the room. He was obviously glad of the few dollars that it would bring him. Nor did he seem shocked or become offensively knowing when it was made clear that Winston wanted the room for the purpose of a love-affair. Instead he looked into the middle distance and spoke in generalities, with so delicate an air as to give the impression that he had become partly invisible. Privacy, he said, was a very valuable thing. Everyone wanted a place where they could be alone occasionally. And when they had such a place, it was only common courtesy in anyone else who knew of it to keep his knowledge to himself. He even, seeming almost to fade out of existence as he did so, added that there were two entries to the house, one of them through the back yard, which gave on an alley.

Under the window somebody was singing. Winston peeped out, secure in the protection of the muslin curtain. The June sun was still high in the sky, and in the sun-filled court below, a monstrous

woman, solid as a Norman pillar, with brawny red forearms and a sacking apron strapped about her middle, was stumping to and fro between a washtub and a clothes line, pegging out a series of square white things which Winston recognized as babies' diapers. Whenever her mouth was not corked with clothes pegs she was singing in a powerful contralto:

It was only an 'opeless fancy.

It passed like an Ipril dye,

But a look an' a word an' the dreams they stirred!

They 'ave stolen my 'eart awye!

The tune had been haunting London for weeks past. It was one of countless similar songs published for the benefit of the proles by a sub-section of the Music Department. The words of these songs were composed without any human intervention whatever on an instrument known as a versificator. But the woman sang so tunefully as to turn the dreadful rubbish into an almost pleasant sound. He could hear the woman singing and the scrape of her shoes on the flagstones, and the cries of the children in the street, and somewhere in the far distance a faint roar of traffic, and yet the room seemed curiously silent, thanks to the absence of a telescreen.

Folly, folly, folly! he thought again. It was inconceivable that they could frequent this place for more than a few weeks without being caught. But the temptation of having a hiding-place that was truly their own, indoors and near at hand, had been too much for both of them. For some time after their visit to the church belfry it had been impossible to arrange meetings. Working hours had been drastically increased in anticipation of Hate Week. It was more than a month distant, but the enormous, complex preparations that it entailed were throwing extra work on to everybody. Finally both of them managed to secure a free afternoon on the same day. They had agreed to go back to the clearing in the wood. On the evening beforehand they met briefly in the street. As usual, Winston hardly looked at Julia as they drifted towards one another in the crowd, but from the short glance he gave her it seemed to him that she was paler than usual.

'It's all off,' she murmured as soon as she judged it safe to speak. 'Tomorrow, I mean.'

'What?'

‘Tomorrow afternoon. I can’t come.’

‘Why not?’

‘Oh, the usual reason. It’s started early this time.’

For a moment he was violently angry. During the month that he had known her the nature of his desire for her had changed. At the beginning there had been little true sensuality in it. Their first love-making had been simply an act of the will. But after the second time it was different. The smell of her hair, the taste of her mouth, the feeling of her skin seemed to have got inside him, or into the air all round him. She had become a physical necessity, something that he not only wanted but felt that he had a right to. When she said that she could not come, he had the feeling that she was cheating him. But just at this moment the crowd pressed them together and their hands accidentally met. She gave the tips of his fingers a quick squeeze that seemed to invite not desire but affection. It struck him that when one lived with a woman this particular disappointment must be a normal, recurring event; and a deep tenderness, such as he had not felt for her before, suddenly took hold of him. He wished that they were a married couple of ten years’ standing. He wished that he were walking through the streets with her just as they were doing now but openly and without fear, talking of trivialities and buying odds and ends for the household. He wished above all that they had some place where they could be alone together without feeling the obligation to make love every time they met. It was not actually at that moment, but at some time on the following day, that the idea of renting Mr Charrington’s room had occurred to him. When he suggested it to Julia she had agreed with unexpected readiness. Both of them knew that it was lunacy. It was as though they were intentionally stepping nearer to their graves. As he sat waiting on the edge of the bed he thought again of the cellars of the Ministry of Love. It was curious how that predestined horror moved in and out of one’s consciousness. There it lay, fixed in future times, preceding death as surely as 99 precedes 100. One could not avoid it, but one could perhaps postpone it: and yet instead, every now and again, by a conscious, wilful act, one chose to shorten the interval before it happened.

At this moment there was a quick step on the stairs. Julia burst

into the room. She was carrying a tool-bag of coarse brown canvas, such as he had sometimes seen her carrying to and fro at the Ministry. He started forward to take her in his arms, but she disengaged herself rather hurriedly, partly because she was still holding the tool-bag.

'Half a second,' she said. 'Just let me show you what I've brought. Did you bring some of that filthy Victory Coffee? I thought you would. You can chuck it away again, because we shan't be needing it. Look here.'

She fell on her knees, threw open the bag, and tumbled out some spanners and a screwdriver that filled the top part of it. Underneath were a number of neat paper packets. The first packet that she passed to Winston had a strange and yet vaguely familiar feeling. It was filled with some kind of heavy, sand-like stuff which yielded wherever you touched it.

'It isn't sugar?' he said.

'Real sugar. Not saccharine, sugar. And here's a loaf of bread — proper white bread, not our bloody stuff — and a little pot of jam. And here's a tin of milk — but look! This is the one I'm really proud of. I had to wrap a bit of sacking round it, because — — '

But she did not need to tell him why she had wrapped it up. The smell was already filling the room, a rich hot smell which seemed like an emanation from his early childhood, but which one did occasionally meet with even now, blowing down a passage-way before a door slammed, or diffusing itself mysteriously in a crowded street, sniffed for an instant and then lost again.

'It's coffee,' he murmured, 'real coffee.'

'It's Inner Party coffee. There's a whole kilo here,' she said.

'How did you manage to get hold of all these things?'

'It's all Inner Party stuff. There's nothing those swine don't have, nothing. But of course waiters and servants and people pinch things, and — look, I got a little packet of tea as well.'

Winston had squatted down beside her. He tore open a corner of the packet.

'It's real tea. Not blackberry leaves.'

'There's been a lot of tea about lately. They've captured India, or something,' she said vaguely. 'But listen, dear. I want you to turn

your back on me for three minutes. Go and sit on the other side of the bed. Don't go too near the window. And don't turn round till I tell you.'

Winston gazed abstractedly through the muslin curtain. Down in the yard the red-armed woman was still marching to and fro between the washtub and the line. She took two more pegs out of her mouth and sang with deep feeling:

They sye that time 'eals all things,
They sye you can always forget;
But the smiles an' the tears acrorss the years
They twist my 'eart-strings yet!

She knew the whole drivelling song by heart, it seemed. Her voice floated upward with the sweet summer air, very tuneful, charged with a sort of happy melancholy. One had the feeling that she would have been perfectly content, if the June evening had been endless and the supply of clothes inexhaustible, to remain there for a thousand years, pegging out diapers and singing rubbish. It struck him as a curious fact that he had never heard a member of the Party singing alone and spontaneously. It would even have seemed slightly unorthodox, a dangerous eccentricity, like talking to oneself. Perhaps it was only when people were somewhere near the starvation level that they had anything to sing about.

'You can turn round now,' said Julia.

He turned round, and for a second almost failed to recognize her. What he had actually expected was to see her naked. But she was not naked. The transformation that had happened was much more surprising than that. She had painted her face.

She must have slipped into some shop in the proletarian quarters and bought herself a complete set of make-up materials. Her lips were deeply reddened, her cheeks rouged, her nose powdered; there was even a touch of something under the eyes to make them brighter. It was not very skilfully done, but Winston's standards in such matters were not high. He had never before seen or imagined a woman of the Party with cosmetics on her face. The improvement in her appearance was startling. With just a few dabs of colour in the right places she had become not only very much prettier, but, above all, far more feminine. Her short hair and boyish overalls merely

added to the effect. As he took her in his arms a wave of synthetic violets flooded his nostrils. He remembered the half-darkness of a basement kitchen, and a woman's cavernous mouth. It was the very same scent that she had used; but at the moment it did not seem to matter.

'Scent too!' he said.

'Yes, dear, scent too. And do you know what I'm going to do next? I'm going to get hold of a real woman's frock from somewhere and wear it instead of these bloody trousers. I'll wear silk stockings and high-heeled shoes! In this room I'm going to be a woman, not a Party comrade.'

They flung their clothes off and climbed into the huge mahogany bed. It was the first time that he had stripped himself naked in her presence. Until now he had been too much ashamed of his pale and meagre body, with the varicose veins standing out on his calves and the discoloured patch over his ankle. There were no sheets, but the blanket they lay on was threadbare and smooth, and the size and springiness of the bed astonished both of them. 'It's sure to be full of bugs, but who cares?' said Julia. One never saw a double bed nowadays, except in the homes of the proles. Winston had occasionally slept in one in his boyhood: Julia had never been in one before, so far as she could remember.

Presently they fell asleep for a little while. When Winston woke up the hands of the clock had crept round to nearly nine. He did not stir, because Julia was sleeping with her head in the crook of his arm. Most of her make-up had transferred itself to his own face or the bolster, but a light stain of rouge still brought out the beauty of her cheekbone. A yellow ray from the sinking sun fell across the foot of the bed and lighted up the fireplace, where the water in the pan was boiling fast. Down in the yard the woman had stopped singing, but the faint shouts of children floated in from the street. He wondered vaguely whether in the abolished past it had been a normal experience to lie in bed like this, in the cool of a summer evening, a man and a woman with no clothes on, making love when they chose, talking of what they chose, not feeling any compulsion to get up, simply lying there and listening to peaceful sounds outside. Surely there could never have been a time when that seemed ordinary? Julia

woke up, rubbed her eyes, and raised herself on her elbow to look at the oilstove.

'Half that water's boiled away,' she said. 'I'll get up and make some coffee in another moment. We've got an hour. What time do they cut the lights off at your flats?'

'Twenty-three thirty.'

'It's twenty-three at the hostel. But you have to get in earlier than that, because — Hi! Get out, you filthy brute!'

She suddenly twisted herself over in the bed, seized a shoe from the floor, and sent it hurtling into the corner with a boyish jerk of her arm, exactly as he had seen her fling the dictionary at Goldstein, that morning during the Two Minutes Hate.

'What was it?' he said in surprise.

'A rat. I saw him stick his beastly nose out of the wainscoting. There's a hole down there. I gave him a good fright, anyway.'

'Rats!' murmured Winston. 'In this room!'

'They're all over the place,' said Julia indifferently as she lay down again. 'We've even got them in the kitchen at the hostel. Some parts of London are swarming with them. Did you know they attack children? Yes, they do. In some of these streets a woman daren't leave a baby alone for two minutes. It's the great huge brown ones that do it. And the nasty thing is that the brutes always — — '

'DON'T GO ON!' said Winston, with his eyes tightly shut.

'Dearest! You've gone quite pale. What's the matter? Do they make you feel sick?'

'Of all horrors in the world — a rat!'

She pressed herself against him and wound her limbs round him, as though to reassure him with the warmth of her body. He did not reopen his eyes immediately. For several moments he had had the feeling of being back in a nightmare which had recurred from time to time throughout his life. It was always very much the same. He was standing in front of a wall of darkness, and on the other side of it there was something unendurable, something too dreadful to be faced. In the dream his deepest feeling was always one of self-deception, because he did in fact know what was behind the wall of darkness. With a deadly effort, like wrenching a piece out of his own brain, he could even have dragged the thing into the open. He always

woke up without discovering what it was: but somehow it was connected with what Julia had been saying when he cut her short.

'I'm sorry,' he said, 'it's nothing. I don't like rats, that's all.'

'Don't worry, dear, we're not going to have the filthy brutes in here. I'll stuff the hole with a bit of sacking before we go. And next time we come here I'll bring some plaster and bung it up properly.'

Already the black instant of panic was half-forgotten. Feeling slightly ashamed of himself, he sat up against the bedhead. Julia got out of bed, pulled on her overalls, and made the coffee. The smell that rose from the saucepan was so powerful and exciting that they shut the window lest anybody outside should notice it and become inquisitive. What was even better than the taste of the coffee was the silky texture given to it by the sugar, a thing Winston had almost forgotten after years of saccharine. With one hand in her pocket and a piece of bread and jam in the other, Julia wandered about the room, glancing indifferently at the bookcase, pointing out the best way of repairing the gateleg table, plumping herself down in the ragged armchair to see if it was comfortable, and examining the absurd twelve-hour clock with a sort of tolerant amusement. She brought the glass paperweight over to the bed to have a look at it in a better light. He took it out of her hand, fascinated, as always, by the soft, rainwatery appearance of the glass.

'What is it, do you think?' said Julia.

'I don't think it's anything — I mean, I don't think it was ever put to any use. That's what I like about it. It's a little chunk of history that they've forgotten to alter. It's a message from a hundred years ago, if one knew how to read it.'

'And that picture over there' — she nodded at the engraving on the opposite wall— 'would that be a hundred years old?'

'More. Two hundred, I dare say. One can't tell. It's impossible to discover the age of anything nowadays.'

She went over to look at it. 'Here's where that brute stuck his nose out,' she said, kicking the wainscoting immediately below the picture. 'What is this place? I've seen it before somewhere.'

'It's a church, or at least it used to be. St Clement Danes its name was.' The fragment of rhyme that Mr Charrington had taught him came back into his head, and he added half-nostalgically: "Oranges

and lemons, say the bells of St Clement's!"

To his astonishment she capped the line:

'You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St Martin's,

When will you pay me? say the bells of Old Bailey — — '

'I can't remember how it goes on after that. But anyway I remember it ends up, "Here comes a candle to light you to bed, here comes a chopper to chop off your head!"'

It was like the two halves of a countersign. But there must be another line after 'the bells of Old Bailey'. Perhaps it could be dug out of Mr Charrington's memory, if he were suitably prompted.

'Who taught you that?' he said.

'My grandfather. He used to say it to me when I was a little girl. He was vaporized when I was eight — at any rate, he disappeared. I wonder what a lemon was,' she added inconsequently. 'I've seen oranges. They're a kind of round yellow fruit with a thick skin.'

'I can remember lemons,' said Winston. 'They were quite common in the fifties. They were so sour that it set your teeth on edge even to smell them.'

'I bet that picture's got bugs behind it,' said Julia. 'I'll take it down and give it a good clean some day. I suppose it's almost time we were leaving. I must start washing this paint off. What a bore! I'll get the lipstick off your face afterwards.'

Winston did not get up for a few minutes more. The room was darkening. He turned over towards the light and lay gazing into the glass paperweight. The inexhaustibly interesting thing was not the fragment of coral but the interior of the glass itself. There was such a depth of it, and yet it was almost as transparent as air. It was as though the surface of the glass had been the arch of the sky, enclosing a tiny world with its atmosphere complete. He had the feeling that he could get inside it, and that in fact he was inside it, along with the mahogany bed and the gateleg table, and the clock and the steel engraving and the paperweight itself. The paperweight was the room he was in, and the coral was Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity at the heart of the crystal.

Chapter 5

Syme had vanished. A morning came, and he was missing from work: a few thoughtless people commented on his absence. On the next day nobody mentioned him. On the third day Winston went into the vestibule of the Records Department to look at the notice-board. One of the notices carried a printed list of the members of the Chess Committee, of whom Syme had been one. It looked almost exactly as it had looked before — nothing had been crossed out — but it was one name shorter. It was enough. Syme had ceased to exist: he had never existed.

The weather was baking hot. In the labyrinthine Ministry the windowless, air-conditioned rooms kept their normal temperature, but outside the pavements scorched one's feet and the stench of the Tubes at the rush hours was a horror. The preparations for Hate Week were in full swing, and the staffs of all the Ministries were working overtime. Processions, meetings, military parades, lectures, waxworks, displays, film shows, telescreen programmes all had to be organized; stands had to be erected, effigies built, slogans coined, songs written, rumours circulated, photographs faked. Julia's unit in the Fiction Department had been taken off the production of novels and was rushing out a series of atrocity pamphlets. Winston, in addition to his regular work, spent long periods every day in going through back files of 'The Times' and altering and embellishing news items which were to be quoted in speeches. Late at night, when crowds of rowdy proles roamed the streets, the town had a curiously febrile air. The rocket bombs crashed oftener than ever, and sometimes in the far distance there were enormous explosions which no one could explain and about which there were wild rumours.

The new tune which was to be the theme-song of Hate Week (the Hate Song, it was called) had already been composed and was being endlessly plugged on the telescreens. It had a savage, barking rhythm which could not exactly be called music, but resembled the beating of a drum. Roared out by hundreds of voices to the tramp of marching feet, it was terrifying. The proles had taken a fancy to it, and in the midnight streets it competed with the still-popular 'It was

only a hopeless fancy'. The Parsons children played it at all hours of the night and day, unbearably, on a comb and a piece of toilet paper. Winston's evenings were fuller than ever. Squads of volunteers, organized by Parsons, were preparing the street for Hate Week, stitching banners, painting posters, erecting flagstaffs on the roofs, and perilously slinging wires across the street for the reception of streamers. Parsons boasted that Victory Mansions alone would display four hundred metres of bunting. He was in his native element and as happy as a lark. The heat and the manual work had even given him a pretext for reverting to shorts and an open shirt in the evenings. He was everywhere at once, pushing, pulling, sawing, hammering, improvising, jollying everyone along with comradely exhortations and giving out from every fold of his body what seemed an inexhaustible supply of acrid-smelling sweat.

A new poster had suddenly appeared all over London. It had no caption, and represented simply the monstrous figure of a Eurasian soldier, three or four metres high, striding forward with expressionless Mongolian face and enormous boots, a submachine gun pointed from his hip. From whatever angle you looked at the poster, the muzzle of the gun, magnified by the foreshortening, seemed to be pointed straight at you. The thing had been plastered on every blank space on every wall, even outnumbering the portraits of Big Brother. The proles, normally apathetic about the war, were being lashed into one of their periodical frenzies of patriotism. As though to harmonize with the general mood, the rocket bombs had been killing larger numbers of people than usual. One fell on a crowded film theatre in Stepney, burying several hundred victims among the ruins. The whole population of the neighbourhood turned out for a long, trailing funeral which went on for hours and was in effect an indignation meeting. Another bomb fell on a piece of waste ground which was used as a playground and several dozen children were blown to pieces. There were further angry demonstrations, Goldstein was burned in effigy, hundreds of copies of the poster of the Eurasian soldier were torn down and added to the flames, and a number of shops were looted in the turmoil; then a rumour flew round that spies were directing the rocket bombs by means of wireless waves, and an old couple who were suspected of being of

foreign extraction had their house set on fire and perished of suffocation.

In the room over Mr Charrington's shop, when they could get there, Julia and Winston lay side by side on a stripped bed under the open window, naked for the sake of coolness. The rat had never come back, but the bugs had multiplied hideously in the heat. It did not seem to matter. Dirty or clean, the room was paradise. As soon as they arrived they would sprinkle everything with pepper bought on the black market, tear off their clothes, and make love with sweating bodies, then fall asleep and wake to find that the bugs had rallied and were massing for the counter-attack.

Four, five, six — seven times they met during the month of June. Winston had dropped his habit of drinking gin at all hours. He seemed to have lost the need for it. He had grown fatter, his varicose ulcer had subsided, leaving only a brown stain on the skin above his ankle, his fits of coughing in the early morning had stopped. The process of life had ceased to be intolerable, he had no longer any impulse to make faces at the telescreen or shout curses at the top of his voice. Now that they had a secure hiding-place, almost a home, it did not even seem a hardship that they could only meet infrequently and for a couple of hours at a time. What mattered was that the room over the junk-shop should exist. To know that it was there, inviolate, was almost the same as being in it. The room was a world, a pocket of the past where extinct animals could walk. Mr Charrington, thought Winston, was another extinct animal. He usually stopped to talk with Mr Charrington for a few minutes on his way upstairs. The old man seemed seldom or never to go out of doors, and on the other hand to have almost no customers. He led a ghostlike existence between the tiny, dark shop, and an even tinier back kitchen where he prepared his meals and which contained, among other things, an unbelievably ancient gramophone with an enormous horn. He seemed glad of the opportunity to talk. Wandering about among his worthless stock, with his long nose and thick spectacles and his bowed shoulders in the velvet jacket, he had always vaguely the air of being a collector rather than a tradesman. With a sort of faded enthusiasm he would finger this scrap of rubbish or that — a china bottle-stopper, the painted lid of a broken snuffbox, a pinchbeck

locket containing a strand of some long-dead baby's hair — never asking that Winston should buy it, merely that he should admire it. To talk to him was like listening to the tinkling of a worn-out musical-box. He had dragged out from the corners of his memory some more fragments of forgotten rhymes. There was one about four and twenty blackbirds, and another about a cow with a crumpled horn, and another about the death of poor Cock Robin. 'It just occurred to me you might be interested,' he would say with a deprecating little laugh whenever he produced a new fragment. But he could never recall more than a few lines of any one rhyme.

Both of them knew — in a way, it was never out of their minds that what was now happening could not last long. There were times when the fact of impending death seemed as palpable as the bed they lay on, and they would cling together with a sort of despairing sensuality, like a damned soul grasping at his last morsel of pleasure when the clock is within five minutes of striking. But there were also times when they had the illusion not only of safety but of permanence. So long as they were actually in this room, they both felt, no harm could come to them. Getting there was difficult and dangerous, but the room itself was sanctuary. It was as when Winston had gazed into the heart of the paperweight, with the feeling that it would be possible to get inside that glassy world, and that once inside it time could be arrested. Often they gave themselves up to daydreams of escape. Their luck would hold indefinitely, and they would carry on their intrigue, just like this, for the remainder of their natural lives. Or Katharine would die, and by subtle manoeuvrings Winston and Julia would succeed in getting married. Or they would commit suicide together. Or they would disappear, alter themselves out of recognition, learn to speak with proletarian accents, get jobs in a factory and live out their lives undetected in a back-street. It was all nonsense, as they both knew. In reality there was no escape. Even the one plan that was practicable, suicide, they had no intention of carrying out. To hang on from day to day and from week to week, spinning out a present that had no future, seemed an unconquerable instinct, just as one's lungs will always draw the next breath so long as there is air available.

Sometimes, too, they talked of engaging in active rebellion

against the Party, but with no notion of how to take the first step. Even if the fabulous Brotherhood was a reality, there still remained the difficulty of finding one's way into it. He told her of the strange intimacy that existed, or seemed to exist, between himself and O'Brien, and of the impulse he sometimes felt, simply to walk into O'Brien's presence, announce that he was the enemy of the Party, and demand his help. Curiously enough, this did not strike her as an impossibly rash thing to do. She was used to judging people by their faces, and it seemed natural to her that Winston should believe O'Brien to be trustworthy on the strength of a single flash of the eyes. Moreover she took it for granted that everyone, or nearly everyone, secretly hated the Party and would break the rules if he thought it safe to do so. But she refused to believe that widespread, organized opposition existed or could exist. The tales about Goldstein and his underground army, she said, were simply a lot of rubbish which the Party had invented for its own purposes and which you had to pretend to believe in. Times beyond number, at Party rallies and spontaneous demonstrations, she had shouted at the top of her voice for the execution of people whose names she had never heard and in whose supposed crimes she had not the faintest belief. When public trials were happening she had taken her place in the detachments from the Youth League who surrounded the courts from morning to night, chanting at intervals 'Death to the traitors!' During the Two Minutes Hate she always excelled all others in shouting insults at Goldstein. Yet she had only the dimmest idea of who Goldstein was and what doctrines he was supposed to represent. She had grown up since the Revolution and was too young to remember the ideological battles of the fifties and sixties. Such a thing as an independent political movement was outside her imagination: and in any case the Party was invincible. It would always exist, and it would always be the same. You could only rebel against it by secret disobedience or, at most, by isolated acts of violence such as killing somebody or blowing something up.

In some ways she was far more acute than Winston, and far less susceptible to Party propaganda. Once when he happened in some connexion to mention the war against Eurasia, she startled him by saying casually that in her opinion the war was not happening. The

rocket bombs which fell daily on London were probably fired by the Government of Oceania itself, 'just to keep people frightened'. This was an idea that had literally never occurred to him. She also stirred a sort of envy in him by telling him that during the Two Minutes Hate her great difficulty was to avoid bursting out laughing. But she only questioned the teachings of the Party when they in some way touched upon her own life. Often she was ready to accept the official mythology, simply because the difference between truth and falsehood did not seem important to her. She believed, for instance, having learnt it at school, that the Party had invented aeroplanes. (In his own schooldays, Winston remembered, in the late fifties, it was only the helicopter that the Party claimed to have invented; a dozen years later, when Julia was at school, it was already claiming the aeroplane; one generation more, and it would be claiming the steam engine.) And when he told her that aeroplanes had been in existence before he was born and long before the Revolution, the fact struck her as totally uninteresting. After all, what did it matter who had invented aeroplanes? It was rather more of a shock to him when he discovered from some chance remark that she did not remember that Oceania, four years ago, had been at war with Eastasia and at peace with Eurasia. It was true that she regarded the whole war as a sham: but apparently she had not even noticed that the name of the enemy had changed. 'I thought we'd always been at war with Eurasia,' she said vaguely. It frightened him a little. The invention of aeroplanes dated from long before her birth, but the switchover in the war had happened only four years ago, well after she was grown up. He argued with her about it for perhaps a quarter of an hour. In the end he succeeded in forcing her memory back until she did dimly recall that at one time Eastasia and not Eurasia had been the enemy. But the issue still struck her as unimportant. 'Who cares?' she said impatiently. 'It's always one bloody war after another, and one knows the news is all lies anyway.'

Sometimes he talked to her of the Records Department and the impudent forgeries that he committed there. Such things did not appear to horrify her. She did not feel the abyss opening beneath her feet at the thought of lies becoming truths. He told her the story of Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford and the momentous slip of paper

which he had once held between his fingers. It did not make much impression on her. At first, indeed, she failed to grasp the point of the story.

'Were they friends of yours?' she said.

'No, I never knew them. They were Inner Party members. Besides, they were far older men than I was. They belonged to the old days, before the Revolution. I barely knew them by sight.'

'Then what was there to worry about? People are being killed off all the time, aren't they?'

He tried to make her understand. 'This was an exceptional case. It wasn't just a question of somebody being killed. Do you realize that the past, starting from yesterday, has been actually abolished? If it survives anywhere, it's in a few solid objects with no words attached to them, like that lump of glass there. Already we know almost literally nothing about the Revolution and the years before the Revolution. Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book has been rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street and building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And that process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right. I know, of course, that the past is falsified, but it would never be possible for me to prove it, even when I did the falsification myself. After the thing is done, no evidence ever remains. The only evidence is inside my own mind, and I don't know with any certainty that any other human being shares my memories. Just in that one instance, in my whole life, I did possess actual concrete evidence after the event — years after it.'

'And what good was that?'

'It was no good, because I threw it away a few minutes later. But if the same thing happened today, I should keep it.'

'Well, I wouldn't!' said Julia. 'I'm quite ready to take risks, but only for something worth while, not for bits of old newspaper. What could you have done with it even if you had kept it?'

'Not much, perhaps. But it was evidence. It might have planted a few doubts here and there, supposing that I'd dared to show it to anybody. I don't imagine that we can alter anything in our own lifetime. But one can imagine little knots of resistance springing up

here and there — small groups of people banding themselves together, and gradually growing, and even leaving a few records behind, so that the next generations can carry on where we leave off.'

'I'm not interested in the next generation, dear. I'm interested in US.'

'You're only a rebel from the waist downwards,' he told her.

She thought this brilliantly witty and flung her arms round him in delight.

In the ramifications of party doctrine she had not the faintest interest. Whenever he began to talk of the principles of Ingsoc, doublethink, the mutability of the past, and the denial of objective reality, and to use Newspeak words, she became bored and confused and said that she never paid any attention to that kind of thing. One knew that it was all rubbish, so why let oneself be worried by it? She knew when to cheer and when to boo, and that was all one needed. If he persisted in talking of such subjects, she had a disconcerting habit of falling asleep. She was one of those people who can go to sleep at any hour and in any position. Talking to her, he realized how easy it was to present an appearance of orthodoxy while having no grasp whatever of what orthodoxy meant. In a way, the world-view of the Party imposed itself most successfully on people incapable of understanding it. They could be made to accept the most flagrant violations of reality, because they never fully grasped the enormity of what was demanded of them, and were not sufficiently interested in public events to notice what was happening. By lack of understanding they remained sane. They simply swallowed everything, and what they swallowed did them no harm, because it left no residue behind, just as a grain of corn will pass undigested through the body of a bird.

Chapter 6

It had happened at last. The expected message had come. All his life, it seemed to him, he had been waiting for this to happen.

He was walking down the long corridor at the Ministry and he was almost at the spot where Julia had slipped the note into his hand when he became aware that someone larger than himself was walking just behind him. The person, whoever it was, gave a small cough, evidently as a prelude to speaking. Winston stopped abruptly and turned. It was O'Brien.

At last they were face to face, and it seemed that his only impulse was to run away. His heart bounded violently. He would have been incapable of speaking. O'Brien, however, had continued forward in the same movement, laying a friendly hand for a moment on Winston's arm, so that the two of them were walking side by side. He began speaking with the peculiar grave courtesy that differentiated him from the majority of Inner Party members.

'I had been hoping for an opportunity of talking to you,' he said. 'I was reading one of your Newspeak articles in 'The Times' the other day. You take a scholarly interest in Newspeak, I believe?'

Winston had recovered part of his self-possession. 'Hardly scholarly,' he said. 'I'm only an amateur. It's not my subject. I have never had anything to do with the actual construction of the language.'

'But you write it very elegantly,' said O'Brien. 'That is not only my own opinion. I was talking recently to a friend of yours who is certainly an expert. His name has slipped my memory for the moment.'

Again Winston's heart stirred painfully. It was inconceivable that this was anything other than a reference to Syme. But Syme was not only dead, he was abolished, an unperson. Any identifiable reference to him would have been mortally dangerous. O'Brien's remark must obviously have been intended as a signal, a codeword. By sharing a small act of thoughtcrime he had turned the two of them into accomplices. They had continued to stroll slowly down the corridor, but now O'Brien halted. With the curious, disarming friendliness that

he always managed to put in to the gesture he resettled his spectacles on his nose. Then he went on:

'What I had really intended to say was that in your article I noticed you had used two words which have become obsolete. But they have only become so very recently. Have you seen the tenth edition of the Newspeak Dictionary?'

'No,' said Winston. 'I didn't think it had been issued yet. We are still using the ninth in the Records Department.'

'The tenth edition is not due to appear for some months, I believe. But a few advance copies have been circulated. I have one myself. It might interest you to look at it, perhaps?'

'Very much so,' said Winston, immediately seeing where this tended.

'Some of the new developments are most ingenious. The reduction in the number of verbs — that is the point that will appeal to you, I think. Let me see, shall I send a messenger to you with the dictionary? But I am afraid I invariably forget anything of that kind. Perhaps you could pick it up at my flat at some time that suited you? Wait. Let me give you my address.'

They were standing in front of a telescreen. Somewhat absent-mindedly O'Brien felt two of his pockets and then produced a small leather-covered notebook and a gold ink-pencil. Immediately beneath the telescreen, in such a position that anyone who was watching at the other end of the instrument could read what he was writing, he scribbled an address, tore out the page and handed it to Winston.

'I am usually at home in the evenings,' he said. 'If not, my servant will give you the dictionary.'

He was gone, leaving Winston holding the scrap of paper, which this time there was no need to conceal. Nevertheless he carefully memorized what was written on it, and some hours later dropped it into the memory hole along with a mass of other papers.

They had been talking to one another for a couple of minutes at the most. There was only one meaning that the episode could possibly have. It had been contrived as a way of letting Winston know O'Brien's address. This was necessary, because except by direct enquiry it was never possible to discover where anyone lived. There were no directories of any kind. 'If you ever want to see me,

this is where I can be found,' was what O'Brien had been saying to him. Perhaps there would even be a message concealed somewhere in the dictionary. But at any rate, one thing was certain. The conspiracy that he had dreamed of did exist, and he had reached the outer edges of it.

He knew that sooner or later he would obey O'Brien's summons. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps after a long delay — he was not certain. What was happening was only the working-out of a process that had started years ago. The first step had been a secret, involuntary thought, the second had been the opening of the diary. He had moved from thoughts to words, and now from words to actions. The last step was something that would happen in the Ministry of Love. He had accepted it. The end was contained in the beginning. But it was frightening: or, more exactly, it was like a foretaste of death, like being a little less alive. Even while he was speaking to O'Brien, when the meaning of the words had sunk in, a chilly shuddering feeling had taken possession of his body. He had the sensation of stepping into the dampness of a grave, and it was not much better because he had always known that the grave was there and waiting for him.

Chapter 7

Winston had woken up with his eyes full of tears. Julia rolled sleepily against him, murmuring something that might have been 'What's the matter?'

'I dreamt— ' he began, and stopped short. It was too complex to be put into words. There was the dream itself, and there was a memory connected with it that had swum into his mind in the few seconds after waking.

He lay back with his eyes shut, still sodden in the atmosphere of the dream. It was a vast, luminous dream in which his whole life seemed to stretch out before him like a landscape on a summer evening after rain. It had all occurred inside the glass paperweight, but the surface of the glass was the dome of the sky, and inside the dome everything was flooded with clear soft light in which one could see into interminable distances. The dream had also been comprehended by — indeed, in some sense it had consisted in — a gesture of the arm made by his mother, and made again thirty years later by the Jewish woman he had seen on the news film, trying to shelter the small boy from the bullets, before the helicopter blew them both to pieces.

'Do you know,' he said, 'that until this moment I believed I had murdered my mother?'

'Why did you murder her?' said Julia, almost asleep.

'I didn't murder her. Not physically.'

In the dream he had remembered his last glimpse of his mother, and within a few moments of waking the cluster of small events surrounding it had all come back. It was a memory that he must have deliberately pushed out of his consciousness over many years. He was not certain of the date, but he could not have been less than ten years old, possibly twelve, when it had happened.

His father had disappeared some time earlier, how much earlier he could not remember. He remembered better the rackety, uneasy circumstances of the time: the periodical panics about air-raids and the sheltering in Tube stations, the piles of rubble everywhere, the unintelligible proclamations posted at street corners, the gangs of

youths in shirts all the same colour, the enormous queues outside the bakeries, the intermittent machine-gun fire in the distance — above all, the fact that there was never enough to eat. He remembered long afternoons spent with other boys in scrounging round dustbins and rubbish heaps, picking out the ribs of cabbage leaves, potato peelings, sometimes even scraps of stale breadcrust from which they carefully scraped away the cinders; and also in waiting for the passing of trucks which travelled over a certain route and were known to carry cattle feed, and which, when they jolted over the bad patches in the road, sometimes spilt a few fragments of oil-cake.

When his father disappeared, his mother did not show any surprise or any violent grief, but a sudden change came over her. She seemed to have become completely spiritless. It was evident even to Winston that she was waiting for something that she knew must happen. She did everything that was needed — cooked, washed, mended, made the bed, swept the floor, dusted the mantelpiece — always very slowly and with a curious lack of superfluous motion, like an artist's lay-figure moving of its own accord. Her large shapely body seemed to relapse naturally into stillness. For hours at a time she would sit almost immobile on the bed, nursing his young sister, a tiny, ailing, very silent child of two or three, with a face made simian by thinness. Very occasionally she would take Winston in her arms and press him against her for a long time without saying anything. He was aware, in spite of his youthfulness and selfishness, that this was somehow connected with the never-mentioned thing that was about to happen.

He remembered the room where they lived, a dark, close-smelling room that seemed half filled by a bed with a white counterpane. There was a gas ring in the fender, and a shelf where food was kept, and on the landing outside there was a brown earthenware sink, common to several rooms. He remembered his mother's statuesque body bending over the gas ring to stir at something in a saucepan. Above all he remembered his continuous hunger, and the fierce sordid battles at mealtimes. He would ask his mother naggingly, over and over again, why there was not more food, he would shout and storm at her (he even remembered the tones of his voice, which was beginning to break prematurely and sometimes boomed in a peculiar

way), or he would attempt a snivelling note of pathos in his efforts to get more than his share. His mother was quite ready to give him more than his share. She took it for granted that he, 'the boy', should have the biggest portion; but however much she gave him he invariably demanded more. At every meal she would beseech him not to be selfish and to remember that his little sister was sick and also needed food, but it was no use. He would cry out with rage when she stopped ladling, he would try to wrench the saucepan and spoon out of her hands, he would grab bits from his sister's plate. He knew that he was starving the other two, but he could not help it; he even felt that he had a right to do it. The clamorous hunger in his belly seemed to justify him. Between meals, if his mother did not stand guard, he was constantly pilfering at the wretched store of food on the shelf.

One day a chocolate ration was issued. There had been no such issue for weeks or months past. He remembered quite clearly that precious little morsel of chocolate. It was a two-ounce slab (they still talked about ounces in those days) between the three of them. It was obvious that it ought to be divided into three equal parts. Suddenly, as though he were listening to somebody else, Winston heard himself demanding in a loud booming voice that he should be given the whole piece. His mother told him not to be greedy. There was a long, nagging argument that went round and round, with shouts, whines, tears, remonstrances, bargainings. His tiny sister, clinging to her mother with both hands, exactly like a baby monkey, sat looking over her shoulder at him with large, mournful eyes. In the end his mother broke off three-quarters of the chocolate and gave it to Winston, giving the other quarter to his sister. The little girl took hold of it and looked at it dully, perhaps not knowing what it was. Winston stood watching her for a moment. Then with a sudden swift spring he had snatched the piece of chocolate out of his sister's hand and was fleeing for the door.

'Winston, Winston!' his mother called after him. 'Come back! Give your sister back her chocolate!'

He stopped, but did not come back. His mother's anxious eyes were fixed on his face. Even now he was thinking about the thing, he did not know what it was that was on the point of happening. His

sister, conscious of having been robbed of something, had set up a feeble wail. His mother drew her arm round the child and pressed its face against her breast. Something in the gesture told him that his sister was dying. He turned and fled down the stairs, with the chocolate growing sticky in his hand.

He never saw his mother again. After he had devoured the chocolate he felt somewhat ashamed of himself and hung about in the streets for several hours, until hunger drove him home. When he came back his mother had disappeared. This was already becoming normal at that time. Nothing was gone from the room except his mother and his sister. They had not taken any clothes, not even his mother's overcoat. To this day he did not know with any certainty that his mother was dead. It was perfectly possible that she had merely been sent to a forced-labour camp. As for his sister, she might have been removed, like Winston himself, to one of the colonies for homeless children (Reclamation Centres, they were called) which had grown up as a result of the civil war, or she might have been sent to the labour camp along with his mother, or simply left somewhere or other to die.

The dream was still vivid in his mind, especially the enveloping protecting gesture of the arm in which its whole meaning seemed to be contained. His mind went back to another dream of two months ago. Exactly as his mother had sat on the dingy white-quilted bed, with the child clinging to her, so she had sat in the sunken ship, far underneath him, and drowning deeper every minute, but still looking up at him through the darkening water.

He told Julia the story of his mother's disappearance. Without opening her eyes she rolled over and settled herself into a more comfortable position.

'I expect you were a beastly little swine in those days,' she said indistinctly. 'All children are swine.'

'Yes. But the real point of the story — — '

From her breathing it was evident that she was going off to sleep again. He would have liked to continue talking about his mother. He did not suppose, from what he could remember of her, that she had been an unusual woman, still less an intelligent one; and yet she had possessed a kind of nobility, a kind of purity, simply because the

standards that she obeyed were private ones. Her feelings were her own, and could not be altered from outside. It would not have occurred to her that an action which is ineffectual thereby becomes meaningless. If you loved someone, you loved him, and when you had nothing else to give, you still gave him love. When the last of the chocolate was gone, his mother had clasped the child in her arms. It was no use, it changed nothing, it did not produce more chocolate, it did not avert the child's death or her own; but it seemed natural to her to do it. The refugee woman in the boat had also covered the little boy with her arm, which was no more use against the bullets than a sheet of paper. The terrible thing that the Party had done was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feelings, were of no account, while at the same time robbing you of all power over the material world. When once you were in the grip of the Party, what you felt or did not feel, what you did or refrained from doing, made literally no difference. Whatever happened you vanished, and neither you nor your actions were ever heard of again. You were lifted clean out of the stream of history. And yet to the people of only two generations ago this would not have seemed all-important, because they were not attempting to alter history. They were governed by private loyalties which they did not question. What mattered were individual relationships, and a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself. The proles, it suddenly occurred to him, had remained in this condition. They were not loyal to a party or a country or an idea, they were loyal to one another. For the first time in his life he did not despise the proles or think of them merely as an inert force which would one day spring to life and regenerate the world. The proles had stayed human. They had not become hardened inside. They had held on to the primitive emotions which he himself had to re-learn by conscious effort. And in thinking this he remembered, without apparent relevance, how a few weeks ago he had seen a severed hand lying on the pavement and had kicked it into the gutter as though it had been a cabbage-stalk.

'The proles are human beings,' he said aloud. 'We are not human.'

'Why not?' said Julia, who had woken up again.

He thought for a little while. ‘Has it ever occurred to you,’ he said, ‘that the best thing for us to do would be simply to walk out of here before it’s too late, and never see each other again?’

‘Yes, dear, it has occurred to me, several times. But I’m not going to do it, all the same.’

‘We’ve been lucky,’ he said ‘but it can’t last much longer. You’re young. You look normal and innocent. If you keep clear of people like me, you might stay alive for another fifty years.’

‘No. I’ve thought it all out. What you do, I’m going to do. And don’t be too downhearted. I’m rather good at staying alive.’

‘We may be together for another six months — a year — there’s no knowing. At the end we’re certain to be apart. Do you realize how utterly alone we shall be? When once they get hold of us there will be nothing, literally nothing, that either of us can do for the other. If I confess, they’ll shoot you, and if I refuse to confess, they’ll shoot you just the same. Nothing that I can do or say, or stop myself from saying, will put off your death for as much as five minutes. Neither of us will even know whether the other is alive or dead. We shall be utterly without power of any kind. The one thing that matters is that we shouldn’t betray one another, although even that can’t make the slightest difference.’

‘If you mean confessing,’ she said, ‘we shall do that, right enough. Everybody always confesses. You can’t help it. They torture you.’

‘I don’t mean confessing. Confession is not betrayal. What you say or do doesn’t matter: only feelings matter. If they could make me stop loving you — that would be the real betrayal.’

She thought it over. ‘They can’t do that,’ she said finally. ‘It’s the one thing they can’t do. They can make you say anything — ANYTHING — but they can’t make you believe it. They can’t get inside you.’

‘No,’ he said a little more hopefully, ‘no; that’s quite true. They can’t get inside you. If you can FEEL that staying human is worth while, even when it can’t have any result whatever, you’ve beaten them.’

He thought of the telescreen with its never-sleeping ear. They could spy upon you night and day, but if you kept your head you

could still outwit them. With all their cleverness they had never mastered the secret of finding out what another human being was thinking. Perhaps that was less true when you were actually in their hands. One did not know what happened inside the Ministry of Love, but it was possible to guess: tortures, drugs, delicate instruments that registered your nervous reactions, gradual wearing-down by sleeplessness and solitude and persistent questioning. Facts, at any rate, could not be kept hidden. They could be tracked down by enquiry, they could be squeezed out of you by torture. But if the object was not to stay alive but to stay human, what difference did it ultimately make? They could not alter your feelings: for that matter you could not alter them yourself, even if you wanted to. They could lay bare in the utmost detail everything that you had done or said or thought; but the inner heart, whose workings were mysterious even to yourself, remained impregnable.

Chapter 8

They had done it, they had done it at last!

The room they were standing in was long-shaped and softly lit. The telescreen was dimmed to a low murmur; the richness of the dark-blue carpet gave one the impression of treading on velvet. At the far end of the room O'Brien was sitting at a table under a green-shaded lamp, with a mass of papers on either side of him. He had not bothered to look up when the servant showed Julia and Winston in.

Winston's heart was thumping so hard that he doubted whether he would be able to speak. They had done it, they had done it at last, was all he could think. It had been a rash act to come here at all, and sheer folly to arrive together; though it was true that they had come by different routes and only met on O'Brien's doorstep. But merely to walk into such a place needed an effort of the nerve. It was only on very rare occasions that one saw inside the dwelling-places of the Inner Party, or even penetrated into the quarter of the town where they lived. The whole atmosphere of the huge block of flats, the richness and spaciousness of everything, the unfamiliar smells of good food and good tobacco, the silent and incredibly rapid lifts sliding up and down, the white-jacketed servants hurrying to and fro — everything was intimidating. Although he had a good pretext for coming here, he was haunted at every step by the fear that a black-uniformed guard would suddenly appear from round the corner, demand his papers, and order him to get out. O'Brien's servant, however, had admitted the two of them without demur. He was a small, dark-haired man in a white jacket, with a diamond-shaped, completely expressionless face which might have been that of a Chinese. The passage down which he led them was softly carpeted, with cream-papered walls and white wainscoting, all exquisitely clean. That too was intimidating. Winston could not remember ever to have seen a passageway whose walls were not grimy from the contact of human bodies.

O'Brien had a slip of paper between his fingers and seemed to be studying it intently. His heavy face, bent down so that one could see the line of the nose, looked both formidable and intelligent. For

perhaps twenty seconds he sat without stirring. Then he pulled the speakwrite towards him and rapped out a message in the hybrid jargon of the Ministries:

'Items one comma five comma seven approved fullwise stop suggestion contained item six doubleplus ridiculous verging crimethink cancel stop unproceed constructionwise antegetting plusfull estimates machinery overheads stop end message.'

He rose deliberately from his chair and came towards them across the soundless carpet. A little of the official atmosphere seemed to have fallen away from him with the Newspeak words, but his expression was grimmer than usual, as though he were not pleased at being disturbed. The terror that Winston already felt was suddenly shot through by a streak of ordinary embarrassment. It seemed to him quite possible that he had simply made a stupid mistake. For what evidence had he in reality that O'Brien was any kind of political conspirator? Nothing but a flash of the eyes and a single equivocal remark: beyond that, only his own secret imaginings, founded on a dream. He could not even fall back on the pretence that he had come to borrow the dictionary, because in that case Julia's presence was impossible to explain. As O'Brien passed the telescreen a thought seemed to strike him. He stopped, turned aside and pressed a switch on the wall. There was a sharp snap. The voice had stopped.

Julia uttered a tiny sound, a sort of squeak of surprise. Even in the midst of his panic, Winston was too much taken aback to be able to hold his tongue.

'You can turn it off!' he said.

'Yes,' said O'Brien, 'we can turn it off. We have that privilege.'

He was opposite them now. His solid form towered over the pair of them, and the expression on his face was still indecipherable. He was waiting, somewhat sternly, for Winston to speak, but about what? Even now it was quite conceivable that he was simply a busy man wondering irritably why he had been interrupted. Nobody spoke. After the stopping of the telescreen the room seemed deadly silent. The seconds marched past, enormous. With difficulty Winston continued to keep his eyes fixed on O'Brien's. Then suddenly the grim face broke down into what might have been the beginnings of a smile. With his characteristic gesture O'Brien resettled his spectacles

on his nose.

'Shall I say it, or will you?' he said.

'I will say it,' said Winston promptly. 'That thing is really turned off?'

'Yes, everything is turned off. We are alone.'

'We have come here because — — '

He paused, realizing for the first time the vagueness of his own motives. Since he did not in fact know what kind of help he expected from O'Brien, it was not easy to say why he had come here. He went on, conscious that what he was saying must sound both feeble and pretentious:

'We believe that there is some kind of conspiracy, some kind of secret organization working against the Party, and that you are involved in it. We want to join it and work for it. We are enemies of the Party. We disbelieve in the principles of Ingsoc. We are thought-criminals. We are also adulterers. I tell you this because we want to put ourselves at your mercy. If you want us to incriminate ourselves in any other way, we are ready.'

He stopped and glanced over his shoulder, with the feeling that the door had opened. Sure enough, the little yellow-faced servant had come in without knocking. Winston saw that he was carrying a tray with a decanter and glasses.

'Martin is one of us,' said O'Brien impassively. 'Bring the drinks over here, Martin. Put them on the round table. Have we enough chairs? Then we may as well sit down and talk in comfort. Bring a chair for yourself, Martin. This is business. You can stop being a servant for the next ten minutes.'

The little man sat down, quite at his ease, and yet still with a servant-like air, the air of a valet enjoying a privilege. Winston regarded him out of the corner of his eye. It struck him that the man's whole life was playing a part, and that he felt it to be dangerous to drop his assumed personality even for a moment. O'Brien took the decanter by the neck and filled up the glasses with a dark-red liquid. It aroused in Winston dim memories of something seen long ago on a wall or a hoarding — a vast bottle composed of electric lights which seemed to move up and down and pour its contents into a glass. Seen from the top the stuff looked almost black, but in the decanter it

gleamed like a ruby. It had a sour-sweet smell. He saw Julia pick up her glass and sniff at it with frank curiosity.

'It is called wine,' said O'Brien with a faint smile. 'You will have read about it in books, no doubt. Not much of it gets to the Outer Party, I am afraid.' His face grew solemn again, and he raised his glass: 'I think it is fitting that we should begin by drinking a health. To our Leader: To Emmanuel Goldstein.'

Winston took up his glass with a certain eagerness. Wine was a thing he had read and dreamed about. Like the glass paperweight or Mr Charrington's half-remembered rhymes, it belonged to the vanished, romantic past, the olden time as he liked to call it in his secret thoughts. For some reason he had always thought of wine as having an intensely sweet taste, like that of blackberry jam and an immediate intoxicating effect. Actually, when he came to swallow it, the stuff was distinctly disappointing. The truth was that after years of gin-drinking he could barely taste it. He set down the empty glass.

'Then there is such a person as Goldstein?' he said.

'Yes, there is such a person, and he is alive. Where, I do not know.'

'And the conspiracy — the organization? Is it real? It is not simply an invention of the Thought Police?'

'No, it is real. The Brotherhood, we call it. You will never learn much more about the Brotherhood than that it exists and that you belong to it. I will come back to that presently.' He looked at his wrist-watch. 'It is unwise even for members of the Inner Party to turn off the telescreen for more than half an hour. You ought not to have come here together, and you will have to leave separately. You, comrade' — he bowed his head to Julia— 'will leave first. We have about twenty minutes at our disposal. You will understand that I must start by asking you certain questions. In general terms, what are you prepared to do?'

'Anything that we are capable of,' said Winston.

O'Brien had turned himself a little in his chair so that he was facing Winston. He almost ignored Julia, seeming to take it for granted that Winston could speak for her. For a moment the lids flitted down over his eyes. He began asking his questions in a low, expressionless voice, as though this were a routine, a sort of

catechism, most of whose answers were known to him already.

'You are prepared to give your lives?'

'Yes.'

'You are prepared to commit murder?'

'Yes.'

'To commit acts of sabotage which may cause the death of hundreds of innocent people?'

'Yes.'

'To betray your country to foreign powers?'

'Yes.'

'You are prepared to cheat, to forge, to blackmail, to corrupt the minds of children, to distribute habit-forming drugs, to encourage prostitution, to disseminate venereal diseases — to do anything which is likely to cause demoralization and weaken the power of the Party?'

'Yes.'

'If, for example, it would somehow serve our interests to throw sulphuric acid in a child's face — are you prepared to do that?'

'Yes.'

'You are prepared to lose your identity and live out the rest of your life as a waiter or a dock-worker?'

'Yes.'

'You are prepared to commit suicide, if and when we order you to do so?'

'Yes.'

'You are prepared, the two of you, to separate and never see one another again?'

'No!' broke in Julia.

It appeared to Winston that a long time passed before he answered. For a moment he seemed even to have been deprived of the power of speech. His tongue worked soundlessly, forming the opening syllables first of one word, then of the other, over and over again. Until he had said it, he did not know which word he was going to say. 'No,' he said finally.

'You did well to tell me,' said O'Brien. 'It is necessary for us to know everything.'

He turned himself toward Julia and added in a voice with

somewhat more expression in it:

'Do you understand that even if he survives, it may be as a different person? We may be obliged to give him a new identity. His face, his movements, the shape of his hands, the colour of his hair — even his voice would be different. And you yourself might have become a different person. Our surgeons can alter people beyond recognition. Sometimes it is necessary. Sometimes we even amputate a limb.'

Winston could not help snatching another sidelong glance at Martin's Mongolian face. There were no scars that he could see. Julia had turned a shade paler, so that her freckles were showing, but she faced O'Brien boldly. She murmured something that seemed to be assent.

'Good. Then that is settled.'

There was a silver box of cigarettes on the table. With a rather absent-minded air O'Brien pushed them towards the others, took one himself, then stood up and began to pace slowly to and fro, as though he could think better standing. They were very good cigarettes, very thick and well-packed, with an unfamiliar silkiness in the paper. O'Brien looked at his wrist-watch again.

'You had better go back to your Pantry, Martin,' he said. 'I shall switch on in a quarter of an hour. Take a good look at these comrades' faces before you go. You will be seeing them again. I may not.'

Exactly as they had done at the front door, the little man's dark eyes flickered over their faces. There was not a trace of friendliness in his manner. He was memorizing their appearance, but he felt no interest in them, or appeared to feel none. It occurred to Winston that a synthetic face was perhaps incapable of changing its expression. Without speaking or giving any kind of salutation, Martin went out, closing the door silently behind him. O'Brien was strolling up and down, one hand in the pocket of his black overalls, the other holding his cigarette.

'You understand,' he said, 'that you will be fighting in the dark. You will always be in the dark. You will receive orders and you will obey them, without knowing why. Later I shall send you a book from which you will learn the true nature of the society we live in, and the

strategy by which we shall destroy it. When you have read the book, you will be full members of the Brotherhood. But between the general aims that we are fighting for and the immediate tasks of the moment, you will never know anything. I tell you that the Brotherhood exists, but I cannot tell you whether it numbers a hundred members, or ten million. From your personal knowledge you will never be able to say that it numbers even as many as a dozen. You will have three or four contacts, who will be renewed from time to time as they disappear. As this was your first contact, it will be preserved. When you receive orders, they will come from me. If we find it necessary to communicate with you, it will be through Martin. When you are finally caught, you will confess. That is unavoidable. But you will have very little to confess, other than your own actions. You will not be able to betray more than a handful of unimportant people. Probably you will not even betray me. By that time I may be dead, or I shall have become a different person, with a different face.'

He continued to move to and fro over the soft carpet. In spite of the bulkiness of his body there was a remarkable grace in his movements. It came out even in the gesture with which he thrust a hand into his pocket, or manipulated a cigarette. More even than of strength, he gave an impression of confidence and of an understanding tinged by irony. However much in earnest he might be, he had nothing of the single-mindedness that belongs to a fanatic. When he spoke of murder, suicide, venereal disease, amputated limbs, and altered faces, it was with a faint air of persiflage. 'This is unavoidable,' his voice seemed to say; 'this is what we have got to do, unflinchingly. But this is not what we shall be doing when life is worth living again.' A wave of admiration, almost of worship, flowed out from Winston towards O'Brien. For the moment he had forgotten the shadowy figure of Goldstein. When you looked at O'Brien's powerful shoulders and his blunt-featured face, so ugly and yet so civilized, it was impossible to believe that he could be defeated. There was no stratagem that he was not equal to, no danger that he could not foresee. Even Julia seemed to be impressed. She had let her cigarette go out and was listening intently. O'Brien went on:

‘You will have heard rumours of the existence of the Brotherhood. No doubt you have formed your own picture of it. You have imagined, probably, a huge underworld of conspirators, meeting secretly in cellars, scribbling messages on walls, recognizing one another by codewords or by special movements of the hand. Nothing of the kind exists. The members of the Brotherhood have no way of recognizing one another, and it is impossible for any one member to be aware of the identity of more than a few others. Goldstein himself, if he fell into the hands of the Thought Police, could not give them a complete list of members, or any information that would lead them to a complete list. No such list exists. The Brotherhood cannot be wiped out because it is not an organization in the ordinary sense. Nothing holds it together except an idea which is indestructible. You will never have anything to sustain you, except the idea. You will get no comradeship and no encouragement. When finally you are caught, you will get no help. We never help our members. At most, when it is absolutely necessary that someone should be silenced, we are occasionally able to smuggle a razor blade into a prisoner’s cell. You will have to get used to living without results and without hope. You will work for a while, you will be caught, you will confess, and then you will die. Those are the only results that you will ever see. There is no possibility that any perceptible change will happen within our own lifetime. We are the dead. Our only true life is in the future. We shall take part in it as handfuls of dust and splinters of bone. But how far away that future may be, there is no knowing. It might be a thousand years. At present nothing is possible except to extend the area of sanity little by little. We cannot act collectively. We can only spread our knowledge outwards from individual to individual, generation after generation. In the face of the Thought Police there is no other way.’

He halted and looked for the third time at his wrist-watch.

‘It is almost time for you to leave, comrade,’ he said to Julia. ‘Wait. The decanter is still half full.’

He filled the glasses and raised his own glass by the stem.

‘What shall it be this time?’ he said, still with the same faint suggestion of irony. ‘To the confusion of the Thought Police? To the death of Big Brother? To humanity? To the future?’

‘To the past,’ said Winston.

‘The past is more important,’ agreed O’Brien gravely.

They emptied their glasses, and a moment later Julia stood up to go. O’Brien took a small box from the top of a cabinet and handed her a flat white tablet which he told her to place on her tongue. It was important, he said, not to go out smelling of wine: the lift attendants were very observant. As soon as the door had shut behind her he appeared to forget her existence. He took another pace or two up and down, then stopped.

‘There are details to be settled,’ he said. ‘I assume that you have a hiding-place of some kind?’

Winston explained about the room over Mr Charrington’s shop.

‘That will do for the moment. Later we will arrange something else for you. It is important to change one’s hiding-place frequently. Meanwhile I shall send you a copy of THE BOOK’ — even O’Brien, Winston noticed, seemed to pronounce the words as though they were in italics— ‘Goldstein’s book, you understand, as soon as possible. It may be some days before I can get hold of one. There are not many in existence, as you can imagine. The Thought Police hunt them down and destroy them almost as fast as we can produce them. It makes very little difference. The book is indestructible. If the last copy were gone, we could reproduce it almost word for word. Do you carry a brief-case to work with you?’ he added.

‘As a rule, yes.’

‘What is it like?’

‘Black, very shabby. With two straps.’

‘Black, two straps, very shabby — good. One day in the fairly near future — I cannot give a date — one of the messages among your morning’s work will contain a misprinted word, and you will have to ask for a repeat. On the following day you will go to work without your brief-case. At some time during the day, in the street, a man will touch you on the arm and say “I think you have dropped your brief-case.” The one he gives you will contain a copy of Goldstein’s book. You will return it within fourteen days.’

They were silent for a moment.

‘There are a couple of minutes before you need go,’ said O’Brien. ‘We shall meet again — if we do meet again — — ‘

Winston looked up at him. ‘In the place where there is no darkness?’ he said hesitantly.

O’Brien nodded without appearance of surprise. ‘In the place where there is no darkness,’ he said, as though he had recognized the allusion. ‘And in the meantime, is there anything that you wish to say before you leave? Any message? Any question?.’

Winston thought. There did not seem to be any further question that he wanted to ask: still less did he feel any impulse to utter high-sounding generalities. Instead of anything directly connected with O’Brien or the Brotherhood, there came into his mind a sort of composite picture of the dark bedroom where his mother had spent her last days, and the little room over Mr Charrington’s shop, and the glass paperweight, and the steel engraving in its rosewood frame. Almost at random he said:

‘Did you ever happen to hear an old rhyme that begins “Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement’s”?’

Again O’Brien nodded. With a sort of grave courtesy he completed the stanza:

‘Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St Clement’s,
You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St Martin’s,
When will you pay me? say the bells of Old Bailey,
When I grow rich, say the bells of Shoreditch.’

‘You knew the last line!’ said Winston.

‘Yes, I knew the last line. And now, I am afraid, it is time for you to go. But wait. You had better let me give you one of these tablets.’

As Winston stood up O’Brien held out a hand. His powerful grip crushed the bones of Winston’s palm. At the door Winston looked back, but O’Brien seemed already to be in process of putting him out of mind. He was waiting with his hand on the switch that controlled the telescreen. Beyond him Winston could see the writing-table with its green-shaded lamp and the speakwrite and the wire baskets deep-laden with papers. The incident was closed. Within thirty seconds, it occurred to him, O’Brien would be back at his interrupted and important work on behalf of the Party.

Chapter 9

Winston was gelatinous with fatigue. Gelatinous was the right word. It had come into his head spontaneously. His body seemed to have not only the weakness of a jelly, but its translucency. He felt that if he held up his hand he would be able to see the light through it. All the blood and lymph had been drained out of him by an enormous debauch of work, leaving only a frail structure of nerves, bones, and skin. All sensations seemed to be magnified. His overalls fretted his shoulders, the pavement tickled his feet, even the opening and closing of a hand was an effort that made his joints creak.

He had worked more than ninety hours in five days. So had everyone else in the Ministry. Now it was all over, and he had literally nothing to do, no Party work of any description, until tomorrow morning. He could spend six hours in the hiding-place and another nine in his own bed. Slowly, in mild afternoon sunshine, he walked up a dingy street in the direction of Mr Charrington's shop, keeping one eye open for the patrols, but irrationally convinced that this afternoon there was no danger of anyone interfering with him. The heavy brief-case that he was carrying bumped against his knee at each step, sending a tingling sensation up and down the skin of his leg. Inside it was the book, which he had now had in his possession for six days and had not yet opened, nor even looked at.

On the sixth day of Hate Week, after the processions, the speeches, the shouting, the singing, the banners, the posters, the films, the waxworks, the rolling of drums and squealing of trumpets, the tramp of marching feet, the grinding of the caterpillars of tanks, the roar of massed planes, the booming of guns — after six days of this, when the great orgasm was quivering to its climax and the general hatred of Eurasia had boiled up into such delirium that if the crowd could have got their hands on the 2,000 Eurasian war-criminals who were to be publicly hanged on the last day of the proceedings, they would unquestionably have torn them to pieces — at just this moment it had been announced that Oceania was not after all at war with Eurasia. Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Eurasia was an ally.

There was, of course, no admission that any change had taken place. Merely it became known, with extreme suddenness and everywhere at once, that Eastasia and not Eurasia was the enemy. Winston was taking part in a demonstration in one of the central London squares at the moment when it happened. It was night, and the white faces and the scarlet banners were luridly floodlit. The square was packed with several thousand people, including a block of about a thousand schoolchildren in the uniform of the Spies. On a scarlet-draped platform an orator of the Inner Party, a small lean man with disproportionately long arms and a large bald skull over which a few lank locks straggled, was haranguing the crowd. A little Rumpelstiltskin figure, contorted with hatred, he gripped the neck of the microphone with one hand while the other, enormous at the end of a bony arm, clawed the air menacingly above his head. His voice, made metallic by the amplifiers, boomed forth an endless catalogue of atrocities, massacres, deportations, lootings, rapings, torture of prisoners, bombing of civilians, lying propaganda, unjust aggressions, broken treaties. It was almost impossible to listen to him without being first convinced and then maddened. At every few moments the fury of the crowd boiled over and the voice of the speaker was drowned by a wild beast-like roaring that rose uncontrollably from thousands of throats. The most savage yells of all came from the schoolchildren. The speech had been proceeding for perhaps twenty minutes when a messenger hurried on to the platform and a scrap of paper was slipped into the speaker's hand. He unrolled and read it without pausing in his speech. Nothing altered in his voice or manner, or in the content of what he was saying, but suddenly the names were different. Without words said, a wave of understanding rippled through the crowd. Oceania was at war with Eastasia! The next moment there was a tremendous commotion. The banners and posters with which the square was decorated were all wrong! Quite half of them had the wrong faces on them. It was sabotage! The agents of Goldstein had been at work! There was a riotous interlude while posters were ripped from the walls, banners torn to shreds and trampled underfoot. The Spies performed prodigies of activity in clambering over the rooftops and cutting the streamers that fluttered from the chimneys. But within two or three

minutes it was all over. The orator, still gripping the neck of the microphone, his shoulders hunched forward, his free hand clawing at the air, had gone straight on with his speech. One minute more, and the feral roars of rage were again bursting from the crowd. The Hate continued exactly as before, except that the target had been changed.

The thing that impressed Winston in looking back was that the speaker had switched from one line to the other actually in midsentence, not only without a pause, but without even breaking the syntax. But at the moment he had other things to preoccupy him. It was during the moment of disorder while the posters were being torn down that a man whose face he did not see had tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Excuse me, I think you've dropped your brief-case.' He took the brief-case abstractedly, without speaking. He knew that it would be days before he had an opportunity to look inside it. The instant that the demonstration was over he went straight to the Ministry of Truth, though the time was now nearly twenty-three hours. The entire staff of the Ministry had done likewise. The orders already issuing from the telescreen, recalling them to their posts, were hardly necessary.

Oceania was at war with Eastasia: Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia. A large part of the political literature of five years was now completely obsolete. Reports and records of all kinds, newspapers, books, pamphlets, films, sound-tracks, photographs — all had to be rectified at lightning speed. Although no directive was ever issued, it was known that the chiefs of the Department intended that within one week no reference to the war with Eurasia, or the alliance with Eastasia, should remain in existence anywhere. The work was overwhelming, all the more so because the processes that it involved could not be called by their true names. Everyone in the Records Department worked eighteen hours in the twenty-four, with two three-hour snatches of sleep. Mattresses were brought up from the cellars and pitched all over the corridors: meals consisted of sandwiches and Victory Coffee wheeled round on trolleys by attendants from the canteen. Each time that Winston broke off for one of his spells of sleep he tried to leave his desk clear of work, and each time that he crawled back sticky-eyed and aching, it was to find that another shower of paper cylinders had covered the desk like a

snowdrift, half-burying the speakwrite and overflowing on to the floor, so that the first job was always to stack them into a neat enough pile to give him room to work. What was worst of all was that the work was by no means purely mechanical. Often it was enough merely to substitute one name for another, but any detailed report of events demanded care and imagination. Even the geographical knowledge that one needed in transferring the war from one part of the world to another was considerable.

By the third day his eyes ached unbearably and his spectacles needed wiping every few minutes. It was like struggling with some crushing physical task, something which one had the right to refuse and which one was nevertheless neurotically anxious to accomplish. In so far as he had time to remember it, he was not troubled by the fact that every word he murmured into the speakwrite, every stroke of his ink-pencil, was a deliberate lie. He was as anxious as anyone else in the Department that the forgery should be perfect. On the morning of the sixth day the dribble of cylinders slowed down. For as much as half an hour nothing came out of the tube; then one more cylinder, then nothing. Everywhere at about the same time the work was easing off. A deep and as it were secret sigh went through the Department. A mighty deed, which could never be mentioned, had been achieved. It was now impossible for any human being to prove by documentary evidence that the war with Eurasia had ever happened. At twelve hundred it was unexpectedly announced that all workers in the Ministry were free till tomorrow morning. Winston, still carrying the brief-case containing the book, which had remained between his feet while he worked and under his body while he slept, went home, shaved himself, and almost fell asleep in his bath, although the water was barely more than tepid.

With a sort of voluptuous creaking in his joints he climbed the stair above Mr Charrington's shop. He was tired, but not sleepy any longer. He opened the window, lit the dirty little oilstove and put on a pan of water for coffee. Julia would arrive presently: meanwhile there was the book. He sat down in the sluttish armchair and undid the straps of the brief-case.

A heavy black volume, amateurishly bound, with no name or title on the cover. The print also looked slightly irregular. The pages were

worn at the edges, and fell apart, easily, as though the book had passed through many hands. The inscription on the title-page ran:

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF OLIGARCHICAL COLLECTIVISM
by
Emmanuel Goldstein

Winston began reading:

Chapter I

Ignorance is Strength

Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle, and the Low. They have been subdivided in many ways, they have borne countless different names, and their relative numbers, as well as their attitude towards one another, have varied from age to age: but the essential structure of society has never altered. Even after enormous upheavals and seemingly irrevocable changes, the same pattern has always reasserted itself, just as a gyroscope will always return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one way or the other.

The aims of these groups are entirely irreconcilable . . .

Winston stopped reading, chiefly in order to appreciate the fact that he was reading, in comfort and safety. He was alone: no telescreen, no ear at the keyhole, no nervous impulse to glance over his shoulder or cover the page with his hand. The sweet summer air played against his cheek. From somewhere far away there floated the faint shouts of children: in the room itself there was no sound except the insect voice of the clock. He settled deeper into the arm-chair and put his feet up on the fender. It was bliss, it was eternity. Suddenly, as one sometimes does with a book of which one knows that one will ultimately read and re-read every word, he opened it at a different place and found himself at Chapter III. He went on reading:

Chapter III

War is Peace

The splitting up of the world into three great super-states was an event which could be and indeed was foreseen before the middle of the twentieth century. With the absorption of Europe by Russia and of the British Empire by the United States, two of the three existing powers, Eurasia and Oceania, were already effectively in being. The third, Eastasia, only emerged as a distinct unit after another decade of confused fighting. The frontiers between the three super-states are in some places arbitrary, and in others they fluctuate according to the fortunes of war, but in general they follow geographical lines. Eurasia comprises the whole of the northern part of the European and Asiatic land-mass, from Portugal to the Bering Strait. Oceania comprises the Americas, the Atlantic islands including the British Isles, Australasia, and the southern portion of Africa. Eastasia, smaller than the others and with a less definite western frontier, comprises China and the countries to the south of it, the Japanese islands and a large but fluctuating portion of Manchuria, Mongolia, and Tibet.

In one combination or another, these three super-states are permanently at war, and have been so for the past twenty-five years. War, however, is no longer the desperate, annihilating struggle that it was in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is a warfare of limited aims between combatants who are unable to destroy one another, have no material cause for fighting and are not divided by any genuine ideological difference. This is not to say that either the conduct of war, or the prevailing attitude towards it, has become less bloodthirsty or more chivalrous. On the contrary, war hysteria is continuous and universal in all countries, and such acts as raping, looting, the slaughter of children, the reduction of whole populations to slavery, and reprisals against prisoners which extend even to boiling and burying alive, are looked upon as normal, and, when they are committed by one's own side and not by the enemy, meritorious. But in a physical sense war involves very small numbers of people, mostly highly-trained specialists, and causes comparatively few casualties. The fighting, when there is any, takes place on the vague frontiers whose whereabouts the average man can only guess at, or

round the Floating Fortresses which guard strategic spots on the sea lanes. In the centres of civilization war means no more than a continuous shortage of consumption goods, and the occasional crash of a rocket bomb which may cause a few scores of deaths. War has in fact changed its character. More exactly, the reasons for which war is waged have changed in their order of importance. Motives which were already present to some small extent in the great wars of the early twentieth century have now become dominant and are consciously recognized and acted upon.

To understand the nature of the present war — for in spite of the regrouping which occurs every few years, it is always the same war — one must realize in the first place that it is impossible for it to be decisive. None of the three super-states could be definitively conquered even by the other two in combination. They are too evenly matched, and their natural defences are too formidable. Eurasia is protected by its vast land spaces, Oceania by the width of the Atlantic and the Pacific, Eastasia by the fecundity and industriousness of its inhabitants. Secondly, there is no longer, in a material sense, anything to fight about. With the establishment of self-contained economies, in which production and consumption are geared to one another, the scramble for markets which was a main cause of previous wars has come to an end, while the competition for raw materials is no longer a matter of life and death. In any case each of the three super-states is so vast that it can obtain almost all the materials that it needs within its own boundaries. In so far as the war has a direct economic purpose, it is a war for labour power. Between the frontiers of the super-states, and not permanently in the possession of any of them, there lies a rough quadrilateral with its corners at Tangier, Brazzaville, Darwin, and Hong Kong, containing within it about a fifth of the population of the earth. It is for the possession of these thickly-populated regions, and of the northern ice-cap, that the three powers are constantly struggling. In practice no one power ever controls the whole of the disputed area. Portions of it are constantly changing hands, and it is the chance of seizing this or that fragment by a sudden stroke of treachery that dictates the endless changes of alignment.

All of the disputed territories contain valuable minerals, and some

of them yield important vegetable products such as rubber which in colder climates it is necessary to synthesize by comparatively expensive methods. But above all they contain a bottomless reserve of cheap labour. Whichever power controls equatorial Africa, or the countries of the Middle East, or Southern India, or the Indonesian Archipelago, disposes also of the bodies of scores or hundreds of millions of ill-paid and hard-working coolies. The inhabitants of these areas, reduced more or less openly to the status of slaves, pass continually from conqueror to conqueror, and are expended like so much coal or oil in the race to turn out more armaments, to capture more territory, to control more labour power, to turn out more armaments, to capture more territory, and so on indefinitely. It should be noted that the fighting never really moves beyond the edges of the disputed areas. The frontiers of Eurasia flow back and forth between the basin of the Congo and the northern shore of the Mediterranean; the islands of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific are constantly being captured and recaptured by Oceania or by Eastasia; in Mongolia the dividing line between Eurasia and Eastasia is never stable; round the Pole all three powers lay claim to enormous territories which in fact are largely uninhabited and unexplored: but the balance of power always remains roughly even, and the territory which forms the heartland of each super-state always remains inviolate. Moreover, the labour of the exploited peoples round the Equator is not really necessary to the world's economy. They add nothing to the wealth of the world, since whatever they produce is used for purposes of war, and the object of waging a war is always to be in a better position in which to wage another war. By their labour the slave populations allow the tempo of continuous warfare to be speeded up. But if they did not exist, the structure of world society, and the process by which it maintains itself, would not be essentially different.

The primary aim of modern warfare (in accordance with the principles of DOUBLETHINK, this aim is simultaneously recognized and not recognized by the directing brains of the Inner Party) is to use up the products of the machine without raising the general standard of living. Ever since the end of the nineteenth century, the problem of what to do with the surplus of consumption

goods has been latent in industrial society. At present, when few human beings even have enough to eat, this problem is obviously not urgent, and it might not have become so, even if no artificial processes of destruction had been at work. The world of today is a bare, hungry, dilapidated place compared with the world that existed before 1914, and still more so if compared with the imaginary future to which the people of that period looked forward. In the early twentieth century, the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly, and efficient — a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete — was part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person. Science and technology were developing at a prodigious speed, and it seemed natural to assume that they would go on developing. This failed to happen, partly because of the impoverishment caused by a long series of wars and revolutions, partly because scientific and technical progress depended on the empirical habit of thought, which could not survive in a strictly regimented society. As a whole the world is more primitive today than it was fifty years ago. Certain backward areas have advanced, and various devices, always in some way connected with warfare and police espionage, have been developed, but experiment and invention have largely stopped, and the ravages of the atomic war of the nineteen-fifties have never been fully repaired. Nevertheless the dangers inherent in the machine are still there. From the moment when the machine first made its appearance it was clear to all thinking people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality, had disappeared. If the machine were used deliberately for that end, hunger, overwork, dirt, illiteracy, and disease could be eliminated within a few generations. And in fact, without being used for any such purpose, but by a sort of automatic process — by producing wealth which it was sometimes impossible not to distribute — the machine did raise the living standards of the average human being very greatly over a period of about fifty years at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

But it was also clear that an all-round increase in wealth threatened the destruction — indeed, in some sense was the destruction — of a hierarchical society. In a world in which everyone

worked short hours, had enough to eat, lived in a house with a bathroom and a refrigerator, and possessed a motor-car or even an aeroplane, the most obvious and perhaps the most important form of inequality would already have disappeared. If it once became general, wealth would confer no distinction. It was possible, no doubt, to imagine a society in which WEALTH, in the sense of personal possessions and luxuries, should be evenly distributed, while POWER remained in the hands of a small privileged caste. But in practice such a society could not long remain stable. For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves; and when once they had done this, they would sooner or later realize that the privileged minority had no function, and they would sweep it away. In the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance. To return to the agricultural past, as some thinkers about the beginning of the twentieth century dreamed of doing, was not a practicable solution. It conflicted with the tendency towards mechanization which had become quasi-instinctive throughout almost the whole world, and moreover, any country which remained industrially backward was helpless in a military sense and was bound to be dominated, directly or indirectly, by its more advanced rivals.

Nor was it a satisfactory solution to keep the masses in poverty by restricting the output of goods. This happened to a great extent during the final phase of capitalism, roughly between 1920 and 1940. The economy of many countries was allowed to stagnate, land went out of cultivation, capital equipment was not added to, great blocks of the population were prevented from working and kept half alive by State charity. But this, too, entailed military weakness, and since the privations it inflicted were obviously unnecessary, it made opposition inevitable. The problem was how to keep the wheels of industry turning without increasing the real wealth of the world. Goods must be produced, but they must not be distributed. And in practice the only way of achieving this was by continuous warfare.

The essential act of war is destruction, not necessarily of human lives, but of the products of human labour. War is a way of shattering to pieces, or pouring into the stratosphere, or sinking in the depths of

the sea, materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent. Even when weapons of war are not actually destroyed, their manufacture is still a convenient way of expending labour power without producing anything that can be consumed. A Floating Fortress, for example, has locked up in it the labour that would build several hundred cargo-ships. Ultimately it is scrapped as obsolete, never having brought any material benefit to anybody, and with further enormous labours another Floating Fortress is built. In principle the war effort is always so planned as to eat up any surplus that might exist after meeting the bare needs of the population. In practice the needs of the population are always underestimated, with the result that there is a chronic shortage of half the necessities of life; but this is looked on as an advantage. It is deliberate policy to keep even the favoured groups somewhere near the brink of hardship, because a general state of scarcity increases the importance of small privileges and thus magnifies the distinction between one group and another. By the standards of the early twentieth century, even a member of the Inner Party lives an austere, laborious kind of life. Nevertheless, the few luxuries that he does enjoy his large, well-appointed flat, the better texture of his clothes, the better quality of his food and drink and tobacco, his two or three servants, his private motor-car or helicopter — set him in a different world from a member of the Outer Party, and the members of the Outer Party have a similar advantage in comparison with the submerged masses whom we call ‘the proles’. The social atmosphere is that of a besieged city, where the possession of a lump of horseflesh makes the difference between wealth and poverty. And at the same time the consciousness of being at war, and therefore in danger, makes the handing-over of all power to a small caste seem the natural, unavoidable condition of survival.

War, it will be seen, accomplishes the necessary destruction, but accomplishes it in a psychologically acceptable way. In principle it would be quite simple to waste the surplus labour of the world by building temples and pyramids, by digging holes and filling them up again, or even by producing vast quantities of goods and then setting fire to them. But this would provide only the economic and not the emotional basis for a hierarchical society. What is concerned here is

not the morale of masses, whose attitude is unimportant so long as they are kept steadily at work, but the morale of the Party itself. Even the humblest Party member is expected to be competent, industrious, and even intelligent within narrow limits, but it is also necessary that he should be a credulous and ignorant fanatic whose prevailing moods are fear, hatred, adulation, and orgiastic triumph. In other words it is necessary that he should have the mentality appropriate to a state of war. It does not matter whether the war is actually happening, and, since no decisive victory is possible, it does not matter whether the war is going well or badly. All that is needed is that a state of war should exist. The splitting of the intelligence which the Party requires of its members, and which is more easily achieved in an atmosphere of war, is now almost universal, but the higher up the ranks one goes, the more marked it becomes. It is precisely in the Inner Party that war hysteria and hatred of the enemy are strongest. In his capacity as an administrator, it is often necessary for a member of the Inner Party to know that this or that item of war news is untruthful, and he may often be aware that the entire war is spurious and is either not happening or is being waged for purposes quite other than the declared ones: but such knowledge is easily neutralized by the technique of DOUBLETHINK. Meanwhile no Inner Party member wavers for an instant in his mystical belief that the war is real, and that it is bound to end victoriously, with Oceania the undisputed master of the entire world.

All members of the Inner Party believe in this coming conquest as an article of faith. It is to be achieved either by gradually acquiring more and more territory and so building up an overwhelming preponderance of power, or by the discovery of some new and unanswerable weapon. The search for new weapons continues unceasingly, and is one of the very few remaining activities in which the inventive or speculative type of mind can find any outlet. In Oceania at the present day, Science, in the old sense, has almost ceased to exist. In Newspeak there is no word for ‘Science’. The empirical method of thought, on which all the scientific achievements of the past were founded, is opposed to the most fundamental principles of Ingsoc. And even technological progress only happens when its products can in some way be used for the

diminution of human liberty. In all the useful arts the world is either standing still or going backwards. The fields are cultivated with horse-ploughs while books are written by machinery. But in matters of vital importance — meaning, in effect, war and police espionage — the empirical approach is still encouraged, or at least tolerated. The two aims of the Party are to conquer the whole surface of the earth and to extinguish once and for all the possibility of independent thought. There are therefore two great problems which the Party is concerned to solve. One is how to discover, against his will, what another human being is thinking, and the other is how to kill several hundred million people in a few seconds without giving warning beforehand. In so far as scientific research still continues, this is its subject matter. The scientist of today is either a mixture of psychologist and inquisitor, studying with real ordinary minuteness the meaning of facial expressions, gestures, and tones of voice, and testing the truth-producing effects of drugs, shock therapy, hypnosis, and physical torture; or he is chemist, physicist, or biologist concerned only with such branches of his special subject as are relevant to the taking of life. In the vast laboratories of the Ministry of Peace, and in the experimental stations hidden in the Brazilian forests, or in the Australian desert, or on lost islands of the Antarctic, the teams of experts are indefatigably at work. Some are concerned simply with planning the logistics of future wars; others devise larger and larger rocket bombs, more and more powerful explosives, and more and more impenetrable armour-plating; others search for new and deadlier gases, or for soluble poisons capable of being produced in such quantities as to destroy the vegetation of whole continents, or for breeds of disease germs immunized against all possible antibodies; others strive to produce a vehicle that shall bore its way under the soil like a submarine under the water, or an aeroplane as independent of its base as a sailing-ship; others explore even remoter possibilities such as focusing the sun's rays through lenses suspended thousands of kilometres away in space, or producing artificial earthquakes and tidal waves by tapping the heat at the earth's centre.

But none of these projects ever comes anywhere near realization, and none of the three super-states ever gains a significant lead on the

others. What is more remarkable is that all three powers already possess, in the atomic bomb, a weapon far more powerful than any that their present researches are likely to discover. Although the Party, according to its habit, claims the invention for itself, atomic bombs first appeared as early as the nineteen-forties, and were first used on a large scale about ten years later. At that time some hundreds of bombs were dropped on industrial centres, chiefly in European Russia, Western Europe, and North America. The effect was to convince the ruling groups of all countries that a few more atomic bombs would mean the end of organized society, and hence of their own power. Thereafter, although no formal agreement was ever made or hinted at, no more bombs were dropped. All three powers merely continue to produce atomic bombs and store them up against the decisive opportunity which they all believe will come sooner or later. And meanwhile the art of war has remained almost stationary for thirty or forty years. Helicopters are more used than they were formerly, bombing planes have been largely superseded by self-propelled projectiles, and the fragile movable battleship has given way to the almost unsinkable Floating Fortress; but otherwise there has been little development. The tank, the submarine, the torpedo, the machine gun, even the rifle and the hand grenade are still in use. And in spite of the endless slaughters reported in the Press and on the telescreens, the desperate battles of earlier wars, in which hundreds of thousands or even millions of men were often killed in a few weeks, have never been repeated.

None of the three super-states ever attempts any manoeuvre which involves the risk of serious defeat. When any large operation is undertaken, it is usually a surprise attack against an ally. The strategy that all three powers are following, or pretend to themselves that they are following, is the same. The plan is, by a combination of fighting, bargaining, and well-timed strokes of treachery, to acquire a ring of bases completely encircling one or other of the rival states, and then to sign a pact of friendship with that rival and remain on peaceful terms for so many years as to lull suspicion to sleep. During this time rockets loaded with atomic bombs can be assembled at all the strategic spots; finally they will all be fired simultaneously, with effects so devastating as to make retaliation impossible. It will then

be time to sign a pact of friendship with the remaining world-power, in preparation for another attack. This scheme, it is hardly necessary to say, is a mere daydream, impossible of realization. Moreover, no fighting ever occurs except in the disputed areas round the Equator and the Pole: no invasion of enemy territory is ever undertaken. This explains the fact that in some places the frontiers between the super-states are arbitrary. Eurasia, for example, could easily conquer the British Isles, which are geographically part of Europe, or on the other hand it would be possible for Oceania to push its frontiers to the Rhine or even to the Vistula. But this would violate the principle, followed on all sides though never formulated, of cultural integrity. If Oceania were to conquer the areas that used once to be known as France and Germany, it would be necessary either to exterminate the inhabitants, a task of great physical difficulty, or to assimilate a population of about a hundred million people, who, so far as technical development goes, are roughly on the Oceanic level. The problem is the same for all three super-states. It is absolutely necessary to their structure that there should be no contact with foreigners, except, to a limited extent, with war prisoners and coloured slaves. Even the official ally of the moment is always regarded with the darkest suspicion. War prisoners apart, the average citizen of Oceania never sets eyes on a citizen of either Eurasia or Eastasia, and he is forbidden the knowledge of foreign languages. If he were allowed contact with foreigners he would discover that they are creatures similar to himself and that most of what he has been told about them is lies. The sealed world in which he lives would be broken, and the fear, hatred, and self-righteousness on which his morale depends might evaporate. It is therefore realized on all sides that however often Persia, or Egypt, or Java, or Ceylon may change hands, the main frontiers must never be crossed by anything except bombs.

Under this lies a fact never mentioned aloud, but tacitly understood and acted upon: namely, that the conditions of life in all three super-states are very much the same. In Oceania the prevailing philosophy is called Ingsoc, in Eurasia it is called Neo-Bolshevism, and in Eastasia it is called by a Chinese name usually translated as Death-Worship, but perhaps better rendered as Obliteration of the

Self. The citizen of Oceania is not allowed to know anything of the tenets of the other two philosophies, but he is taught to execrate them as barbarous outrages upon morality and common sense. Actually the three philosophies are barely distinguishable, and the social systems which they support are not distinguishable at all. Everywhere there is the same pyramidal structure, the same worship of semi-divine leader, the same economy existing by and for continuous warfare. It follows that the three super-states not only cannot conquer one another, but would gain no advantage by doing so. On the contrary, so long as they remain in conflict they prop one another up, like three sheaves of corn. And, as usual, the ruling groups of all three powers are simultaneously aware and unaware of what they are doing. Their lives are dedicated to world conquest, but they also know that it is necessary that the war should continue everlastingly and without victory. Meanwhile the fact that there IS no danger of conquest makes possible the denial of reality which is the special feature of Ingsoc and its rival systems of thought. Here it is necessary to repeat what has been said earlier, that by becoming continuous war has fundamentally changed its character.

In past ages, a war, almost by definition, was something that sooner or later came to an end, usually in unmistakable victory or defeat. In the past, also, war was one of the main instruments by which human societies were kept in touch with physical reality. All rulers in all ages have tried to impose a false view of the world upon their followers, but they could not afford to encourage any illusion that tended to impair military efficiency. So long as defeat meant the loss of independence, or some other result generally held to be undesirable, the precautions against defeat had to be serious. Physical facts could not be ignored. In philosophy, or religion, or ethics, or politics, two and two might make five, but when one was designing a gun or an aeroplane they had to make four. Inefficient nations were always conquered sooner or later, and the struggle for efficiency was inimical to illusions. Moreover, to be efficient it was necessary to be able to learn from the past, which meant having a fairly accurate idea of what had happened in the past. Newspapers and history books were, of course, always coloured and biased, but falsification of the kind that is practised today would have been impossible. War was a

sure safeguard of sanity, and so far as the ruling classes were concerned it was probably the most important of all safeguards. While wars could be won or lost, no ruling class could be completely irresponsible.

But when war becomes literally continuous, it also ceases to be dangerous. When war is continuous there is no such thing as military necessity. Technical progress can cease and the most palpable facts can be denied or disregarded. As we have seen, researches that could be called scientific are still carried out for the purposes of war, but they are essentially a kind of daydreaming, and their failure to show results is not important. Efficiency, even military efficiency, is no longer needed. Nothing is efficient in Oceania except the Thought Police. Since each of the three super-states is unconquerable, each is in effect a separate universe within which almost any perversion of thought can be safely practised. Reality only exerts its pressure through the needs of everyday life — the need to eat and drink, to get shelter and clothing, to avoid swallowing poison or stepping out of top-storey windows, and the like. Between life and death, and between physical pleasure and physical pain, there is still a distinction, but that is all. Cut off from contact with the outer world, and with the past, the citizen of Oceania is like a man in interstellar space, who has no way of knowing which direction is up and which is down. The rulers of such a state are absolute, as the Pharaohs or the Caesars could not be. They are obliged to prevent their followers from starving to death in numbers large enough to be inconvenient, and they are obliged to remain at the same low level of military technique as their rivals; but once that minimum is achieved, they can twist reality into whatever shape they choose.

The war, therefore, if we judge it by the standards of previous wars, is merely an imposture. It is like the battles between certain ruminant animals whose horns are set at such an angle that they are incapable of hurting one another. But though it is unreal it is not meaningless. It eats up the surplus of consumable goods, and it helps to preserve the special mental atmosphere that a hierarchical society needs. War, it will be seen, is now a purely internal affair. In the past, the ruling groups of all countries, although they might recognize their common interest and therefore limit the destructiveness of war,

did fight against one another, and the victor always plundered the vanquished. In our own day they are not fighting against one another at all. The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact. The very word 'war', therefore, has become misleading. It would probably be accurate to say that by becoming continuous war has ceased to exist. The peculiar pressure that it exerted on human beings between the Neolithic Age and the early twentieth century has disappeared and been replaced by something quite different. The effect would be much the same if the three super-states, instead of fighting one another, should agree to live in perpetual peace, each inviolate within its own boundaries. For in that case each would still be a self-contained universe, freed for ever from the sobering influence of external danger. A peace that was truly permanent would be the same as a permanent war. This — although the vast majority of Party members understand it only in a shallower sense — is the inner meaning of the Party slogan: WAR IS PEACE.

Winston stopped reading for a moment. Somewhere in remote distance a rocket bomb thundered. The blissful feeling of being alone with the forbidden book, in a room with no telescreen, had not worn off. Solitude and safety were physical sensations, mixed up somehow with the tiredness of his body, the softness of the chair, the touch of the faint breeze from the window that played upon his cheek. The book fascinated him, or more exactly it reassured him. In a sense it told him nothing that was new, but that was part of the attraction. It said what he would have said, if it had been possible for him to set his scattered thoughts in order. It was the product of a mind similar to his own, but enormously more powerful, more systematic, less fear-ridden. The best books, he perceived, are those that tell you what you know already. He had just turned back to Chapter I when he heard Julia's footstep on the stair and started out of his chair to meet her. She dumped her brown tool-bag on the floor and flung herself into his arms. It was more than a week since they had seen one another.

'I've got THE BOOK,' he said as they disentangled themselves.

'Oh, you've got it? Good,' she said without much interest, and

almost immediately knelt down beside the oil stove to make the coffee.

They did not return to the subject until they had been in bed for half an hour. The evening was just cool enough to make it worth while to pull up the counterpane. From below came the familiar sound of singing and the scrape of boots on the flagstones. The brawny red-armed woman whom Winston had seen there on his first visit was almost a fixture in the yard. There seemed to be no hour of daylight when she was not marching to and fro between the washtub and the line, alternately gagging herself with clothes pegs and breaking forth into lusty song. Julia had settled down on her side and seemed to be already on the point of falling asleep. He reached out for the book, which was lying on the floor, and sat up against the bedhead.

'We must read it,' he said. 'You too. All members of the Brotherhood have to read it.'

'You read it,' she said with her eyes shut. 'Read it aloud. That's the best way. Then you can explain it to me as you go.'

The clock's hands said six, meaning eighteen. They had three or four hours ahead of them. He propped the book against his knees and began reading:

Chapter I

Ignorance is Strength

Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle, and the Low. They have been subdivided in many ways, they have borne countless different names, and their relative numbers, as well as their attitude towards one another, have varied from age to age: but the essential structure of society has never altered. Even after enormous upheavals and seemingly irrevocable changes, the same pattern has always reasserted itself, just as a gyroscope will always return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one way or the other

'Julia, are you awake?' said Winston.

‘Yes, my love, I’m listening. Go on. It’s marvellous.’

He continued reading:

The aims of these three groups are entirely irreconcilable. The aim of the High is to remain where they are. The aim of the Middle is to change places with the High. The aim of the Low, when they have an aim — for it is an abiding characteristic of the Low that they are too much crushed by drudgery to be more than intermittently conscious of anything outside their daily lives — is to abolish all distinctions and create a society in which all men shall be equal. Thus throughout history a struggle which is the same in its main outlines recurs over and over again. For long periods the High seem to be securely in power, but sooner or later there always comes a moment when they lose either their belief in themselves or their capacity to govern efficiently, or both. They are then overthrown by the Middle, who enlist the Low on their side by pretending to them that they are fighting for liberty and justice. As soon as they have reached their objective, the Middle thrust the Low back into their old position of servitude, and themselves become the High. Presently a new Middle group splits off from one of the other groups, or from both of them, and the struggle begins over again. Of the three groups, only the Low are never even temporarily successful in achieving their aims. It would be an exaggeration to say that throughout history there has been no progress of a material kind. Even today, in a period of decline, the average human being is physically better off than he was a few centuries ago. But no advance in wealth, no softening of manners, no reform or revolution has ever brought human equality a millimetre nearer. From the point of view of the Low, no historic change has ever meant much more than a change in the name of their masters.

By the late nineteenth century the recurrence of this pattern had become obvious to many observers. There then rose schools of thinkers who interpreted history as a cyclical process and claimed to show that inequality was the unalterable law of human life. This doctrine, of course, had always had its adherents, but in the manner in which it was now put forward there was a significant change. In the past the need for a hierarchical form of society had been the doctrine specifically of the High. It had been preached by kings and

aristocrats and by the priests, lawyers, and the like who were parasitical upon them, and it had generally been softened by promises of compensation in an imaginary world beyond the grave. The Middle, so long as it was struggling for power, had always made use of such terms as freedom, justice, and fraternity. Now, however, the concept of human brotherhood began to be assailed by people who were not yet in positions of command, but merely hoped to be so before long. In the past the Middle had made revolutions under the banner of equality, and then had established a fresh tyranny as soon as the old one was overthrown. The new Middle groups in effect proclaimed their tyranny beforehand. Socialism, a theory which appeared in the early nineteenth century and was the last link in a chain of thought stretching back to the slave rebellions of antiquity, was still deeply infected by the Utopianism of past ages. But in each variant of Socialism that appeared from about 1900 onwards the aim of establishing liberty and equality was more and more openly abandoned. The new movements which appeared in the middle years of the century, Ingsoc in Oceania, Neo-Bolshevism in Eurasia, Death-Worship, as it is commonly called, in Eastasia, had the conscious aim of perpetuating UNfreedom and INequality. These new movements, of course, grew out of the old ones and tended to keep their names and pay lip-service to their ideology. But the purpose of all of them was to arrest progress and freeze history at a chosen moment. The familiar pendulum swing was to happen once more, and then stop. As usual, the High were to be turned out by the Middle, who would then become the High; but this time, by conscious strategy, the High would be able to maintain their position permanently.

The new doctrines arose partly because of the accumulation of historical knowledge, and the growth of the historical sense, which had hardly existed before the nineteenth century. The cyclical movement of history was now intelligible, or appeared to be so; and if it was intelligible, then it was alterable. But the principal, underlying cause was that, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, human equality had become technically possible. It was still true that men were not equal in their native talents and that functions had to be specialized in ways that favoured some individuals against

others; but there was no longer any real need for class distinctions or for large differences of wealth. In earlier ages, class distinctions had been not only inevitable but desirable. Inequality was the price of civilization. With the development of machine production, however, the case was altered. Even if it was still necessary for human beings to do different kinds of work, it was no longer necessary for them to live at different social or economic levels. Therefore, from the point of view of the new groups who were on the point of seizing power, human equality was no longer an ideal to be striven after, but a danger to be averted. In more primitive ages, when a just and peaceful society was in fact not possible, it had been fairly easy to believe it. The idea of an earthly paradise in which men should live together in a state of brotherhood, without laws and without brute labour, had haunted the human imagination for thousands of years. And this vision had had a certain hold even on the groups who actually profited by each historical change. The heirs of the French, English, and American revolutions had partly believed in their own phrases about the rights of man, freedom of speech, equality before the law, and the like, and have even allowed their conduct to be influenced by them to some extent. But by the fourth decade of the twentieth century all the main currents of political thought were authoritarian. The earthly paradise had been discredited at exactly the moment when it became realizable. Every new political theory, by whatever name it called itself, led back to hierarchy and regimentation. And in the general hardening of outlook that set in round about 1930, practices which had been long abandoned, in some cases for hundreds of years — imprisonment without trial, the use of war prisoners as slaves, public executions, torture to extract confessions, the use of hostages, and the deportation of whole populations — not only became common again, but were tolerated and even defended by people who considered themselves enlightened and progressive.

It was only after a decade of national wars, civil wars, revolutions, and counter-revolutions in all parts of the world that Ingsoc and its rivals emerged as fully worked-out political theories. But they had been foreshadowed by the various systems, generally called totalitarian, which had appeared earlier in the century, and the main

outlines of the world which would emerge from the prevailing chaos had long been obvious. What kind of people would control this world had been equally obvious. The new aristocracy was made up for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organizers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists, and professional politicians. These people, whose origins lay in the salaried middle class and the upper grades of the working class, had been shaped and brought together by the barren world of monopoly industry and centralized government. As compared with their opposite numbers in past ages, they were less avaricious, less tempted by luxury, hungrier for pure power, and, above all, more conscious of what they were doing and more intent on crushing opposition. This last difference was cardinal. By comparison with that existing today, all the tyrannies of the past were half-hearted and inefficient. The ruling groups were always infected to some extent by liberal ideas, and were content to leave loose ends everywhere, to regard only the overt act and to be uninterested in what their subjects were thinking. Even the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages was tolerant by modern standards. Part of the reason for this was that in the past no government had the power to keep its citizens under constant surveillance. The invention of print, however, made it easier to manipulate public opinion, and the film and the radio carried the process further. With the development of television, and the technical advance which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, private life came to an end. Every citizen, or at least every citizen important enough to be worth watching, could be kept for twenty-four hours a day under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda, with all other channels of communication closed. The possibility of enforcing not only complete obedience to the will of the State, but complete uniformity of opinion on all subjects, now existed for the first time.

After the revolutionary period of the fifties and sixties, society regrouped itself, as always, into High, Middle, and Low. But the new High group, unlike all its forerunners, did not act upon instinct but knew what was needed to safeguard its position. It had long been realized that the only secure basis for oligarchy is collectivism. Wealth and privilege are most easily defended when they are

possessed jointly. The so-called ‘abolition of private property’ which took place in the middle years of the century meant, in effect, the concentration of property in far fewer hands than before: but with this difference, that the new owners were a group instead of a mass of individuals. Individually, no member of the Party owns anything, except petty personal belongings. Collectively, the Party owns everything in Oceania, because it controls everything, and disposes of the products as it thinks fit. In the years following the Revolution it was able to step into this commanding position almost unopposed, because the whole process was represented as an act of collectivization. It had always been assumed that if the capitalist class were expropriated, Socialism must follow: and unquestionably the capitalists had been expropriated. Factories, mines, land, houses, transport — everything had been taken away from them: and since these things were no longer private property, it followed that they must be public property. Ingsoc, which grew out of the earlier Socialist movement and inherited its phraseology, has in fact carried out the main item in the Socialist programme; with the result, foreseen and intended beforehand, that economic inequality has been made permanent.

But the problems of perpetuating a hierarchical society go deeper than this. There are only four ways in which a ruling group can fall from power. Either it is conquered from without, or it governs so inefficiently that the masses are stirred to revolt, or it allows a strong and discontented Middle group to come into being, or it loses its own self-confidence and willingness to govern. These causes do not operate singly, and as a rule all four of them are present in some degree. A ruling class which could guard against all of them would remain in power permanently. Ultimately the determining factor is the mental attitude of the ruling class itself.

After the middle of the present century, the first danger had in reality disappeared. Each of the three powers which now divide the world is in fact unconquerable, and could only become conquerable through slow demographic changes which a government with wide powers can easily avert. The second danger, also, is only a theoretical one. The masses never revolt of their own accord, and they never revolt merely because they are oppressed. Indeed, so long

as they are not permitted to have standards of comparison, they never even become aware that they are oppressed. The recurrent economic crises of past times were totally unnecessary and are not now permitted to happen, but other and equally large dislocations can and do happen without having political results, because there is no way in which discontent can become articulate. As for the problem of over-production, which has been latent in our society since the development of machine technique, it is solved by the device of continuous warfare (see Chapter III), which is also useful in keying up public morale to the necessary pitch. From the point of view of our present rulers, therefore, the only genuine dangers are the splitting-off of a new group of able, under-employed, power-hungry people, and the growth of liberalism and scepticism in their own ranks. The problem, that is to say, is educational. It is a problem of continuously moulding the consciousness both of the directing group and of the larger executive group that lies immediately below it. The consciousness of the masses needs only to be influenced in a negative way.

Given this background, one could infer, if one did not know it already, the general structure of Oceanic society. At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration. Nobody has ever seen Big Brother. He is a face on the hoardings, a voice on the telescreen. We may be reasonably sure that he will never die, and there is already considerable uncertainty as to when he was born. Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, and reverence, emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than towards an organization. Below Big Brother comes the Inner Party. Its numbers limited to six millions, or something less than 2 per cent of the population of Oceania. Below the Inner Party comes the Outer Party, which, if the Inner Party is described as the brain of the State, may be justly likened to the hands. Below that come the dumb masses whom we habitually refer to as ‘the proles’, numbering perhaps 85 per cent of the population.

In the terms of our earlier classification, the proles are the Low: for the slave population of the equatorial lands who pass constantly from conqueror to conqueror, are not a permanent or necessary part of the structure.

In principle, membership of these three groups is not hereditary. The child of Inner Party parents is in theory not born into the Inner Party. Admission to either branch of the Party is by examination, taken at the age of sixteen. Nor is there any racial discrimination, or any marked domination of one province by another. Jews, Negroes, South Americans of pure Indian blood are to be found in the highest ranks of the Party, and the administrators of any area are always drawn from the inhabitants of that area. In no part of Oceania do the inhabitants have the feeling that they are a colonial population ruled from a distant capital. Oceania has no capital, and its titular head is a person whose whereabouts nobody knows. Except that English is its chief LINGUA FRANCA and Newspeak its official language, it is not centralized in any way. Its rulers are not held together by blood-ties but by adherence to a common doctrine. It is true that our society is stratified, and very rigidly stratified, on what at first sight appear to be hereditary lines. There is far less to-and-fro movement between the different groups than happened under capitalism or even in the pre-industrial age. Between the two branches of the Party there is a certain amount of interchange, but only so much as will ensure that weaklings are excluded from the Inner Party and that ambitious members of the Outer Party are made harmless by allowing them to rise. Proletarians, in practice, are not allowed to graduate into the Party. The most gifted among them, who might possibly become nuclei of discontent, are simply marked down by the Thought Police and eliminated. But this state of affairs is not necessarily permanent, nor is it a matter of principle. The Party is not a class in the old sense of the word. It does not aim at transmitting power to its own children, as such; and if there were no other way of keeping the ablest people at the top, it would be perfectly prepared to recruit an entire new generation from the ranks of the proletariat. In the crucial years, the fact that the Party was not a hereditary body did a great deal to neutralize opposition. The older kind of Socialist, who had been trained to fight against something called ‘class privilege’

assumed that what is not hereditary cannot be permanent. He did not see that the continuity of an oligarchy need not be physical, nor did he pause to reflect that hereditary aristocracies have always been shortlived, whereas adoptive organizations such as the Catholic Church have sometimes lasted for hundreds or thousands of years. The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance, but the persistence of a certain world-view and a certain way of life, imposed by the dead upon the living. A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors. The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself. WHO wields power is not important, provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same.

All the beliefs, habits, tastes, emotions, mental attitudes that characterize our time are really designed to sustain the mystique of the Party and prevent the true nature of present-day society from being perceived. Physical rebellion, or any preliminary move towards rebellion, is at present not possible. From the proletarians nothing is to be feared. Left to themselves, they will continue from generation to generation and from century to century, working, breeding, and dying, not only without any impulse to rebel, but without the power of grasping that the world could be other than it is. They could only become dangerous if the advance of industrial technique made it necessary to educate them more highly; but, since military and commercial rivalry are no longer important, the level of popular education is actually declining. What opinions the masses hold, or do not hold, is looked on as a matter of indifference. They can be granted intellectual liberty because they have no intellect. In a Party member, on the other hand, not even the smallest deviation of opinion on the most unimportant subject can be tolerated.

A Party member lives from birth to death under the eye of the Thought Police. Even when he is alone he can never be sure that he is alone. Wherever he may be, asleep or awake, working or resting, in his bath or in bed, he can be inspected without warning and without knowing that he is being inspected. Nothing that he does is indifferent. His friendships, his relaxations, his behaviour towards his wife and children, the expression of his face when he is alone, the words he mutters in sleep, even the characteristic movements of his

body, are all jealously scrutinized. Not only any actual misdemeanour, but any eccentricity, however small, any change of habits, any nervous mannerism that could possibly be the symptom of an inner struggle, is certain to be detected. He has no freedom of choice in any direction whatever. On the other hand his actions are not regulated by law or by any clearly formulated code of behaviour. In Oceania there is no law. Thoughts and actions which, when detected, mean certain death are not formally forbidden, and the endless purges, arrests, tortures, imprisonments, and vaporizations are not inflicted as punishment for crimes which have actually been committed, but are merely the wiping-out of persons who might perhaps commit a crime at some time in the future. A Party member is required to have not only the right opinions, but the right instincts. Many of the beliefs and attitudes demanded of him are never plainly stated, and could not be stated without laying bare the contradictions inherent in Ingsoc. If he is a person naturally orthodox (in Newspeak a GOODTHINKER), he will in all circumstances know, without taking thought, what is the true belief or the desirable emotion. But in any case an elaborate mental training, undergone in childhood and grouping itself round the Newspeak words CRIMESTOP, BLACKWHITE, and DOUBLETHINK, makes him unwilling and unable to think too deeply on any subject whatever.

A Party member is expected to have no private emotions and no respites from enthusiasm. He is supposed to live in a continuous frenzy of hatred of foreign enemies and internal traitors, triumph over victories, and self-abasement before the power and wisdom of the Party. The discontents produced by his bare, unsatisfying life are deliberately turned outwards and dissipated by such devices as the Two Minutes Hate, and the speculations which might possibly induce a sceptical or rebellious attitude are killed in advance by his early acquired inner discipline. The first and simplest stage in the discipline, which can be taught even to young children, is called, in Newspeak, CRIMESTOP. CRIMESTOP means the faculty of stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought. It includes the power of not grasping analogies, of failing to perceive logical errors, of misunderstanding the simplest arguments if they are inimical to Ingsoc, and of being bored or

repelled by any train of thought which is capable of leading in a heretical direction. CRIMESTOP, in short, means protective stupidity. But stupidity is not enough. On the contrary, orthodoxy in the full sense demands a control over one's own mental processes as complete as that of a contortionist over his body. Oceanic society rests ultimately on the belief that Big Brother is omnipotent and that the Party is infallible. But since in reality Big Brother is not omnipotent and the party is not infallible, there is need for an unwearying, moment-to-moment flexibility in the treatment of facts. The keyword here is BLACKWHITE. Like so many Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts. Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this. But it means also the ability to BELIEVE that black is white, and more, to KNOW that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary. This demands a continuous alteration of the past, made possible by the system of thought which really embraces all the rest, and which is known in Newspeak as DOUBLETHINK.

The alteration of the past is necessary for two reasons, one of which is subsidiary and, so to speak, precautionary. The subsidiary reason is that the Party member, like the proletarian, tolerates present-day conditions partly because he has no standards of comparison. He must be cut off from the past, just as he must be cut off from foreign countries, because it is necessary for him to believe that he is better off than his ancestors and that the average level of material comfort is constantly rising. But by far the more important reason for the readjustment of the past is the need to safeguard the infallibility of the Party. It is not merely that speeches, statistics, and records of every kind must be constantly brought up to date in order to show that the predictions of the Party were in all cases right. It is also that no change in doctrine or in political alignment can ever be admitted. For to change one's mind, or even one's policy, is a confession of weakness. If, for example, Eurasia or Eastasia (whichever it may be) is the enemy today, then that country must always have been the enemy. And if the facts say otherwise then the

facts must be altered. Thus history is continuously rewritten. This day-to-day falsification of the past, carried out by the Ministry of Truth, is as necessary to the stability of the regime as the work of repression and espionage carried out by the Ministry of Love.

The mutability of the past is the central tenet of Ingsoc. Past events, it is argued, have no objective existence, but survive only in written records and in human memories. The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon. And since the Party is in full control of all records and in equally full control of the minds of its members, it follows that the past is whatever the Party chooses to make it. It also follows that though the past is alterable, it never has been altered in any specific instance. For when it has been recreated in whatever shape is needed at the moment, then this new version IS the past, and no different past can ever have existed. This holds good even when, as often happens, the same event has to be altered out of recognition several times in the course of a year. At all times the Party is in possession of absolute truth, and clearly the absolute can never have been different from what it is now. It will be seen that the control of the past depends above all on the training of memory. To make sure that all written records agree with the orthodoxy of the moment is merely a mechanical act. But it is also necessary to REMEMBER that events happened in the desired manner. And if it is necessary to rearrange one's memories or to tamper with written records, then it is necessary to FORGET that one has done so. The trick of doing this can be learned like any other mental technique. It is learned by the majority of Party members, and certainly by all who are intelligent as well as orthodox. In Oldspeak it is called, quite frankly, 'reality control'. In Newspeak it is called DOUBLETHINK, though DOUBLETHINK comprises much else as well.

DOUBLETHINK means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of DOUBLETHINK he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity and hence

of guilt. DOUBLETHINK lies at the very heart of Ingsoc, since the essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty. To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies — all this is indispensably necessary. Even in using the word DOUBLETHINK it is necessary to exercise DOUBLETHINK. For by using the word one admits that one is tampering with reality; by a fresh act of DOUBLETHINK one erases this knowledge; and so on indefinitely, with the lie always one leap ahead of the truth. Ultimately it is by means of DOUBLETHINK that the Party has been able — and may, for all we know, continue to be able for thousands of years — to arrest the course of history.

All past oligarchies have fallen from power either because they ossified or because they grew soft. Either they became stupid and arrogant, failed to adjust themselves to changing circumstances, and were overthrown; or they became liberal and cowardly, made concessions when they should have used force, and once again were overthrown. They fell, that is to say, either through consciousness or through unconsciousness. It is the achievement of the Party to have produced a system of thought in which both conditions can exist simultaneously. And upon no other intellectual basis could the dominion of the Party be made permanent. If one is to rule, and to continue ruling, one must be able to dislocate the sense of reality. For the secret of rulership is to combine a belief in one's own infallibility with the Power to learn from past mistakes.

It need hardly be said that the subtlest practitioners of DOUBLETHINK are those who invented DOUBLETHINK and know that it is a vast system of mental cheating. In our society, those who have the best knowledge of what is happening are also those who are furthest from seeing the world as it is. In general, the greater the understanding, the greater the delusion; the more intelligent, the less sane. One clear illustration of this is the fact that war hysteria increases in intensity as one rises in the social scale. Those whose

attitude towards the war is most nearly rational are the subject peoples of the disputed territories. To these people the war is simply a continuous calamity which sweeps to and fro over their bodies like a tidal wave. Which side is winning is a matter of complete indifference to them. They are aware that a change of overlordship means simply that they will be doing the same work as before for new masters who treat them in the same manner as the old ones. The slightly more favoured workers whom we call 'the proles' are only intermittently conscious of the war. When it is necessary they can be prodded into frenzies of fear and hatred, but when left to themselves they are capable of forgetting for long periods that the war is happening. It is in the ranks of the Party, and above all of the Inner Party, that the true war enthusiasm is found. World-conquest is believed in most firmly by those who know it to be impossible. This peculiar linking-together of opposites — knowledge with ignorance, cynicism with fanaticism — is one of the chief distinguishing marks of Oceanic society. The official ideology abounds with contradictions even when there is no practical reason for them. Thus, the Party rejects and vilifies every principle for which the Socialist movement originally stood, and it chooses to do this in the name of Socialism. It preaches a contempt for the working class unexampled for centuries past, and it dresses its members in a uniform which was at one time peculiar to manual workers and was adopted for that reason. It systematically undermines the solidarity of the family, and it calls its leader by a name which is a direct appeal to the sentiment of family loyalty. Even the names of the four Ministries by which we are governed exhibit a sort of impudence in their deliberate reversal of the facts. The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. These contradictions are not accidental, nor do they result from ordinary hypocrisy; they are deliberate exercises in DOUBLETHINK. For it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely. In no other way could the ancient cycle be broken. If human equality is to be for ever averted — if the High, as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently — then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity.

But there is one question which until this moment we have almost ignored. It is; WHY should human equality be averted? Supposing that the mechanics of the process have been rightly described, what is the motive for this huge, accurately planned effort to freeze history at a particular moment of time?

Here we reach the central secret. As we have seen. the mystique of the Party, and above all of the Inner Party, depends upon DOUBLETHINK But deeper than this lies the original motive, the never-questioned instinct that first led to the seizure of power and brought DOUBLETHINK, the Thought Police, continuous warfare, and all the other necessary paraphernalia into existence afterwards. This motive really consists . . .

Winston became aware of silence, as one becomes aware of a new sound. It seemed to him that Julia had been very still for some time past. She was lying on her side, naked from the waist upwards, with her cheek pillowed on her hand and one dark lock tumbling across her eyes. Her breast rose and fell slowly and regularly.

'Julia.'

No answer.

'Julia, are you awake?'

No answer. She was asleep. He shut the book, put it carefully on the floor, lay down, and pulled the coverlet over both of them.

He had still, he reflected, not learned the ultimate secret. He understood HOW; he did not understand WHY. Chapter I, like Chapter III, had not actually told him anything that he did not know, it had merely systematized the knowledge that he possessed already. But after reading it he knew better than before that he was not mad. Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad. There was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad. A yellow beam from the sinking sun slanted in through the window and fell across the pillow. He shut his eyes. The sun on his face and the girl's smooth body touching his own gave him a strong, sleepy, confident feeling. He was safe, everything was all right. He fell asleep murmuring 'Sanity is not statistical,' with the feeling that this remark contained in it a profound wisdom.

Chapter 10

When he woke it was with the sensation of having slept for a long time, but a glance at the old-fashioned clock told him that it was only twenty-thirty. He lay dozing for a while; then the usual deep-lunged singing struck up from the yard below:

'It was only an 'opeless fancy,
It passed like an Ipril dye,
But a look an' a word an' the dreams they stirred
They 'ave stolen my 'eart awye!'

The drivelling song seemed to have kept its popularity. You still heard it all over the place. It had outlived the Hate Song. Julia woke at the sound, stretched herself luxuriously, and got out of bed.

'I'm hungry,' she said. 'Let's make some more coffee. Damn! The stove's gone out and the water's cold.' She picked the stove up and shook it. 'There's no oil in it.'

'We can get some from old Charrington, I expect.'

'The funny thing is I made sure it was full. I'm going to put my clothes on,' she added. 'It seems to have got colder.'

Winston also got up and dressed himself. The indefatigable voice sang on:

'They sye that time 'eals all things,
They sye you can always forget;
But the smiles an' the tears acrorss the years
They twist my 'eart-strings yet!'

As he fastened the belt of his overalls he strolled across to the window. The sun must have gone down behind the houses; it was not shining into the yard any longer. The flagstones were wet as though they had just been washed, and he had the feeling that the sky had been washed too, so fresh and pale was the blue between the chimney-pots. Tirelessly the woman marched to and fro, corking and uncorking herself, singing and falling silent, and pegging out more diapers, and more and yet more. He wondered whether she took in washing for a living or was merely the slave of twenty or thirty grandchildren. Julia had come across to his side; together they gazed down with a sort of fascination at the sturdy figure below. As he

looked at the woman in her characteristic attitude, her thick arms reaching up for the line, her powerful mare-like buttocks protruded, it struck him for the first time that she was beautiful. It had never before occurred to him that the body of a woman of fifty, blown up to monstrous dimensions by childbearing, then hardened, roughened by work till it was coarse in the grain like an over-ripe turnip, could be beautiful. But it was so, and after all, he thought, why not? The solid, contourless body, like a block of granite, and the rasping red skin, bore the same relation to the body of a girl as the rose-hip to the rose. Why should the fruit be held inferior to the flower?

'She's beautiful,' he murmured.

'She's a metre across the hips, easily,' said Julia.

'That is her style of beauty,' said Winston.

He held Julia's supple waist easily encircled by his arm. From the hip to the knee her flank was against his. Out of their bodies no child would ever come. That was the one thing they could never do. Only by word of mouth, from mind to mind, could they pass on the secret. The woman down there had no mind, she had only strong arms, a warm heart, and a fertile belly. He wondered how many children she had given birth to. It might easily be fifteen. She had had her momentary flowering, a year, perhaps, of wild-rose beauty and then she had suddenly swollen like a fertilized fruit and grown hard and red and coarse, and then her life had been laundering, scrubbing, darning, cooking, sweeping, polishing, mending, scrubbing, laundering, first for children, then for grandchildren, over thirty unbroken years. At the end of it she was still singing. The mystical reverence that he felt for her was somehow mixed up with the aspect of the pale, cloudless sky, stretching away behind the chimney-pots into interminable distance. It was curious to think that the sky was the same for everybody, in Eurasia or Eastasia as well as here. And the people under the sky were also very much the same — everywhere, all over the world, hundreds of thousands of millions of people just like this, people ignorant of one another's existence, held apart by walls of hatred and lies, and yet almost exactly the same — people who had never learned to think but who were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world. If there was hope, it lay in the proles! Without

having read to the end of THE BOOK, he knew that that must be Goldstein's final message. The future belonged to the proles. And could he be sure that when their time came the world they constructed would not be just as alien to him, Winston Smith, as the world of the Party? Yes, because at the least it would be a world of sanity. Where there is equality there can be sanity. Sooner or later it would happen, strength would change into consciousness. The proles were immortal, you could not doubt it when you looked at that valiant figure in the yard. In the end their awakening would come. And until that happened, though it might be a thousand years, they would stay alive against all the odds, like birds, passing on from body to body the vitality which the Party did not share and could not kill.

'Do you remember,' he said, 'the thrush that sang to us, that first day, at the edge of the wood?'

'He wasn't singing to us,' said Julia. 'He was singing to please himself. Not even that. He was just singing.'

The birds sang, the proles sang. the Party did not sing. All round the world, in London and New York, in Africa and Brazil, and in the mysterious, forbidden lands beyond the frontiers, in the streets of Paris and Berlin, in the villages of the endless Russian plain, in the bazaars of China and Japan — everywhere stood the same solid unconquerable figure, made monstrous by work and childbearing, toiling from birth to death and still singing. Out of those mighty loins a race of conscious beings must one day come. You were the dead, theirs was the future. But you could share in that future if you kept alive the mind as they kept alive the body, and passed on the secret doctrine that two plus two make four.

'We are the dead,' he said.

'We are the dead,' echoed Julia dutifully.

'You are the dead,' said an iron voice behind them.

They sprang apart. Winston's entrails seemed to have turned into ice. He could see the white all round the irises of Julia's eyes. Her face had turned a milky yellow. The smear of rouge that was still on each cheekbone stood out sharply, almost as though unconnected with the skin beneath.

'You are the dead,' repeated the iron voice.

‘It was behind the picture,’ breathed Julia.

‘It was behind the picture,’ said the voice. ‘Remain exactly where you are. Make no movement until you are ordered.’

It was starting, it was starting at last! They could do nothing except stand gazing into one another’s eyes. To run for life, to get out of the house before it was too late — no such thought occurred to them. Unthinkable to disobey the iron voice from the wall. There was a snap as though a catch had been turned back, and a crash of breaking glass. The picture had fallen to the floor uncovering the telescreen behind it.

‘Now they can see us,’ said Julia.

‘Now we can see you,’ said the voice. ‘Stand out in the middle of the room. Stand back to back. Clasp your hands behind your heads. Do not touch one another.’

They were not touching, but it seemed to him that he could feel Julia’s body shaking. Or perhaps it was merely the shaking of his own. He could just stop his teeth from chattering, but his knees were beyond his control. There was a sound of trampling boots below, inside the house and outside. The yard seemed to be full of men. Something was being dragged across the stones. The woman’s singing had stopped abruptly. There was a long, rolling clang, as though the washtub had been flung across the yard, and then a confusion of angry shouts which ended in a yell of pain.

‘The house is surrounded,’ said Winston.

‘The house is surrounded,’ said the voice.

He heard Julia snap her teeth together. ‘I suppose we may as well say good-bye,’ she said.

‘You may as well say good-bye,’ said the voice. And then another quite different voice, a thin, cultivated voice which Winston had the impression of having heard before, struck in; ‘And by the way, while we are on the subject, “Here comes a candle to light you to bed, here comes a chopper to chop off your head”!’

Something crashed on to the bed behind Winston’s back. The head of a ladder had been thrust through the window and had burst in the frame. Someone was climbing through the window. There was a stampede of boots up the stairs. The room was full of solid men in black uniforms, with iron-shod boots on their feet and truncheons in

their hands.

Winston was not trembling any longer. Even his eyes he barely moved. One thing alone mattered; to keep still, to keep still and not give them an excuse to hit you! A man with a smooth prize-fighter's jowl in which the mouth was only a slit paused opposite him balancing his truncheon meditatively between thumb and forefinger. Winston met his eyes. The feeling of nakedness, with one's hands behind one's head and one's face and body all exposed, was almost unbearable. The man protruded the tip of a white tongue, licked the place where his lips should have been, and then passed on. There was another crash. Someone had picked up the glass paperweight from the table and smashed it to pieces on the hearth-stone.

The fragment of coral, a tiny crinkle of pink like a sugar rosebud from a cake, rolled across the mat. How small, thought Winston, how small it always was! There was a gasp and a thump behind him, and he received a violent kick on the ankle which nearly flung him off his balance. One of the men had smashed his fist into Julia's solar plexus, doubling her up like a pocket ruler. She was thrashing about on the floor, fighting for breath. Winston dared not turn his head even by a millimetre, but sometimes her livid, gasping face came within the angle of his vision. Even in his terror it was as though he could feel the pain in his own body, the deadly pain which nevertheless was less urgent than the struggle to get back her breath. He knew what it was like; the terrible, agonizing pain which was there all the while but could not be suffered yet, because before all else it was necessary to be able to breathe. Then two of the men hoisted her up by knees and shoulders, and carried her out of the room like a sack. Winston had a glimpse of her face, upside down, yellow and contorted, with the eyes shut, and still with a smear of rouge on either cheek; and that was the last he saw of her.

He stood dead still. No one had hit him yet. Thoughts which came of their own accord but seemed totally uninteresting began to flit through his mind. He wondered whether they had got Mr Charrington. He wondered what they had done to the woman in the yard. He noticed that he badly wanted to urinate, and felt a faint surprise, because he had done so only two or three hours ago. He noticed that the clock on the mantelpiece said nine, meaning twenty-

one. But the light seemed too strong. Would not the light be fading at twenty-one hours on an August evening? He wondered whether after all he and Julia had mistaken the time — had slept the clock round and thought it was twenty-thirty when really it was nought eight-thirty on the following morning. But he did not pursue the thought further. It was not interesting.

There was another, lighter step in the passage. Mr Charrington came into the room. The demeanour of the black-uniformed men suddenly became more subdued. Something had also changed in Mr Charrington's appearance. His eye fell on the fragments of the glass paperweight.

'Pick up those pieces,' he said sharply.

A man stooped to obey. The cockney accent had disappeared; Winston suddenly realized whose voice it was that he had heard a few moments ago on the telescreen. Mr Charrington was still wearing his old velvet jacket, but his hair, which had been almost white, had turned black. Also he was not wearing his spectacles. He gave Winston a single sharp glance, as though verifying his identity, and then paid no more attention to him. He was still recognizable, but he was not the same person any longer. His body had straightened, and seemed to have grown bigger. His face had undergone only tiny changes that had nevertheless worked a complete transformation. The black eyebrows were less bushy, the wrinkles were gone, the whole lines of the face seemed to have altered; even the nose seemed shorter. It was the alert, cold face of a man of about five-and-thirty. It occurred to Winston that for the first time in his life he was looking, with knowledge, at a member of the Thought Police.

PART THREE

Chapter 1

He did not know where he was. Presumably he was in the Ministry of Love, but there was no way of making certain. He was in a high-ceilinged windowless cell with walls of glittering white porcelain. Concealed lamps flooded it with cold light, and there was a low, steady humming sound which he supposed had something to do with the air supply. A bench, or shelf, just wide enough to sit on ran round the wall, broken only by the door and, at the end opposite the door, a lavatory pan with no wooden seat. There were four telescreens, one in each wall.

There was a dull aching in his belly. It had been there ever since they had bundled him into the closed van and driven him away. But he was also hungry, with a gnawing, unwholesome kind of hunger. It might be twenty-four hours since he had eaten, it might be thirty-six. He still did not know, probably never would know, whether it had been morning or evening when they arrested him. Since he was arrested he had not been fed.

He sat as still as he could on the narrow bench, with his hands crossed on his knee. He had already learned to sit still. If you made unexpected movements they yelled at you from the telescreen. But the craving for food was growing upon him. What he longed for above all was a piece of bread. He had an idea that there were a few breadcrumbs in the pocket of his overalls. It was even possible — he thought this because from time to time something seemed to tickle his leg — that there might be a sizeable bit of crust there. In the end the temptation to find out overcame his fear; he slipped a hand into his pocket.

'Smith!' yelled a voice from the telescreen. '6079 Smith W.! Hands out of pockets in the cells!'

He sat still again, his hands crossed on his knee. Before being brought here he had been taken to another place which must have been an ordinary prison or a temporary lock-up used by the patrols. He did not know how long he had been there; some hours at any rate; with no clocks and no daylight it was hard to gauge the time. It was a noisy, evil-smelling place. They had put him into a cell similar to the

one he was now in, but filthily dirty and at all times crowded by ten or fifteen people. The majority of them were common criminals, but there were a few political prisoners among them. He had sat silent against the wall, jostled by dirty bodies, too preoccupied by fear and the pain in his belly to take much interest in his surroundings, but still noticing the astonishing difference in demeanour between the Party prisoners and the others. The Party prisoners were always silent and terrified, but the ordinary criminals seemed to care nothing for anybody. They yelled insults at the guards, fought back fiercely when their belongings were impounded, wrote obscene words on the floor, ate smuggled food which they produced from mysterious hiding-places in their clothes, and even shouted down the telescreen when it tried to restore order. On the other hand some of them seemed to be on good terms with the guards, called them by nicknames, and tried to wheedle cigarettes through the spyhole in the door. The guards, too, treated the common criminals with a certain forbearance, even when they had to handle them roughly. There was much talk about the forced-labour camps to which most of the prisoners expected to be sent. It was 'all right' in the camps, he gathered, so long as you had good contacts and knew the ropes. There was bribery, favouritism, and racketeering of every kind, there was homosexuality and prostitution, there was even illicit alcohol distilled from potatoes. The positions of trust were given only to the common criminals, especially the gangsters and the murderers, who formed a sort of aristocracy. All the dirty jobs were done by the politicals.

There was a constant come-and-go of prisoners of every description: drug-peddlers, thieves, bandits, black-marketeers, drunks, prostitutes. Some of the drunks were so violent that the other prisoners had to combine to suppress them. An enormous wreck of a woman, aged about sixty, with great tumbling breasts and thick coils of white hair which had come down in her struggles, was carried in, kicking and shouting, by four guards, who had hold of her one at each corner. They wrenched off the boots with which she had been trying to kick them, and dumped her down across Winston's lap, almost breaking his thigh-bones. The woman hoisted herself upright and followed them out with a yell of 'F —— bastards!' Then, noticing that she was sitting on something uneven, she slid off

Winston's knees on to the bench.

'Beg pardon, dearie,' she said. 'I wouldn't 'a sat on you, only the buggers put me there. They dono 'ow to treat a lady, do they?' She paused, patted her breast, and belched. 'Pardon,' she said, 'I ain't meself, quite.'

She leant forward and vomited copiously on the floor.

'Thass better,' she said, leaning back with closed eyes. 'Never keep it down, thass what I say. Get it up while it's fresh on your stomach, like.'

She revived, turned to have another look at Winston and seemed immediately to take a fancy to him. She put a vast arm round his shoulder and drew him towards her, breathing beer and vomit into his face.

'Wass your name, dearie?' she said.

'Smith,' said Winston.

'Smith?' said the woman. 'Thass funny. My name's Smith too. Why,' she added sentimentally, 'I might be your mother!'

She might, thought Winston, be his mother. She was about the right age and physique, and it was probable that people changed somewhat after twenty years in a forced-labour camp.

No one else had spoken to him. To a surprising extent the ordinary criminals ignored the Party prisoners. 'The polITS,' they called them, with a sort of uninterested contempt. The Party prisoners seemed terrified of speaking to anybody, and above all of speaking to one another. Only once, when two Party members, both women, were pressed close together on the bench, he overheard amid the din of voices a few hurriedly-whispered words; and in particular a reference to something called 'room one-oh-one', which he did not understand.

It might be two or three hours ago that they had brought him here. The dull pain in his belly never went away, but sometimes it grew better and sometimes worse, and his thoughts expanded or contracted accordingly. When it grew worse he thought only of the pain itself, and of his desire for food. When it grew better, panic took hold of him. There were moments when he foresaw the things that would happen to him with such actuality that his heart galloped and his breath stopped. He felt the smash of truncheons on his elbows and

iron-shod boots on his shins; he saw himself grovelling on the floor, screaming for mercy through broken teeth. He hardly thought of Julia. He could not fix his mind on her. He loved her and would not betray her; but that was only a fact, known as he knew the rules of arithmetic. He felt no love for her, and he hardly even wondered what was happening to her. He thought oftener of O'Brien, with a flickering hope. O'Brien might know that he had been arrested. The Brotherhood, he had said, never tried to save its members. But there was the razor blade; they would send the razor blade if they could. There would be perhaps five seconds before the guard could rush into the cell. The blade would bite into him with a sort of burning coldness, and even the fingers that held it would be cut to the bone. Everything came back to his sick body, which shrank trembling from the smallest pain. He was not certain that he would use the razor blade even if he got the chance. It was more natural to exist from moment to moment, accepting another ten minutes' life even with the certainty that there was torture at the end of it.

Sometimes he tried to calculate the number of porcelain bricks in the walls of the cell. It should have been easy, but he always lost count at some point or another. More often he wondered where he was, and what time of day it was. At one moment he felt certain that it was broad daylight outside, and at the next equally certain that it was pitch darkness. In this place, he knew instinctively, the lights would never be turned out. It was the place with no darkness: he saw now why O'Brien had seemed to recognize the allusion. In the Ministry of Love there were no windows. His cell might be at the heart of the building or against its outer wall; it might be ten floors below ground, or thirty above it. He moved himself mentally from place to place, and tried to determine by the feeling of his body whether he was perched high in the air or buried deep underground.

There was a sound of marching boots outside. The steel door opened with a clang. A young officer, a trim black-uniformed figure who seemed to glitter all over with polished leather, and whose pale, straight-featured face was like a wax mask, stepped smartly through the doorway. He motioned to the guards outside to bring in the prisoner they were leading. The poet Ampleforth shambled into the cell. The door clanged shut again.

Ampleforth made one or two uncertain movements from side to side, as though having some idea that there was another door to go out of, and then began to wander up and down the cell. He had not yet noticed Winston's presence. His troubled eyes were gazing at the wall about a metre above the level of Winston's head. He was shoeless; large, dirty toes were sticking out of the holes in his socks. He was also several days away from a shave. A scrubby beard covered his face to the cheekbones, giving him an air of ruffianism that went oddly with his large weak frame and nervous movements.

Winston roused himself a little from his lethargy. He must speak to Ampleforth, and risk the yell from the telescreen. It was even conceivable that Ampleforth was the bearer of the razor blade.

'Ampleforth,' he said.

There was no yell from the telescreen. Ampleforth paused, mildly startled. His eyes focused themselves slowly on Winston.

'Ah, Smith!' he said. 'You too!'

'What are you in for?'

'To tell you the truth— ' He sat down awkwardly on the bench opposite Winston. 'There is only one offence, is there not?' he said.

'And have you committed it?'

'Apparently I have.'

He put a hand to his forehead and pressed his temples for a moment, as though trying to remember something.

'These things happen,' he began vaguely. 'I have been able to recall one instance — a possible instance. It was an indiscretion, undoubtedly. We were producing a definitive edition of the poems of Kipling. I allowed the word "God" to remain at the end of a line. I could not help it!' he added almost indignantly, raising his face to look at Winston. 'It was impossible to change the line. The rhyme was "rod". Do you realize that there are only twelve rhymes to "rod" in the entire language? For days I had racked my brains. There WAS no other rhyme.'

The expression on his face changed. The annoyance passed out of it and for a moment he looked almost pleased. A sort of intellectual warmth, the joy of the pedant who has found out some useless fact, shone through the dirt and scrubby hair.

'Has it ever occurred to you,' he said, 'that the whole history of

English poetry has been determined by the fact that the English language lacks rhymes?'

No, that particular thought had never occurred to Winston. Nor, in the circumstances, did it strike him as very important or interesting.

'Do you know what time of day it is?' he said.

Ampleforth looked startled again. 'I had hardly thought about it. They arrested me — it could be two days ago — perhaps three.' His eyes flitted round the walls, as though he half expected to find a window somewhere. 'There is no difference between night and day in this place. I do not see how one can calculate the time.'

They talked desultorily for some minutes, then, without apparent reason, a yell from the telescreen bade them be silent. Winston sat quietly, his hands crossed. Ampleforth, too large to sit in comfort on the narrow bench, fidgeted from side to side, clasping his lank hands first round one knee, then round the other. The telescreen barked at him to keep still. Time passed. Twenty minutes, an hour — it was difficult to judge. Once more there was a sound of boots outside. Winston's entrails contracted. Soon, very soon, perhaps in five minutes, perhaps now, the tramp of boots would mean that his own turn had come.

The door opened. The cold-faced young officer stepped into the cell. With a brief movement of the hand he indicated Ampleforth.

'Room 101,' he said.

Ampleforth marched clumsily out between the guards, his face vaguely perturbed, but uncomprehending.

What seemed like a long time passed. The pain in Winston's belly had revived. His mind sagged round and round on the same trick, like a ball falling again and again into the same series of slots. He had only six thoughts. The pain in his belly; a piece of bread; the blood and the screaming; O'Brien; Julia; the razor blade. There was another spasm in his entrails, the heavy boots were approaching. As the door opened, the wave of air that it created brought in a powerful smell of cold sweat. Parsons walked into the cell. He was wearing khaki shorts and a sports-shirt.

This time Winston was startled into self-forgetfulness.

'YOU here!' he said.

Parsons gave Winston a glance in which there was neither interest

nor surprise, but only misery. He began walking jerkily up and down, evidently unable to keep still. Each time he straightened his pudgy knees it was apparent that they were trembling. His eyes had a wide-open, staring look, as though he could not prevent himself from gazing at something in the middle distance.

'What are you in for?' said Winston.

'Thoughtcrime!' said Parsons, almost blubbering. The tone of his voice implied at once a complete admission of his guilt and a sort of incredulous horror that such a word could be applied to himself. He paused opposite Winston and began eagerly appealing to him: 'You don't think they'll shoot me, do you, old chap? They don't shoot you if you haven't actually done anything — only thoughts, which you can't help? I know they give you a fair hearing. Oh, I trust them for that! They'll know my record, won't they? YOU know what kind of chap I was. Not a bad chap in my way. Not brainy, of course, but keen. I tried to do my best for the Party, didn't I? I'll get off with five years, don't you think? Or even ten years? A chap like me could make himself pretty useful in a labour-camp. They wouldn't shoot me for going off the rails just once?'

'Are you guilty?' said Winston.

'Of course I'm guilty!' cried Parsons with a servile glance at the telescreen. 'You don't think the Party would arrest an innocent man, do you?' His frog-like face grew calmer, and even took on a slightly sanctimonious expression. 'Thoughtcrime is a dreadful thing, old man,' he said sententiously. 'It's insidious. It can get hold of you without your even knowing it. Do you know how it got hold of me? In my sleep! Yes, that's a fact. There I was, working away, trying to do my bit — never knew I had any bad stuff in my mind at all. And then I started talking in my sleep. Do you know what they heard me saying?'

He sank his voice, like someone who is obliged for medical reasons to utter an obscenity.

'"Down with Big Brother!" Yes, I said that! Said it over and over again, it seems. Between you and me, old man, I'm glad they got me before it went any further. Do you know what I'm going to say to them when I go up before the tribunal? "Thank you," I'm going to say, "thank you for saving me before it was too late."'

‘Who denounced you?’ said Winston.

‘It was my little daughter,’ said Parsons with a sort of doleful pride. ‘She listened at the keyhole. Heard what I was saying, and nipped off to the patrols the very next day. Pretty smart for a nipper of seven, eh? I don’t bear her any grudge for it. In fact I’m proud of her. It shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway.’

He made a few more jerky movements up and down, several times, casting a longing glance at the lavatory pan. Then he suddenly ripped down his shorts.

‘Excuse me, old man,’ he said. ‘I can’t help it. It’s the waiting.’

He plumped his large posterior into the lavatory pan. Winston covered his face with his hands.

‘Smith!’ yelled the voice from the telescreen. ‘6079 Smith W.! Uncover your face. No faces covered in the cells.’

Winston uncovered his face. Parsons used the lavatory, loudly and abundantly. It then turned out that the plug was defective and the cell stank abominably for hours afterwards.

Parsons was removed. More prisoners came and went, mysteriously. One, a woman, was consigned to ‘Room 101’, and, Winston noticed, seemed to shrivel and turn a different colour when she heard the words. A time came when, if it had been morning when he was brought here, it would be afternoon; or if it had been afternoon, then it would be midnight. There were six prisoners in the cell, men and women. All sat very still. Opposite Winston there sat a man with a chinless, toothy face exactly like that of some large, harmless rodent. His fat, mottled cheeks were so pouched at the bottom that it was difficult not to believe that he had little stores of food tucked away there. His pale-grey eyes flitted timorously from face to face and turned quickly away again when he caught anyone’s eye.

The door opened, and another prisoner was brought in whose appearance sent a momentary chill through Winston. He was a commonplace, mean-looking man who might have been an engineer or technician of some kind. But what was startling was the emaciation of his face. It was like a skull. Because of its thinness the mouth and eyes looked disproportionately large, and the eyes seemed filled with a murderous, unappeasable hatred of somebody or

something.

The man sat down on the bench at a little distance from Winston. Winston did not look at him again, but the tormented, skull-like face was as vivid in his mind as though it had been straight in front of his eyes. Suddenly he realized what was the matter. The man was dying of starvation. The same thought seemed to occur almost simultaneously to everyone in the cell. There was a very faint stirring all the way round the bench. The eyes of the chinless man kept flitting towards the skull-faced man, then turning guiltily away, then being dragged back by an irresistible attraction. Presently he began to fidget on his seat. At last he stood up, waddled clumsily across the cell, dug down into the pocket of his overalls, and, with an abashed air, held out a grimy piece of bread to the skull-faced man.

There was a furious, deafening roar from the telescreen. The chinless man jumped in his tracks. The skull-faced man had quickly thrust his hands behind his back, as though demonstrating to all the world that he refused the gift.

'Bumstead!' roared the voice. '2713 Bumstead J.! Let fall that piece of bread!'

The chinless man dropped the piece of bread on the floor.

'Remain standing where you are,' said the voice. 'Face the door. Make no movement.'

The chinless man obeyed. His large pouchy cheeks were quivering uncontrollably. The door clanged open. As the young officer entered and stepped aside, there emerged from behind him a short stumpy guard with enormous arms and shoulders. He took his stand opposite the chinless man, and then, at a signal from the officer, let free a frightful blow, with all the weight of his body behind it, full in the chinless man's mouth. The force of it seemed almost to knock him clear of the floor. His body was flung across the cell and fetched up against the base of the lavatory seat. For a moment he lay as though stunned, with dark blood oozing from his mouth and nose. A very faint whimpering or squeaking, which seemed unconscious, came out of him. Then he rolled over and raised himself unsteadily on hands and knees. Amid a stream of blood and saliva, the two halves of a dental plate fell out of his mouth.

The prisoners sat very still, their hands crossed on their knees. The chinless man climbed back into his place. Down one side of his face the flesh was darkening. His mouth had swollen into a shapeless cherry-coloured mass with a black hole in the middle of it.

From time to time a little blood dripped on to the breast of his overalls. His grey eyes still flitted from face to face, more guiltily than ever, as though he were trying to discover how much the others despised him for his humiliation.

The door opened. With a small gesture the officer indicated the skull-faced man.

'Room 101,' he said.

There was a gasp and a flurry at Winston's side. The man had actually flung himself on his knees on the floor, with his hand clasped together.

'Comrade! Officer!' he cried. 'You don't have to take me to that place! Haven't I told you everything already? What else is it you want to know? There's nothing I wouldn't confess, nothing! Just tell me what it is and I'll confess straight off. Write it down and I'll sign it — anything! Not room 101!'

'Room 101,' said the officer.

The man's face, already very pale, turned a colour Winston would not have believed possible. It was definitely, unmistakably, a shade of green.

'Do anything to me!' he yelled. 'You've been starving me for weeks. Finish it off and let me die. Shoot me. Hang me. Sentence me to twenty-five years. Is there somebody else you want me to give away? Just say who it is and I'll tell you anything you want. I don't care who it is or what you do to them. I've got a wife and three children. The biggest of them isn't six years old. You can take the whole lot of them and cut their throats in front of my eyes, and I'll stand by and watch it. But not Room 101!'

'Room 101,' said the officer.

The man looked frantically round at the other prisoners, as though with some idea that he could put another victim in his own place. His eyes settled on the smashed face of the chinless man. He flung out a lean arm.

'That's the one you ought to be taking, not me!' he shouted. 'You

didn't hear what he was saying after they bashed his face. Give me a chance and I'll tell you every word of it. HE'S the one that's against the Party, not me.' The guards stepped forward. The man's voice rose to a shriek. 'You didn't hear him!' he repeated. 'Something went wrong with the telescreen. HE'S the one you want. Take him, not me!'

The two sturdy guards had stooped to take him by the arms. But just at this moment he flung himself across the floor of the cell and grabbed one of the iron legs that supported the bench. He had set up a wordless howling, like an animal. The guards took hold of him to wrench him loose, but he clung on with astonishing strength. For perhaps twenty seconds they were hauling at him. The prisoners sat quiet, their hands crossed on their knees, looking straight in front of them. The howling stopped; the man had no breath left for anything except hanging on. Then there was a different kind of cry. A kick from a guard's boot had broken the fingers of one of his hands. They dragged him to his feet.

'Room 101,' said the officer.

The man was led out, walking unsteadily, with head sunken, nursing his crushed hand, all the fight had gone out of him.

A long time passed. If it had been midnight when the skull-faced man was taken away, it was morning: if morning, it was afternoon. Winston was alone, and had been alone for hours. The pain of sitting on the narrow bench was such that often he got up and walked about, unreproved by the telescreen. The piece of bread still lay where the chinless man had dropped it. At the beginning it needed a hard effort not to look at it, but presently hunger gave way to thirst. His mouth was sticky and evil-tasting. The humming sound and the unvarying white light induced a sort of faintness, an empty feeling inside his head. He would get up because the ache in his bones was no longer bearable, and then would sit down again almost at once because he was too dizzy to make sure of staying on his feet. Whenever his physical sensations were a little under control the terror returned. Sometimes with a fading hope he thought of O'Brien and the razor blade. It was thinkable that the razor blade might arrive concealed in his food, if he were ever fed. More dimly he thought of Julia. Somewhere or other she was suffering perhaps far worse than he. She

might be screaming with pain at this moment. He thought: 'If I could save Julia by doubling my own pain, would I do it? Yes, I would.' But that was merely an intellectual decision, taken because he knew that he ought to take it. He did not feel it. In this place you could not feel anything, except pain and foreknowledge of pain. Besides, was it possible, when you were actually suffering it, to wish for any reason that your own pain should increase? But that question was not answerable yet.

The boots were approaching again. The door opened. O'Brien came in.

Winston started to his feet. The shock of the sight had driven all caution out of him. For the first time in many years he forgot the presence of the telescreen.

'They've got you too!' he cried.

'They got me a long time ago,' said O'Brien with a mild, almost regretful irony. He stepped aside. From behind him there emerged a broad-chested guard with a long black truncheon in his hand.

'You know this, Winston,' said O'Brien. 'Don't deceive yourself. You did know it — you have always known it.'

Yes, he saw now, he had always known it. But there was no time to think of that. All he had eyes for was the truncheon in the guard's hand. It might fall anywhere; on the crown, on the tip of the ear, on the upper arm, on the elbow ——

The elbow! He had slumped to his knees, almost paralysed, clasping the stricken elbow with his other hand. Everything had exploded into yellow light. Inconceivable, inconceivable that one blow could cause such pain! The light cleared and he could see the other two looking down at him. The guard was laughing at his contortions. One question at any rate was answered. Never, for any reason on earth, could you wish for an increase of pain. Of pain you could wish only one thing: that it should stop. Nothing in the world was so bad as physical pain. In the face of pain there are no heroes, no heroes, he thought over and over as he writhed on the floor, clutching uselessly at his disabled left arm.

Chapter 2

He was lying on something that felt like a camp bed, except that it was higher off the ground and that he was fixed down in some way so that he could not move. Light that seemed stronger than usual was falling on his face. O'Brien was standing at his side, looking down at him intently. At the other side of him stood a man in a white coat, holding a hypodermic syringe.

Even after his eyes were open he took in his surroundings only gradually. He had the impression of swimming up into this room from some quite different world, a sort of underwater world far beneath it. How long he had been down there he did not know. Since the moment when they arrested him he had not seen darkness or daylight. Besides, his memories were not continuous. There had been times when consciousness, even the sort of consciousness that one has in sleep, had stopped dead and started again after a blank interval. But whether the intervals were of days or weeks or only seconds, there was no way of knowing.

With that first blow on the elbow the nightmare had started. Later he was to realize that all that then happened was merely a preliminary, a routine interrogation to which nearly all prisoners were subjected. There was a long range of crimes — espionage, sabotage, and the like — to which everyone had to confess as a matter of course. The confession was a formality, though the torture was real. How many times he had been beaten, how long the beatings had continued, he could not remember. Always there were five or six men in black uniforms at him simultaneously. Sometimes it was fists, sometimes it was truncheons, sometimes it was steel rods, sometimes it was boots. There were times when he rolled about the floor, as shameless as an animal, writhing his body this way and that in an endless, hopeless effort to dodge the kicks, and simply inviting more and yet more kicks, in his ribs, in his belly, on his elbows, on his shins, in his groin, in his testicles, on the bone at the base of his spine. There were times when it went on and on until the cruel, wicked, unforgivable thing seemed to him not that the guards continued to beat him but that he could not force himself into losing

consciousness. There were times when his nerve so forsook him that he began shouting for mercy even before the beating began, when the mere sight of a fist drawn back for a blow was enough to make him pour forth a confession of real and imaginary crimes. There were other times when he started out with the resolve of confessing nothing, when every word had to be forced out of him between gasps of pain, and there were times when he feebly tried to compromise, when he said to himself: 'I will confess, but not yet. I must hold out till the pain becomes unbearable. Three more kicks, two more kicks, and then I will tell them what they want.' Sometimes he was beaten till he could hardly stand, then flung like a sack of potatoes on to the stone floor of a cell, left to recuperate for a few hours, and then taken out and beaten again. There were also longer periods of recovery. He remembered them dimly, because they were spent chiefly in sleep or stupor. He remembered a cell with a plank bed, a sort of shelf sticking out from the wall, and a tin wash-basin, and meals of hot soup and bread and sometimes coffee. He remembered a surly barber arriving to scrape his chin and crop his hair, and businesslike, unsympathetic men in white coats feeling his pulse, tapping his reflexes, turning up his eyelids, running harsh fingers over him in search for broken bones, and shooting needles into his arm to make him sleep.

The beatings grew less frequent, and became mainly a threat, a horror to which he could be sent back at any moment when his answers were unsatisfactory. His questioners now were not ruffians in black uniforms but Party intellectuals, little rotund men with quick movements and flashing spectacles, who worked on him in relays over periods which lasted — he thought, he could not be sure — ten or twelve hours at a stretch. These other questioners saw to it that he was in constant slight pain, but it was not chiefly pain that they relied on. They slapped his face, wrung his ears, pulled his hair, made him stand on one leg, refused him leave to urinate, shone glaring lights in his face until his eyes ran with water; but the aim of this was simply to humiliate him and destroy his power of arguing and reasoning. Their real weapon was the merciless questioning that went on and on, hour after hour, tripping him up, laying traps for him, twisting everything that he said, convicting him at every step of lies and self-

contradiction until he began weeping as much from shame as from nervous fatigue. Sometimes he would weep half a dozen times in a single session. Most of the time they screamed abuse at him and threatened at every hesitation to deliver him over to the guards again; but sometimes they would suddenly change their tune, call him comrade, appeal to him in the name of Ingsoc and Big Brother, and ask him sorrowfully whether even now he had not enough loyalty to the Party left to make him wish to undo the evil he had done. When his nerves were in rags after hours of questioning, even this appeal could reduce him to snivelling tears. In the end the nagging voices broke him down more completely than the boots and fists of the guards. He became simply a mouth that uttered, a hand that signed, whatever was demanded of him. His sole concern was to find out what they wanted him to confess, and then confess it quickly, before the bullying started anew. He confessed to the assassination of eminent Party members, the distribution of seditious pamphlets, embezzlement of public funds, sale of military secrets, sabotage of every kind. He confessed that he had been a spy in the pay of the Eastasian government as far back as 1968. He confessed that he was a religious believer, an admirer of capitalism, and a sexual pervert. He confessed that he had murdered his wife, although he knew, and his questioners must have known, that his wife was still alive. He confessed that for years he had been in personal touch with Goldstein and had been a member of an underground organization which had included almost every human being he had ever known. It was easier to confess everything and implicate everybody. Besides, in a sense it was all true. It was true that he had been the enemy of the Party, and in the eyes of the Party there was no distinction between the thought and the deed.

There were also memories of another kind. They stood out in his mind disconnectedly, like pictures with blackness all round them.

He was in a cell which might have been either dark or light, because he could see nothing except a pair of eyes. Near at hand some kind of instrument was ticking slowly and regularly. The eyes grew larger and more luminous. Suddenly he floated out of his seat, dived into the eyes, and was swallowed up.

He was strapped into a chair surrounded by dials, under dazzling

lights. A man in a white coat was reading the dials. There was a tramp of heavy boots outside. The door clanged open. The waxed-faced officer marched in, followed by two guards.

'Room 101,' said the officer.

The man in the white coat did not turn round. He did not look at Winston either; he was looking only at the dials.

He was rolling down a mighty corridor, a kilometre wide, full of glorious, golden light, roaring with laughter and shouting out confessions at the top of his voice. He was confessing everything, even the things he had succeeded in holding back under the torture. He was relating the entire history of his life to an audience who knew it already. With him were the guards, the other questioners, the men in white coats, O'Brien, Julia, Mr Charrington, all rolling down the corridor together and shouting with laughter. Some dreadful thing which had lain embedded in the future had somehow been skipped over and had not happened. Everything was all right, there was no more pain, the last detail of his life was laid bare, understood, forgiven.

He was starting up from the plank bed in the half-certainty that he had heard O'Brien's voice. All through his interrogation, although he had never seen him, he had had the feeling that O'Brien was at his elbow, just out of sight. It was O'Brien who was directing everything. It was he who set the guards on to Winston and who prevented them from killing him. It was he who decided when Winston should scream with pain, when he should have a respite, when he should be fed, when he should sleep, when the drugs should be pumped into his arm. It was he who asked the questions and suggested the answers. He was the tormentor, he was the protector, he was the inquisitor, he was the friend. And once — Winston could not remember whether it was in drugged sleep, or in normal sleep, or even in a moment of wakefulness — a voice murmured in his ear: 'Don't worry, Winston; you are in my keeping. For seven years I have watched over you. Now the turning-point has come. I shall save you, I shall make you perfect.' He was not sure whether it was O'Brien's voice; but it was the same voice that had said to him, 'We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness,' in that other dream, seven years ago.

He did not remember any ending to his interrogation. There was a period of blackness and then the cell, or room, in which he now was had gradually materialized round him. He was almost flat on his back, and unable to move. His body was held down at every essential point. Even the back of his head was gripped in some manner. O'Brien was looking down at him gravely and rather sadly. His face, seen from below, looked coarse and worn, with pouches under the eyes and tired lines from nose to chin. He was older than Winston had thought him; he was perhaps forty-eight or fifty. Under his hand there was a dial with a lever on top and figures running round the face.

'I told you,' said O'Brien, 'that if we met again it would be here.'

'Yes,' said Winston.

Without any warning except a slight movement of O'Brien's hand, a wave of pain flooded his body. It was a frightening pain, because he could not see what was happening, and he had the feeling that some mortal injury was being done to him. He did not know whether the thing was really happening, or whether the effect was electrically produced; but his body was being wrenched out of shape, the joints were being slowly torn apart. Although the pain had brought the sweat out on his forehead, the worst of all was the fear that his backbone was about to snap. He set his teeth and breathed hard through his nose, trying to keep silent as long as possible.

'You are afraid,' said O'Brien, watching his face, 'that in another moment something is going to break. Your especial fear is that it will be your backbone. You have a vivid mental picture of the vertebrae snapping apart and the spinal fluid dripping out of them. That is what you are thinking, is it not, Winston?'

Winston did not answer. O'Brien drew back the lever on the dial. The wave of pain receded almost as quickly as it had come.

'That was forty,' said O'Brien. 'You can see that the numbers on this dial run up to a hundred. Will you please remember, throughout our conversation, that I have it in my power to inflict pain on you at any moment and to whatever degree I choose? If you tell me any lies, or attempt to prevaricate in any way, or even fall below your usual level of intelligence, you will cry out with pain, instantly. Do you understand that?'

‘Yes,’ said Winston.

O’Brien’s manner became less severe. He resettled his spectacles thoughtfully, and took a pace or two up and down. When he spoke his voice was gentle and patient. He had the air of a doctor, a teacher, even a priest, anxious to explain and persuade rather than to punish.

‘I am taking trouble with you, Winston,’ he said, ‘because you are worth trouble. You know perfectly well what is the matter with you. You have known it for years, though you have fought against the knowledge. You are mentally deranged. You suffer from a defective memory. You are unable to remember real events and you persuade yourself that you remember other events which never happened. Fortunately it is curable. You have never cured yourself of it, because you did not choose to. There was a small effort of the will that you were not ready to make. Even now, I am well aware, you are clinging to your disease under the impression that it is a virtue. Now we will take an example. At this moment, which power is Oceania at war with?’

‘When I was arrested, Oceania was at war with Eastasia.’

‘With Eastasia. Good. And Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia, has it not?’

Winston drew in his breath. He opened his mouth to speak and then did not speak. He could not take his eyes away from the dial.

‘The truth, please, Winston. YOUR truth. Tell me what you think you remember.’

‘I remember that until only a week before I was arrested, we were not at war with Eastasia at all. We were in alliance with them. The war was against Eurasia. That had lasted for four years. Before that — — ‘

O’Brien stopped him with a movement of the hand.

‘Another example,’ he said. ‘Some years ago you had a very serious delusion indeed. You believed that three men, three one-time Party members named Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford — men who were executed for treachery and sabotage after making the fullest possible confession — were not guilty of the crimes they were charged with. You believed that you had seen unmistakable documentary evidence proving that their confessions were false. There was a certain photograph about which you had a hallucination.

You believed that you had actually held it in your hands. It was a photograph something like this.'

An oblong slip of newspaper had appeared between O'Brien's fingers. For perhaps five seconds it was within the angle of Winston's vision. It was a photograph, and there was no question of its identity. It was THE photograph. It was another copy of the photograph of Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford at the party function in New York, which he had chanced upon eleven years ago and promptly destroyed. For only an instant it was before his eyes, then it was out of sight again. But he had seen it, unquestionably he had seen it! He made a desperate, agonizing effort to wrench the top half of his body free. It was impossible to move so much as a centimetre in any direction. For the moment he had even forgotten the dial. All he wanted was to hold the photograph in his fingers again, or at least to see it.

'It exists!' he cried.

'No,' said O'Brien.

He stepped across the room. There was a memory hole in the opposite wall. O'Brien lifted the grating. Unseen, the frail slip of paper was whirling away on the current of warm air; it was vanishing in a flash of flame. O'Brien turned away from the wall.

'Ashes,' he said. 'Not even identifiable ashes. Dust. It does not exist. It never existed.'

'But it did exist! It does exist! It exists in memory. I remember it. You remember it.'

'I do not remember it,' said O'Brien.

Winston's heart sank. That was doublethink. He had a feeling of deadly helplessness. If he could have been certain that O'Brien was lying, it would not have seemed to matter. But it was perfectly possible that O'Brien had really forgotten the photograph. And if so, then already he would have forgotten his denial of remembering it, and forgotten the act of forgetting. How could one be sure that it was simple trickery? Perhaps that lunatic dislocation in the mind could really happen: that was the thought that defeated him.

O'Brien was looking down at him speculatively. More than ever he had the air of a teacher taking pains with a wayward but promising child.

‘There is a Party slogan dealing with the control of the past,’ he said. ‘Repeat it, if you please.’

‘“Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past,”’ repeated Winston obediently.

‘“Who controls the present controls the past,”’ said O’Brien, nodding his head with slow approval. ‘Is it your opinion, Winston, that the past has real existence?’

Again the feeling of helplessness descended upon Winston. His eyes flitted towards the dial. He not only did not know whether ‘yes’ or ‘no’ was the answer that would save him from pain; he did not even know which answer he believed to be the true one.

O’Brien smiled faintly. ‘You are no metaphysician, Winston,’ he said. ‘Until this moment you had never considered what is meant by existence. I will put it more precisely. Does the past exist concretely, in space? Is there somewhere or other a place, a world of solid objects, where the past is still happening?’

‘No.’

‘Then where does the past exist, if at all?’

‘In records. It is written down.’

‘In records. And —— ?’

‘In the mind. In human memories.’

‘In memory. Very well, then. We, the Party, control all records, and we control all memories. Then we control the past, do we not?’

‘But how can you stop people remembering things?’ cried Winston again momentarily forgetting the dial. ‘It is involuntary. It is outside oneself. How can you control memory? You have not controlled mine!’

O’Brien’s manner grew stern again. He laid his hand on the dial.

‘On the contrary,’ he said, ‘YOU have not controlled it. That is what has brought you here. You are here because you have failed in humility, in self-discipline. You would not make the act of submission which is the price of sanity. You preferred to be a lunatic, a minority of one. Only the disciplined mind can see reality, Winston. You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. You also believe that the nature of reality is self-evident. When you delude yourself into thinking that you see something, you assume that everyone else sees the same thing as

you. But I tell you, Winston, that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes: only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be the truth, is truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party. That is the fact that you have got to relearn, Winston. It needs an act of self-destruction, an effort of the will. You must humble yourself before you can become sane.'

He paused for a few moments, as though to allow what he had been saying to sink in.

'Do you remember,' he went on, 'writing in your diary, "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four"?'

'Yes,' said Winston.

O'Brien held up his left hand, its back towards Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended.

'How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?'

'Four.'

'And if the party says that it is not four but five — then how many?'

'Four.'

The word ended in a gasp of pain. The needle of the dial had shot up to fifty-five. The sweat had sprung out all over Winston's body. The air tore into his lungs and issued again in deep groans which even by clenching his teeth he could not stop. O'Brien watched him, the four fingers still extended. He drew back the lever. This time the pain was only slightly eased.

'How many fingers, Winston?'

'Four.'

The needle went up to sixty.

'How many fingers, Winston?'

'Four! Four! What else can I say? Four!'

The needle must have risen again, but he did not look at it. The heavy, stern face and the four fingers filled his vision. The fingers stood up before his eyes like pillars, enormous, blurry, and seeming to vibrate, but unmistakably four.

'How many fingers, Winston?'

‘Four! Stop it, stop it! How can you go on? Four! Four!’

‘How many fingers, Winston?’

‘Five! Five! Five!’

‘No, Winston, that is no use. You are lying. You still think there are four. How many fingers, please?’

‘Four! five! Four! Anything you like. Only stop it, stop the pain!’

Abruptly he was sitting up with O’Brien’s arm round his shoulders. He had perhaps lost consciousness for a few seconds. The bonds that had held his body down were loosened. He felt very cold, he was shaking uncontrollably, his teeth were chattering, the tears were rolling down his cheeks. For a moment he clung to O’Brien like a baby, curiously comforted by the heavy arm round his shoulders. He had the feeling that O’Brien was his protector, that the pain was something that came from outside, from some other source, and that it was O’Brien who would save him from it.

‘You are a slow learner, Winston,’ said O’Brien gently.

‘How can I help it?’ he blubbered. ‘How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four.’

‘Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane.’

He laid Winston down on the bed. The grip of his limbs tightened again, but the pain had ebbed away and the trembling had stopped, leaving him merely weak and cold. O’Brien motioned with his head to the man in the white coat, who had stood immobile throughout the proceedings. The man in the white coat bent down and looked closely into Winston’s eyes, felt his pulse, laid an ear against his chest, tapped here and there, then he nodded to O’Brien.

‘Again,’ said O’Brien.

The pain flowed into Winston’s body. The needle must be at seventy, seventy-five. He had shut his eyes this time. He knew that the fingers were still there, and still four. All that mattered was somehow to stay alive until the spasm was over. He had ceased to notice whether he was crying out or not. The pain lessened again. He opened his eyes. O’Brien had drawn back the lever.

‘How many fingers, Winston?’

‘Four. I suppose there are four. I would see five if I could. I am

trying to see five.'

'Which do you wish: to persuade me that you see five, or really to see them?'

'Really to see them.'

'Again,' said O'Brien.

Perhaps the needle was eighty — ninety. Winston could not intermittently remember why the pain was happening. Behind his screwed-up eyelids a forest of fingers seemed to be moving in a sort of dance, weaving in and out, disappearing behind one another and reappearing again. He was trying to count them, he could not remember why. He knew only that it was impossible to count them, and that this was somehow due to the mysterious identity between five and four. The pain died down again. When he opened his eyes it was to find that he was still seeing the same thing. Innumerable fingers, like moving trees, were still streaming past in either direction, crossing and recrossing. He shut his eyes again.

'How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?'

'I don't know. I don't know. You will kill me if you do that again. Four, five, six — in all honesty I don't know.'

'Better,' said O'Brien.

A needle slid into Winston's arm. Almost in the same instant a blissful, healing warmth spread all through his body. The pain was already half-forgotten. He opened his eyes and looked up gratefully at O'Brien. At sight of the heavy, lined face, so ugly and so intelligent, his heart seemed to turn over. If he could have moved he would have stretched out a hand and laid it on O'Brien's arm. He had never loved him so deeply as at this moment, and not merely because he had stopped the pain. The old feeling, that at bottom it did not matter whether O'Brien was a friend or an enemy, had come back. O'Brien was a person who could be talked to. Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood. O'Brien had tortured him to the edge of lunacy, and in a little while, it was certain, he would send him to his death. It made no difference. In some sense that went deeper than friendship, they were intimates: somewhere or other, although the actual words might never be spoken, there was a place where they could meet and talk. O'Brien was looking down at him with an expression which suggested that the same thought might

be in his own mind. When he spoke it was in an easy, conversational tone.

'Do you know where you are, Winston?' he said.

'I don't know. I can guess. In the Ministry of Love.'

'Do you know how long you have been here?'

'I don't know. Days, weeks, months — I think it is months.'

'And why do you imagine that we bring people to this place?'

'To make them confess.'

'No, that is not the reason. Try again.'

'To punish them.'

'No!' exclaimed O'Brien. His voice had changed extraordinarily, and his face had suddenly become both stern and animated. 'No! Not merely to extract your confession, not to punish you. Shall I tell you why we have brought you here? To cure you! To make you sane! Will you understand, Winston, that no one whom we bring to this place ever leaves our hands uncured? We are not interested in those stupid crimes that you have committed. The Party is not interested in the overt act: the thought is all we care about. We do not merely destroy our enemies, we change them. Do you understand what I mean by that?'

He was bending over Winston. His face looked enormous because of its nearness, and hideously ugly because it was seen from below. Moreover it was filled with a sort of exaltation, a lunatic intensity. Again Winston's heart shrank. If it had been possible he would have cowered deeper into the bed. He felt certain that O'Brien was about to twist the dial out of sheer wantonness. At this moment, however, O'Brien turned away. He took a pace or two up and down. Then he continued less vehemently:

'The first thing for you to understand is that in this place there are no martyrdoms. You have read of the religious persecutions of the past. In the Middle Ages there was the Inquisition. It was a failure. It set out to eradicate heresy, and ended by perpetuating it. For every heretic it burned at the stake, thousands of others rose up. Why was that? Because the Inquisition killed its enemies in the open, and killed them while they were still unrepentant: in fact, it killed them because they were unrepentant. Men were dying because they would not abandon their true beliefs. Naturally all the glory belonged to the

victim and all the shame to the Inquisitor who burned him. Later, in the twentieth century, there were the totalitarians, as they were called. There were the German Nazis and the Russian Communists. The Russians persecuted heresy more cruelly than the Inquisition had done. And they imagined that they had learned from the mistakes of the past; they knew, at any rate, that one must not make martyrs. Before they exposed their victims to public trial, they deliberately set themselves to destroy their dignity. They wore them down by torture and solitude until they were despicable, cringing wretches, confessing whatever was put into their mouths, covering themselves with abuse, accusing and sheltering behind one another, whimpering for mercy. And yet after only a few years the same thing had happened over again. The dead men had become martyrs and their degradation was forgotten. Once again, why was it? In the first place, because the confessions that they had made were obviously extorted and untrue. We do not make mistakes of that kind. All the confessions that are uttered here are true. We make them true. And above all we do not allow the dead to rise up against us. You must stop imagining that posterity will vindicate you, Winston. Posterity will never hear of you. You will be lifted clean out from the stream of history. We shall turn you into gas and pour you into the stratosphere. Nothing will remain of you, not a name in a register, not a memory in a living brain. You will be annihilated in the past as well as in the future. You will never have existed.'

Then why bother to torture me? thought Winston, with a momentary bitterness. O'Brien checked his step as though Winston had uttered the thought aloud. His large ugly face came nearer, with the eyes a little narrowed.

'You are thinking,' he said, 'that since we intend to destroy you utterly, so that nothing that you say or do can make the smallest difference — in that case, why do we go to the trouble of interrogating you first? That is what you were thinking, was it not?'

'Yes,' said Winston.

O'Brien smiled slightly. 'You are a flaw in the pattern, Winston. You are a stain that must be wiped out. Did I not tell you just now that we are different from the persecutors of the past? We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject

submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us: so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him. It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be. Even in the instant of death we cannot permit any deviation. In the old days the heretic walked to the stake still a heretic, proclaiming his heresy, exulting in it. Even the victim of the Russian purges could carry rebellion locked up in his skull as he walked down the passage waiting for the bullet. But we make the brain perfect before we blow it out. The command of the old despotisms was "Thou shalt not". The command of the totalitarians was "Thou shalt". Our command is "THOU ART". No one whom we bring to this place ever stands out against us. Everyone is washed clean. Even those three miserable traitors in whose innocence you once believed — Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford — in the end we broke them down. I took part in their interrogation myself. I saw them gradually worn down, whimpering, grovelling, weeping — and in the end it was not with pain or fear, only with penitence. By the time we had finished with them they were only the shells of men. There was nothing left in them except sorrow for what they had done, and love of Big Brother. It was touching to see how they loved him. They begged to be shot quickly, so that they could die while their minds were still clean.'

His voice had grown almost dreamy. The exaltation, the lunatic enthusiasm, was still in his face. He is not pretending, thought Winston, he is not a hypocrite, he believes every word he says. What most oppressed him was the consciousness of his own intellectual inferiority. He watched the heavy yet graceful form strolling to and fro, in and out of the range of his vision. O'Brien was a being in all ways larger than himself. There was no idea that he had ever had, or could have, that O'Brien had not long ago known, examined, and rejected. His mind CONTAINED Winston's mind. But in that case how could it be true that O'Brien was mad? It must be he, Winston, who was mad. O'Brien halted and looked down at him. His voice

had grown stern again.

'Do not imagine that you will save yourself, Winston, however completely you surrender to us. No one who has once gone astray is ever spared. And even if we chose to let you live out the natural term of your life, still you would never escape from us. What happens to you here is for ever. Understand that in advance. We shall crush you down to the point from which there is no coming back. Things will happen to you from which you could not recover, if you lived a thousand years. Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling. Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves.'

He paused and signed to the man in the white coat. Winston was aware of some heavy piece of apparatus being pushed into place behind his head. O'Brien had sat down beside the bed, so that his face was almost on a level with Winston's.

'Three thousand,' he said, speaking over Winston's head to the man in the white coat.

Two soft pads, which felt slightly moist, clamped themselves against Winston's temples. He quailed. There was pain coming, a new kind of pain. O'Brien laid a hand reassuringly, almost kindly, on his.

'This time it will not hurt,' he said. 'Keep your eyes fixed on mine.'

At this moment there was a devastating explosion, or what seemed like an explosion, though it was not certain whether there was any noise. There was undoubtedly a blinding flash of light. Winston was not hurt, only prostrated. Although he had already been lying on his back when the thing happened, he had a curious feeling that he had been knocked into that position. A terrific painless blow had flattened him out. Also something had happened inside his head. As his eyes regained their focus he remembered who he was, and where he was, and recognized the face that was gazing into his own; but somewhere or other there was a large patch of emptiness, as though a piece had been taken out of his brain.

'It will not last,' said O'Brien. 'Look me in the eyes. What

country is Oceania at war with?'

Winston thought. He knew what was meant by Oceania and that he himself was a citizen of Oceania. He also remembered Eurasia and Eastasia; but who was at war with whom he did not know. In fact he had not been aware that there was any war.

'I don't remember.'

'Oceania is at war with Eastasia. Do you remember that now?'

'Yes.'

'Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia. Since the beginning of your life, since the beginning of the Party, since the beginning of history, the war has continued without a break, always the same war. Do you remember that?'

'Yes.'

'Eleven years ago you created a legend about three men who had been condemned to death for treachery. You pretended that you had seen a piece of paper which proved them innocent. No such piece of paper ever existed. You invented it, and later you grew to believe in it. You remember now the very moment at which you first invented it. Do you remember that?'

'Yes.'

'Just now I held up the fingers of my hand to you. You saw five fingers. Do you remember that?'

'Yes.'

O'Brien held up the fingers of his left hand, with the thumb concealed.

'There are five fingers there. Do you see five fingers?'

'Yes.'

And he did see them, for a fleeting instant, before the scenery of his mind changed. He saw five fingers, and there was no deformity. Then everything was normal again, and the old fear, the hatred, and the bewilderment came crowding back again. But there had been a moment — he did not know how long, thirty seconds, perhaps — of luminous certainty, when each new suggestion of O'Brien's had filled up a patch of emptiness and become absolute truth, and when two and two could have been three as easily as five, if that were what was needed. It had faded but before O'Brien had dropped his hand; but though he could not recapture it, he could remember it, as one

remembers a vivid experience at some period of one's life when one was in effect a different person.

'You see now,' said O'Brien, 'that it is at any rate possible.'

'Yes,' said Winston.

O'Brien stood up with a satisfied air. Over to his left Winston saw the man in the white coat break an ampoule and draw back the plunger of a syringe. O'Brien turned to Winston with a smile. In almost the old manner he resettled his spectacles on his nose.

'Do you remember writing in your diary,' he said, 'that it did not matter whether I was a friend or an enemy, since I was at least a person who understood you and could be talked to? You were right. I enjoy talking to you. Your mind appeals to me. It resembles my own mind except that you happen to be insane. Before we bring the session to an end you can ask me a few questions, if you choose.'

'Any question I like?'

'Anything.' He saw that Winston's eyes were upon the dial. 'It is switched off. What is your first question?'

'What have you done with Julia?' said Winston.

O'Brien smiled again. 'She betrayed you, Winston. Immediately — unreservedly. I have seldom seen anyone come over to us so promptly. You would hardly recognize her if you saw her. All her rebelliousness, her deceit, her folly, her dirty-mindedness — everything has been burned out of her. It was a perfect conversion, a textbook case.'

'You tortured her?'

O'Brien left this unanswered. 'Next question,' he said.

'Does Big Brother exist?'

'Of course he exists. The Party exists. Big Brother is the embodiment of the Party.'

'Does he exist in the same way as I exist?'

'You do not exist,' said O'Brien.

Once again the sense of helplessness assailed him. He knew, or he could imagine, the arguments which proved his own nonexistence; but they were nonsense, they were only a play on words. Did not the statement, 'You do not exist', contain a logical absurdity? But what use was it to say so? His mind shrivelled as he thought of the unanswerable, mad arguments with which O'Brien would demolish

him.

‘I think I exist,’ he said wearily. ‘I am conscious of my own identity. I was born and I shall die. I have arms and legs. I occupy a particular point in space. No other solid object can occupy the same point simultaneously. In that sense, does Big Brother exist?’

‘It is of no importance. He exists.’

‘Will Big Brother ever die?’

‘Of course not. How could he die? Next question.’

‘Does the Brotherhood exist?’

‘That, Winston, you will never know. If we choose to set you free when we have finished with you, and if you live to be ninety years old, still you will never learn whether the answer to that question is Yes or No. As long as you live it will be an unsolved riddle in your mind.’

Winston lay silent. His breast rose and fell a little faster. He still had not asked the question that had come into his mind the first. He had got to ask it, and yet it was as though his tongue would not utter it. There was a trace of amusement in O’Brien’s face. Even his spectacles seemed to wear an ironical gleam. He knows, thought Winston suddenly, he knows what I am going to ask! At the thought the words burst out of him:

‘What is in Room 101?’

The expression on O’Brien’s face did not change. He answered drily:

‘You know what is in Room 101, Winston. Everyone knows what is in Room 101.’

He raised a finger to the man in the white coat. Evidently the session was at an end. A needle jerked into Winston’s arm. He sank almost instantly into deep sleep.

Chapter 3

‘There are three stages in your reintegration,’ said O’Brien. ‘There is learning, there is understanding, and there is acceptance. It is time for you to enter upon the second stage.’

As always, Winston was lying flat on his back. But of late his bonds were looser. They still held him to the bed, but he could move his knees a little and could turn his head from side to side and raise his arms from the elbow. The dial, also, had grown to be less of a terror. He could evade its pangs if he was quick-witted enough: it was chiefly when he showed stupidity that O’Brien pulled the lever. Sometimes they got through a whole session without use of the dial. He could not remember how many sessions there had been. The whole process seemed to stretch out over a long, indefinite time — weeks, possibly — and the intervals between the sessions might sometimes have been days, sometimes only an hour or two.

‘As you lie there,’ said O’Brien, ‘you have often wondered — you have even asked me — why the Ministry of Love should expend so much time and trouble on you. And when you were free you were puzzled by what was essentially the same question. You could grasp the mechanics of the Society you lived in, but not its underlying motives. Do you remember writing in your diary, “I understand HOW: I do not understand WHY”? It was when you thought about “why” that you doubted your own sanity. You have read THE BOOK, Goldstein’s book, or parts of it, at least. Did it tell you anything that you did not know already?’

‘You have read it?’ said Winston.

‘I wrote it. That is to say, I collaborated in writing it. No book is produced individually, as you know.’

‘Is it true, what it says?’

‘As description, yes. The programme it sets forth is nonsense. The secret accumulation of knowledge — a gradual spread of enlightenment — ultimately a proletarian rebellion — the overthrow of the Party. You foresaw yourself that that was what it would say. It is all nonsense. The proletarians will never revolt, not in a thousand years or a million. They cannot. I do not have to tell you the reason:

you know it already. If you have ever cherished any dreams of violent insurrection, you must abandon them. There is no way in which the Party can be overthrown. The rule of the Party is for ever. Make that the starting-point of your thoughts.'

He came closer to the bed. 'For ever!' he repeated. 'And now let us get back to the question of "how" and "why". You understand well enough HOW the Party maintains itself in power. Now tell me WHY we cling to power. What is our motive? Why should we want power? Go on, speak,' he added as Winston remained silent.

Nevertheless Winston did not speak for another moment or two. A feeling of weariness had overwhelmed him. The faint, mad gleam of enthusiasm had come back into O'Brien's face. He knew in advance what O'Brien would say. That the Party did not seek power for its own ends, but only for the good of the majority. That it sought power because men in the mass were frail, cowardly creatures who could not endure liberty or face the truth, and must be ruled over and systematically deceived by others who were stronger than themselves. That the choice for mankind lay between freedom and happiness, and that, for the great bulk of mankind, happiness was better. That the party was the eternal guardian of the weak, a dedicated sect doing evil that good might come, sacrificing its own happiness to that of others. The terrible thing, thought Winston, the terrible thing was that when O'Brien said this he would believe it. You could see it in his face. O'Brien knew everything. A thousand times better than Winston he knew what the world was really like, in what degradation the mass of human beings lived and by what lies and barbarities the Party kept them there. He had understood it all, weighed it all, and it made no difference: all was justified by the ultimate purpose. What can you do, thought Winston, against the lunatic who is more intelligent than yourself, who gives your arguments a fair hearing and then simply persists in his lunacy?

'You are ruling over us for our own good,' he said feebly. 'You believe that human beings are not fit to govern themselves, and therefore — — '

He started and almost cried out. A pang of pain had shot through his body. O'Brien had pushed the lever of the dial up to thirty-five.

'That was stupid, Winston, stupid!' he said. 'You should know

better than to say a thing like that.'

He pulled the lever back and continued:

'Now I will tell you the answer to my question. It is this. The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently. We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me?'

Winston was struck, as he had been struck before, by the tiredness of O'Brien's face. It was strong and fleshy and brutal, it was full of intelligence and a sort of controlled passion before which he felt himself helpless; but it was tired. There were pouches under the eyes, the skin sagged from the cheekbones. O'Brien leaned over him, deliberately bringing the worn face nearer.

'You are thinking,' he said, 'that my face is old and tired. You are thinking that I talk of power, and yet I am not even able to prevent the decay of my own body. Can you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism. Do you die when you cut your fingernails?'

He turned away from the bed and began strolling up and down again, one hand in his pocket.

'We are the priests of power,' he said. 'God is power. But at present power is only a word so far as you are concerned. It is time for you to gather some idea of what power means. The first thing you

must realize is that power is collective. The individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual. You know the Party slogan: "Freedom is Slavery". Has it ever occurred to you that it is reversible? Slavery is freedom. Alone — free — the human being is always defeated. It must be so, because every human being is doomed to die, which is the greatest of all failures. But if he can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he IS the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal. The second thing for you to realize is that power is power over human beings. Over the body — but, above all, over the mind. Power over matter — external reality, as you would call it — is not important. Already our control over matter is absolute.'

For a moment Winston ignored the dial. He made a violent effort to raise himself into a sitting position, and merely succeeded in wrenching his body painfully.

'But how can you control matter?' he burst out. 'You don't even control the climate or the law of gravity. And there are disease, pain, death — — '

O'Brien silenced him by a movement of his hand. 'We control matter because we control the mind. Reality is inside the skull. You will learn by degrees, Winston. There is nothing that we could not do. Invisibility, levitation — anything. I could float off this floor like a soap bubble if I wish to. I do not wish to, because the Party does not wish it. You must get rid of those nineteenth-century ideas about the laws of Nature. We make the laws of Nature.'

'But you do not! You are not even masters of this planet. What about Eurasia and Eastasia? You have not conquered them yet.'

'Unimportant. We shall conquer them when it suits us. And if we did not, what difference would it make? We can shut them out of existence. Oceania is the world.'

'But the world itself is only a speck of dust. And man is tiny — helpless! How long has he been in existence? For millions of years the earth was uninhabited.'

'Nonsense. The earth is as old as we are, no older. How could it be older? Nothing exists except through human consciousness.'

'But the rocks are full of the bones of extinct animals —

mammoths and mastodons and enormous reptiles which lived here long before man was ever heard of.'

'Have you ever seen those bones, Winston? Of course not. Nineteenth-century biologists invented them. Before man there was nothing. After man, if he could come to an end, there would be nothing. Outside man there is nothing.'

'But the whole universe is outside us. Look at the stars! Some of them are a million light-years away. They are out of our reach for ever.'

'What are the stars?' said O'Brien indifferently. 'They are bits of fire a few kilometres away. We could reach them if we wanted to. Or we could blot them out. The earth is the centre of the universe. The sun and the stars go round it.'

Winston made another convulsive movement. This time he did not say anything. O'Brien continued as though answering a spoken objection:

'For certain purposes, of course, that is not true. When we navigate the ocean, or when we predict an eclipse, we often find it convenient to assume that the earth goes round the sun and that the stars are millions upon millions of kilometres away. But what of it? Do you suppose it is beyond us to produce a dual system of astronomy? The stars can be near or distant, according as we need them. Do you suppose our mathematicians are unequal to that? Have you forgotten doublethink?'

Winston shrank back upon the bed. Whatever he said, the swift answer crushed him like a bludgeon. And yet he knew, he KNEW, that he was in the right. The belief that nothing exists outside your own mind — surely there must be some way of demonstrating that it was false? Had it not been exposed long ago as a fallacy? There was even a name for it, which he had forgotten. A faint smile twitched the corners of O'Brien's mouth as he looked down at him.

'I told you, Winston,' he said, 'that metaphysics is not your strong point. The word you are trying to think of is solipsism. But you are mistaken. This is not solipsism. Collective solipsism, if you like. But that is a different thing: in fact, the opposite thing. All this is a digression,' he added in a different tone. 'The real power, the power we have to fight for night and day, is not power over things, but over

men.' He paused, and for a moment assumed again his air of a schoolmaster questioning a promising pupil: 'How does one man assert his power over another, Winston?'

Winston thought. 'By making him suffer,' he said.

'Exactly. By making him suffer. Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? It is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but MORE merciless as it refines itself. Progress in our world will be progress towards more pain. The old civilizations claimed that they were founded on love or justice. Ours is founded upon hatred. In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy — everything. Already we are breaking down the habits of thought which have survived from before the Revolution. We have cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future there will be no wives and no friends. Children will be taken from their mothers at birth, as one takes eggs from a hen. The sex instinct will be eradicated. Procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card. We shall abolish the orgasm. Our neurologists are at work upon it now. There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. When we are omnipotent we shall have no more need of science. There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. But always — do not forget this, Winston — always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of

trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face — for ever.'

He paused as though he expected Winston to speak. Winston had tried to shrink back into the surface of the bed again. He could not say anything. His heart seemed to be frozen. O'Brien went on:

'And remember that it is for ever. The face will always be there to be stamped upon. The heretic, the enemy of society, will always be there, so that he can be defeated and humiliated over again. Everything that you have undergone since you have been in our hands — all that will continue, and worse. The espionage, the betrayals, the arrests, the tortures, the executions, the disappearances will never cease. It will be a world of terror as much as a world of triumph. The more the Party is powerful, the less it will be tolerant: the weaker the opposition, the tighter the despotism. Goldstein and his heresies will live for ever. Every day, at every moment, they will be defeated, discredited, ridiculed, spat upon and yet they will always survive. This drama that I have played out with you during seven years will be played out over and over again generation after generation, always in subtler forms. Always we shall have the heretic here at our mercy, screaming with pain, broken up, contemptible — and in the end utterly penitent, saved from himself, crawling to our feet of his own accord. That is the world that we are preparing, Winston. A world of victory after victory, triumph after triumph after triumph: an endless pressing, pressing, pressing upon the nerve of power. You are beginning, I can see, to realize what that world will be like. But in the end you will do more than understand it. You will accept it, welcome it, become part of it.'

Winston had recovered himself sufficiently to speak. 'You can't!' he said weakly.

'What do you mean by that remark, Winston?'

'You could not create such a world as you have just described. It is a dream. It is impossible.'

'Why?'

'It is impossible to found a civilization on fear and hatred and cruelty. It would never endure.'

'Why not?'

'It would have no vitality. It would disintegrate. It would commit

suicide.'

'Nonsense. You are under the impression that hatred is more exhausting than love. Why should it be? And if it were, what difference would that make? Suppose that we choose to wear ourselves out faster. Suppose that we quicken the tempo of human life till men are senile at thirty. Still what difference would it make? Can you not understand that the death of the individual is not death? The party is immortal.'

As usual, the voice had battered Winston into helplessness. Moreover he was in dread that if he persisted in his disagreement O'Brien would twist the dial again. And yet he could not keep silent. Feebly, without arguments, with nothing to support him except his inarticulate horror of what O'Brien had said, he returned to the attack.

'I don't know — I don't care. Somehow you will fail. Something will defeat you. Life will defeat you.'

'We control life, Winston, at all its levels. You are imagining that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable. Or perhaps you have returned to your old idea that the proletarians or the slaves will arise and overthrow us. Put it out of your mind. They are helpless, like the animals. Humanity is the Party. The others are outside — irrelevant.'

'I don't care. In the end they will beat you. Sooner or later they will see you for what you are, and then they will tear you to pieces.'

'Do you see any evidence that that is happening? Or any reason why it should?'

'No. I believe it. I KNOW that you will fail. There is something in the universe — I don't know, some spirit, some principle — that you will never overcome.'

'Do you believe in God, Winston?'

'No.'

'Then what is it, this principle that will defeat us?'

'I don't know. The spirit of Man.'

'And do you consider yourself a man?'

'Yes.'

'If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is

extinct; we are the inheritors. Do you understand that you are ALONE? You are outside history, you are non-existent.' His manner changed and he said more harshly: 'And you consider yourself morally superior to us, with our lies and our cruelty?'

'Yes, I consider myself superior.'

O'Brien did not speak. Two other voices were speaking. After a moment Winston recognized one of them as his own. It was a sound-track of the conversation he had had with O'Brien, on the night when he had enrolled himself in the Brotherhood. He heard himself promising to lie, to steal, to forge, to murder, to encourage drug-taking and prostitution, to disseminate venereal diseases, to throw vitriol in a child's face. O'Brien made a small impatient gesture, as though to say that the demonstration was hardly worth making. Then he turned a switch and the voices stopped.

'Get up from that bed,' he said.

The bonds had loosened themselves. Winston lowered himself to the floor and stood up unsteadily.

'You are the last man,' said O'Brien. 'You are the guardian of the human spirit. You shall see yourself as you are. Take off your clothes.'

Winston undid the bit of string that held his overalls together. The zip fastener had long since been wrenched out of them. He could not remember whether at any time since his arrest he had taken off all his clothes at one time. Beneath the overalls his body was looped with filthy yellowish rags, just recognizable as the remnants of underclothes. As he slid them to the ground he saw that there was a three-sided mirror at the far end of the room. He approached it, then stopped short. An involuntary cry had broken out of him.

'Go on,' said O'Brien. 'Stand between the wings of the mirror. You shall see the side view as well.'

He had stopped because he was frightened. A bowed, grey-coloured, skeleton-like thing was coming towards him. Its actual appearance was frightening, and not merely the fact that he knew it to be himself. He moved closer to the glass. The creature's face seemed to be protruded, because of its bent carriage. A forlorn, jailbird's face with a nobby forehead running back into a bald scalp, a crooked nose, and battered-looking cheekbones above which his

eyes were fierce and watchful. The cheeks were seamed, the mouth had a drawn-in look. Certainly it was his own face, but it seemed to him that it had changed more than he had changed inside. The emotions it registered would be different from the ones he felt. He had gone partially bald. For the first moment he had thought that he had gone grey as well, but it was only the scalp that was grey. Except for his hands and a circle of his face, his body was grey all over with ancient, ingrained dirt. Here and there under the dirt there were the red scars of wounds, and near the ankle the varicose ulcer was an inflamed mass with flakes of skin peeling off it. But the truly frightening thing was the emaciation of his body. The barrel of the ribs was as narrow as that of a skeleton: the legs had shrunk so that the knees were thicker than the thighs. He saw now what O'Brien had meant about seeing the side view. The curvature of the spine was astonishing. The thin shoulders were hunched forward so as to make a cavity of the chest, the scraggy neck seemed to be bending double under the weight of the skull. At a guess he would have said that it was the body of a man of sixty, suffering from some malignant disease.

'You have thought sometimes,' said O'Brien, 'that my face — the face of a member of the Inner Party — looks old and worn. What do you think of your own face?'

He seized Winston's shoulder and spun him round so that he was facing him.

'Look at the condition you are in!' he said. 'Look at this filthy grime all over your body. Look at the dirt between your toes. Look at that disgusting running sore on your leg. Do you know that you stink like a goat? Probably you have ceased to notice it. Look at your emaciation. Do you see? I can make my thumb and forefinger meet round your bicep. I could snap your neck like a carrot. Do you know that you have lost twenty-five kilograms since you have been in our hands? Even your hair is coming out in handfuls. Look!' He plucked at Winston's head and brought away a tuft of hair. 'Open your mouth. Nine, ten, eleven teeth left. How many had you when you came to us? And the few you have left are dropping out of your head. Look here!'

He seized one of Winston's remaining front teeth between his

powerful thumb and forefinger. A twinge of pain shot through Winston's jaw. O'Brien had wrenched the loose tooth out by the roots. He tossed it across the cell.

'You are rotting away,' he said; 'you are falling to pieces. What are you? A bag of filth. Now turn around and look into that mirror again. Do you see that thing facing you? That is the last man. If you are human, that is humanity. Now put your clothes on again.'

Winston began to dress himself with slow stiff movements. Until now he had not seemed to notice how thin and weak he was. Only one thought stirred in his mind: that he must have been in this place longer than he had imagined. Then suddenly as he fixed the miserable rags round himself a feeling of pity for his ruined body overcame him. Before he knew what he was doing he had collapsed on to a small stool that stood beside the bed and burst into tears. He was aware of his ugliness, his gracelessness, a bundle of bones in filthy underclothes sitting weeping in the harsh white light: but he could not stop himself. O'Brien laid a hand on his shoulder, almost kindly.

'It will not last for ever,' he said. 'You can escape from it whenever you choose. Everything depends on yourself.'

'You did it!' sobbed Winston. 'You reduced me to this state.'

'No, Winston, you reduced yourself to it. This is what you accepted when you set yourself up against the Party. It was all contained in that first act. Nothing has happened that you did not foresee.'

He paused, and then went on:

'We have beaten you, Winston. We have broken you up. You have seen what your body is like. Your mind is in the same state. I do not think there can be much pride left in you. You have been kicked and flogged and insulted, you have screamed with pain, you have rolled on the floor in your own blood and vomit. You have whimpered for mercy, you have betrayed everybody and everything. Can you think of a single degradation that has not happened to you?'

Winston had stopped weeping, though the tears were still oozing out of his eyes. He looked up at O'Brien.

'I have not betrayed Julia,' he said.

O'Brien looked down at him thoughtfully. 'No,' he said; 'no; that

is perfectly true. You have not betrayed Julia.'

The peculiar reverence for O'Brien, which nothing seemed able to destroy, flooded Winston's heart again. How intelligent, he thought, how intelligent! Never did O'Brien fail to understand what was said to him. Anyone else on earth would have answered promptly that he HAD betrayed Julia. For what was there that they had not screwed out of him under the torture? He had told them everything he knew about her, her habits, her character, her past life; he had confessed in the most trivial detail everything that had happened at their meetings, all that he had said to her and she to him, their black-market meals, their adulteries, their vague plottings against the Party — everything. And yet, in the sense in which he intended the word, he had not betrayed her. He had not stopped loving her; his feelings towards her had remained the same. O'Brien had seen what he meant without the need for explanation.

'Tell me,' he said, 'how soon will they shoot me?'

'It might be a long time,' said O'Brien. 'You are a difficult case. But don't give up hope. Everyone is cured sooner or later. In the end we shall shoot you.'

Chapter 4

He was much better. He was growing fatter and stronger every day, if it was proper to speak of days.

The white light and the humming sound were the same as ever, but the cell was a little more comfortable than the others he had been in. There was a pillow and a mattress on the plank bed, and a stool to sit on. They had given him a bath, and they allowed him to wash himself fairly frequently in a tin basin. They even gave him warm water to wash with. They had given him new underclothes and a clean suit of overalls. They had dressed his varicose ulcer with soothing ointment. They had pulled out the remnants of his teeth and given him a new set of dentures.

Weeks or months must have passed. It would have been possible now to keep count of the passage of time, if he had felt any interest in doing so, since he was being fed at what appeared to be regular intervals. He was getting, he judged, three meals in the twenty-four hours; sometimes he wondered dimly whether he was getting them by night or by day. The food was surprisingly good, with meat at every third meal. Once there was even a packet of cigarettes. He had no matches, but the never-speaking guard who brought his food would give him a light. The first time he tried to smoke it made him sick, but he persevered, and spun the packet out for a long time, smoking half a cigarette after each meal.

They had given him a white slate with a stump of pencil tied to the corner. At first he made no use of it. Even when he was awake he was completely torpid. Often he would lie from one meal to the next almost without stirring, sometimes asleep, sometimes waking into vague reveries in which it was too much trouble to open his eyes. He had long grown used to sleeping with a strong light on his face. It seemed to make no difference, except that one's dreams were more coherent. He dreamed a great deal all through this time, and they were always happy dreams. He was in the Golden Country, or he was sitting among enormous glorious, sunlit ruins, with his mother, with Julia, with O'Brien — not doing anything, merely sitting in the sun, talking of peaceful things. Such thoughts as he had when he was

awake were mostly about his dreams. He seemed to have lost the power of intellectual effort, now that the stimulus of pain had been removed. He was not bored, he had no desire for conversation or distraction. Merely to be alone, not to be beaten or questioned, to have enough to eat, and to be clean all over, was completely satisfying.

By degrees he came to spend less time in sleep, but he still felt no impulse to get off the bed. All he cared for was to lie quiet and feel the strength gathering in his body. He would finger himself here and there, trying to make sure that it was not an illusion that his muscles were growing rounder and his skin tauter. Finally it was established beyond a doubt that he was growing fatter; his thighs were now definitely thicker than his knees. After that, reluctantly at first, he began exercising himself regularly. In a little while he could walk three kilometres, measured by pacing the cell, and his bowed shoulders were growing straighter. He attempted more elaborate exercises, and was astonished and humiliated to find what things he could not do. He could not move out of a walk, he could not hold his stool out at arm's length, he could not stand on one leg without falling over. He squatted down on his heels, and found that with agonizing pains in thigh and calf he could just lift himself to a standing position. He lay flat on his belly and tried to lift his weight by his hands. It was hopeless, he could not raise himself a centimetre. But after a few more days — a few more mealtimes — even that feat was accomplished. A time came when he could do it six times running. He began to grow actually proud of his body, and to cherish an intermittent belief that his face also was growing back to normal. Only when he chanced to put his hand on his bald scalp did he remember the seamed, ruined face that had looked back at him out of the mirror.

His mind grew more active. He sat down on the plank bed, his back against the wall and the slate on his knees, and set to work deliberately at the task of re-educating himself.

He had capitulated, that was agreed. In reality, as he saw now, he had been ready to capitulate long before he had taken the decision. From the moment when he was inside the Ministry of Love — and yes, even during those minutes when he and Julia had stood helpless

while the iron voice from the telescreen told them what to do — he had grasped the frivolity, the shallowness of his attempt to set himself up against the power of the Party. He knew now that for seven years the Thought Police had watched him like a beetle under a magnifying glass. There was no physical act, no word spoken aloud, that they had not noticed, no train of thought that they had not been able to infer. Even the speck of whitish dust on the cover of his diary they had carefully replaced. They had played sound-tracks to him, shown him photographs. Some of them were photographs of Julia and himself. Yes, even . . . He could not fight against the Party any longer. Besides, the Party was in the right. It must be so; how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken? By what external standard could you check its judgements? Sanity was statistical. It was merely a question of learning to think as they thought. Only ——!

The pencil felt thick and awkward in his fingers. He began to write down the thoughts that came into his head. He wrote first in large clumsy capitals:

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

Then almost without a pause he wrote beneath it:

TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE

But then there came a sort of check. His mind, as though shying away from something, seemed unable to concentrate. He knew that he knew what came next, but for the moment he could not recall it. When he did recall it, it was only by consciously reasoning out what it must be: it did not come of its own accord. He wrote:

GOD IS POWER

He accepted everything. The past was alterable. The past never had been altered. Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia. Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford were guilty of the crimes they were charged with. He had never seen the photograph that disproved their guilt. It had never existed, he had invented it. He remembered remembering contrary things, but those were false memories, products of self-deception. How easy it all was! Only surrender, and everything else followed. It was like swimming against a current that swept you backwards however hard you struggled, and then suddenly deciding to turn round and go with

the current instead of opposing it. Nothing had changed except your own attitude: the predestined thing happened in any case. He hardly knew why he had ever rebelled. Everything was easy, except —— !

Anything could be true. The so-called laws of Nature were nonsense. The law of gravity was nonsense. ‘If I wished,’ O’Brien had said, ‘I could float off this floor like a soap bubble.’ Winston worked it out. ‘If he THINKS he floats off the floor, and if I simultaneously THINK I see him do it, then the thing happens.’ Suddenly, like a lump of submerged wreckage breaking the surface of water, the thought burst into his mind: ‘It doesn’t really happen. We imagine it. It is hallucination.’ He pushed the thought under instantly. The fallacy was obvious. It presupposed that somewhere or other, outside oneself, there was a ‘real’ world where ‘real’ things happened. But how could there be such a world? What knowledge have we of anything, save through our own minds? All happenings are in the mind. Whatever happens in all minds, truly happens.

He had no difficulty in disposing of the fallacy, and he was in no danger of succumbing to it. He realized, nevertheless, that it ought never to have occurred to him. The mind should develop a blind spot whenever a dangerous thought presented itself. The process should be automatic, instinctive. CRIMESTOP, they called it in Newspeak.

He set to work to exercise himself in crimestop. He presented himself with propositions— ‘the Party says the earth is flat’, ‘the party says that ice is heavier than water’ — and trained himself in not seeing or not understanding the arguments that contradicted them. It was not easy. It needed great powers of reasoning and improvisation. The arithmetical problems raised, for instance, by such a statement as ‘two and two make five’ were beyond his intellectual grasp. It needed also a sort of athleticism of mind, an ability at one moment to make the most delicate use of logic and at the next to be unconscious of the crudest logical errors. Stupidity was as necessary as intelligence, and as difficult to attain.

All the while, with one part of his mind, he wondered how soon they would shoot him. ‘Everything depends on yourself,’ O’Brien had said; but he knew that there was no conscious act by which he could bring it nearer. It might be ten minutes hence, or ten years. They might keep him for years in solitary confinement, they might

send him to a labour-camp, they might release him for a while, as they sometimes did. It was perfectly possible that before he was shot the whole drama of his arrest and interrogation would be enacted all over again. The one certain thing was that death never came at an expected moment. The tradition — the unspoken tradition: somehow you knew it, though you never heard it said — was that they shot you from behind; always in the back of the head, without warning, as you walked down a corridor from cell to cell.

One day — but 'one day' was not the right expression; just as probably it was in the middle of the night: once — he fell into a strange, blissful reverie. He was walking down the corridor, waiting for the bullet. He knew that it was coming in another moment. Everything was settled, smoothed out, reconciled. There were no more doubts, no more arguments, no more pain, no more fear. His body was healthy and strong. He walked easily, with a joy of movement and with a feeling of walking in sunlight. He was not any longer in the narrow white corridors in the Ministry of Love, he was in the enormous sunlit passage, a kilometre wide, down which he had seemed to walk in the delirium induced by drugs. He was in the Golden Country, following the foot-track across the old rabbit-cropped pasture. He could feel the short springy turf under his feet and the gentle sunshine on his face. At the edge of the field were the elm trees, faintly stirring, and somewhere beyond that was the stream where the dace lay in the green pools under the willows.

Suddenly he started up with a shock of horror. The sweat broke out on his backbone. He had heard himself cry aloud:

'Julia! Julia! Julia, my love! Julia!'

For a moment he had had an overwhelming hallucination of her presence. She had seemed to be not merely with him, but inside him. It was as though she had got into the texture of his skin. In that moment he had loved her far more than he had ever done when they were together and free. Also he knew that somewhere or other she was still alive and needed his help.

He lay back on the bed and tried to compose himself. What had he done? How many years had he added to his servitude by that moment of weakness?

In another moment he would hear the tramp of boots outside.

They could not let such an outburst go unpunished. They would know now, if they had not known before, that he was breaking the agreement he had made with them. He obeyed the Party, but he still hated the Party. In the old days he had hidden a heretical mind beneath an appearance of conformity. Now he had retreated a step further: in the mind he had surrendered, but he had hoped to keep the inner heart inviolate. He knew that he was in the wrong, but he preferred to be in the wrong. They would understand that — O'Brien would understand it. It was all confessed in that single foolish cry.

He would have to start all over again. It might take years. He ran a hand over his face, trying to familiarize himself with the new shape. There were deep furrows in the cheeks, the cheekbones felt sharp, the nose flattened. Besides, since last seeing himself in the glass he had been given a complete new set of teeth. It was not easy to preserve inscrutability when you did not know what your face looked like. In any case, mere control of the features was not enough. For the first time he perceived that if you want to keep a secret you must also hide it from yourself. You must know all the while that it is there, but until it is needed you must never let it emerge into your consciousness in any shape that could be given a name. From now onwards he must not only think right; he must feel right, dream right. And all the while he must keep his hatred locked up inside him like a ball of matter which was part of himself and yet unconnected with the rest of him, a kind of cyst.

One day they would decide to shoot him. You could not tell when it would happen, but a few seconds beforehand it should be possible to guess. It was always from behind, walking down a corridor. Ten seconds would be enough. In that time the world inside him could turn over. And then suddenly, without a word uttered, without a check in his step, without the changing of a line in his face — suddenly the camouflage would be down and bang! would go the batteries of his hatred. Hatred would fill him like an enormous roaring flame. And almost in the same instant bang! would go the bullet, too late, or too early. They would have blown his brain to pieces before they could reclaim it. The heretical thought would be unpunished, unrepented, out of their reach for ever. They would have blown a hole in their own perfection. To die hating them, that was

freedom.

He shut his eyes. It was more difficult than accepting an intellectual discipline. It was a question of degrading himself, mutilating himself. He had got to plunge into the filthiest of filth. What was the most horrible, sickening thing of all? He thought of Big Brother. The enormous face (because of constantly seeing it on posters he always thought of it as being a metre wide), with its heavy black moustache and the eyes that followed you to and fro, seemed to float into his mind of its own accord. What were his true feelings towards Big Brother?

There was a heavy tramp of boots in the passage. The steel door swung open with a clang. O'Brien walked into the cell. Behind him were the waxen-faced officer and the black-uniformed guards.

'Get up,' said O'Brien. 'Come here.'

Winston stood opposite him. O'Brien took Winston's shoulders between his strong hands and looked at him closely.

'You have had thoughts of deceiving me,' he said. 'That was stupid. Stand up straighter. Look me in the face.'

He paused, and went on in a gentler tone:

'You are improving. Intellectually there is very little wrong with you. It is only emotionally that you have failed to make progress. Tell me, Winston — and remember, no lies: you know that I am always able to detect a lie — tell me, what are your true feelings towards Big Brother?'

'I hate him.'

'You hate him. Good. Then the time has come for you to take the last step. You must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him: you must love him.'

He released Winston with a little push towards the guards.

'Room 101,' he said.

Chapter 5

At each stage of his imprisonment he had known, or seemed to know, whereabouts he was in the windowless building. Possibly there were slight differences in the air pressure. The cells where the guards had beaten him were below ground level. The room where he had been interrogated by O'Brien was high up near the roof. This place was many metres underground, as deep down as it was possible to go.

It was bigger than most of the cells he had been in. But he hardly noticed his surroundings. All he noticed was that there were two small tables straight in front of him, each covered with green baize. One was only a metre or two from him, the other was further away, near the door. He was strapped upright in a chair, so tightly that he could move nothing, not even his head. A sort of pad gripped his head from behind, forcing him to look straight in front of him.

For a moment he was alone, then the door opened and O'Brien came in.

'You asked me once,' said O'Brien, 'what was in Room 101. I told you that you knew the answer already. Everyone knows it. The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world.'

The door opened again. A guard came in, carrying something made of wire, a box or basket of some kind. He set it down on the further table. Because of the position in which O'Brien was standing. Winston could not see what the thing was.

'The worst thing in the world,' said O'Brien, 'varies from individual to individual. It may be burial alive, or death by fire, or by drowning, or by impalement, or fifty other deaths. There are cases where it is some quite trivial thing, not even fatal.'

He had moved a little to one side, so that Winston had a better view of the thing on the table. It was an oblong wire cage with a handle on top for carrying it by. Fixed to the front of it was something that looked like a fencing mask, with the concave side outwards. Although it was three or four metres away from him, he could see that the cage was divided lengthways into two compartments, and that there was some kind of creature in each.

They were rats.

'In your case,' said O'Brien, 'the worst thing in the world happens to be rats.'

A sort of premonitory tremor, a fear of he was not certain what, had passed through Winston as soon as he caught his first glimpse of the cage. But at this moment the meaning of the mask-like attachment in front of it suddenly sank into him. His bowels seemed to turn to water.

'You can't do that!' he cried out in a high cracked voice. 'You couldn't, you couldn't! It's impossible.'

'Do you remember,' said O'Brien, 'the moment of panic that used to occur in your dreams? There was a wall of blackness in front of you, and a roaring sound in your ears. There was something terrible on the other side of the wall. You knew that you knew what it was, but you dared not drag it into the open. It was the rats that were on the other side of the wall.'

'O'Brien!' said Winston, making an effort to control his voice. 'You know this is not necessary. What is it that you want me to do?'

O'Brien made no direct answer. When he spoke it was in the schoolmasterish manner that he sometimes affected. He looked thoughtfully into the distance, as though he were addressing an audience somewhere behind Winston's back.

'By itself,' he said, 'pain is not always enough. There are occasions when a human being will stand out against pain, even to the point of death. But for everyone there is something unendurable — something that cannot be contemplated. Courage and cowardice are not involved. If you are falling from a height it is not cowardly to clutch at a rope. If you have come up from deep water it is not cowardly to fill your lungs with air. It is merely an instinct which cannot be destroyed. It is the same with the rats. For you, they are unendurable. They are a form of pressure that you cannot withstand, even if you wished to. You will do what is required of you.'

'But what is it, what is it? How can I do it if I don't know what it is?'

O'Brien picked up the cage and brought it across to the nearer table. He set it down carefully on the baize cloth. Winston could hear the blood singing in his ears. He had the feeling of sitting in utter

loneliness. He was in the middle of a great empty plain, a flat desert drenched with sunlight, across which all sounds came to him out of immense distances. Yet the cage with the rats was not two metres away from him. They were enormous rats. They were at the age when a rat's muzzle grows blunt and fierce and his fur brown instead of grey.

'The rat,' said O'Brien, still addressing his invisible audience, 'although a rodent, is carnivorous. You are aware of that. You will have heard of the things that happen in the poor quarters of this town. In some streets a woman dare not leave her baby alone in the house, even for five minutes. The rats are certain to attack it. Within quite a small time they will strip it to the bones. They also attack sick or dying people. They show astonishing intelligence in knowing when a human being is helpless.'

There was an outburst of squeals from the cage. It seemed to reach Winston from far away. The rats were fighting; they were trying to get at each other through the partition. He heard also a deep groan of despair. That, too, seemed to come from outside himself.

O'Brien picked up the cage, and, as he did so, pressed something in it. There was a sharp click. Winston made a frantic effort to tear himself loose from the chair. It was hopeless; every part of him, even his head, was held immovably. O'Brien moved the cage nearer. It was less than a metre from Winston's face.

'I have pressed the first lever,' said O'Brien. 'You understand the construction of this cage. The mask will fit over your head, leaving no exit. When I press this other lever, the door of the cage will slide up. These starving brutes will shoot out of it like bullets. Have you ever seen a rat leap through the air? They will leap on to your face and bore straight into it. Sometimes they attack the eyes first. Sometimes they burrow through the cheeks and devour the tongue.'

The cage was nearer; it was closing in. Winston heard a succession of shrill cries which appeared to be occurring in the air above his head. But he fought furiously against his panic. To think, to think, even with a split second left — to think was the only hope. Suddenly the foul musty odour of the brutes struck his nostrils. There was a violent convulsion of nausea inside him, and he almost lost consciousness. Everything had gone black. For an instant he was

insane, a screaming animal. Yet he came out of the blackness clutching an idea. There was one and only one way to save himself. He must interpose another human being, the BODY of another human being, between himself and the rats.

The circle of the mask was large enough now to shut out the vision of anything else. The wire door was a couple of hand-spans from his face. The rats knew what was coming now. One of them was leaping up and down, the other, an old scaly grandfather of the sewers, stood up, with his pink hands against the bars, and fiercely sniffed the air. Winston could see the whiskers and the yellow teeth. Again the black panic took hold of him. He was blind, helpless, mindless.

'It was a common punishment in Imperial China,' said O'Brien as didactically as ever.

The mask was closing on his face. The wire brushed his cheek. And then — no, it was not relief, only hope, a tiny fragment of hope. Too late, perhaps too late. But he had suddenly understood that in the whole world there was just ONE person to whom he could transfer his punishment — ONE body that he could thrust between himself and the rats. And he was shouting frantically, over and over.

'Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!'

He was falling backwards, into enormous depths, away from the rats. He was still strapped in the chair, but he had fallen through the floor, through the walls of the building, through the earth, through the oceans, through the atmosphere, into outer space, into the gulfs between the stars — always away, away, away from the rats. He was light years distant, but O'Brien was still standing at his side. There was still the cold touch of wire against his cheek. But through the darkness that enveloped him he heard another metallic click, and knew that the cage door had clicked shut and not open.

Chapter 6

The Chestnut Tree was almost empty. A ray of sunlight slanting through a window fell on dusty table-tops. It was the lonely hour of fifteen. A tinny music trickled from the telescreens.

Winston sat in his usual corner, gazing into an empty glass. Now and again he glanced up at a vast face which eyed him from the opposite wall. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said. Unbidden, a waiter came and filled his glass up with Victory Gin, shaking into it a few drops from another bottle with a quill through the cork. It was saccharine flavoured with cloves, the speciality of the cafe.

Winston was listening to the telescreen. At present only music was coming out of it, but there was a possibility that at any moment there might be a special bulletin from the Ministry of Peace. The news from the African front was disquieting in the extreme. On and off he had been worrying about it all day. A Eurasian army (Oceania was at war with Eurasia: Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia) was moving southward at terrifying speed. The mid-day bulletin had not mentioned any definite area, but it was probable that already the mouth of the Congo was a battlefield. Brazzaville and Leopoldville were in danger. One did not have to look at the map to see what it meant. It was not merely a question of losing Central Africa: for the first time in the whole war, the territory of Oceania itself was menaced.

A violent emotion, not fear exactly but a sort of undifferentiated excitement, flared up in him, then faded again. He stopped thinking about the war. In these days he could never fix his mind on any one subject for more than a few moments at a time. He picked up his glass and drained it at a gulp. As always, the gin made him shudder and even retch slightly. The stuff was horrible. The cloves and saccharine, themselves disgusting enough in their sickly way, could not disguise the flat oily smell; and what was worst of all was that the smell of gin, which dwelt with him night and day, was inextricably mixed up in his mind with the smell of those ——

He never named them, even in his thoughts, and so far as it was

possible he never visualized them. They were something that he was half-aware of, hovering close to his face, a smell that clung to his nostrils. As the gin rose in him he belched through purple lips. He had grown fatter since they released him, and had regained his old colour — indeed, more than regained it. His features had thickened, the skin on nose and cheekbones was coarsely red, even the bald scalp was too deep a pink. A waiter, again unbidden, brought the chessboard and the current issue of 'The Times', with the page turned down at the chess problem. Then, seeing that Winston's glass was empty, he brought the gin bottle and filled it. There was no need to give orders. They knew his habits. The chessboard was always waiting for him, his corner table was always reserved; even when the place was full he had it to himself, since nobody cared to be seen sitting too close to him. He never even bothered to count his drinks. At irregular intervals they presented him with a dirty slip of paper which they said was the bill, but he had the impression that they always undercharged him. It would have made no difference if it had been the other way about. He had always plenty of money nowadays. He even had a job, a sinecure, more highly-paid than his old job had been.

The music from the telescreen stopped and a voice took over. Winston raised his head to listen. No bulletins from the front, however. It was merely a brief announcement from the Ministry of Plenty. In the preceding quarter, it appeared, the Tenth Three-Year Plan's quota for bootlaces had been overfulfilled by 98 per cent.

He examined the chess problem and set out the pieces. It was a tricky ending, involving a couple of knights. 'White to play and mate in two moves.' Winston looked up at the portrait of Big Brother. White always mates, he thought with a sort of cloudy mysticism. Always, without exception, it is so arranged. In no chess problem since the beginning of the world has black ever won. Did it not symbolize the eternal, unvarying triumph of Good over Evil? The huge face gazed back at him, full of calm power. White always mates.

The voice from the telescreen paused and added in a different and much graver tone: 'You are warned to stand by for an important announcement at fifteen-thirty. Fifteen-thirty! This is news of the

highest importance. Take care not to miss it. Fifteen-thirty!' The tinkling music struck up again.

Winston's heart stirred. That was the bulletin from the front; instinct told him that it was bad news that was coming. All day, with little spurts of excitement, the thought of a smashing defeat in Africa had been in and out of his mind. He seemed actually to see the Eurasian army swarming across the never-broken frontier and pouring down into the tip of Africa like a column of ants. Why had it not been possible to outflank them in some way? The outline of the West African coast stood out vividly in his mind. He picked up the white knight and moved it across the board. THERE was the proper spot. Even while he saw the black horde racing southward he saw another force, mysteriously assembled, suddenly planted in their rear, cutting their communications by land and sea. He felt that by willing it he was bringing that other force into existence. But it was necessary to act quickly. If they could get control of the whole of Africa, if they had airfields and submarine bases at the Cape, it would cut Oceania in two. It might mean anything: defeat, breakdown, the redivision of the world, the destruction of the Party! He drew a deep breath. An extraordinary medley of feeling — but it was not a medley, exactly; rather it was successive layers of feeling, in which one could not say which layer was undermost — struggled inside him.

The spasm passed. He put the white knight back in its place, but for the moment he could not settle down to serious study of the chess problem. His thoughts wandered again. Almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust on the table:

2+2=5

'They can't get inside you,' she had said. But they could get inside you. 'What happens to you here is FOR EVER,' O'Brien had said. That was a true word. There were things, your own acts, from which you could never recover. Something was killed in your breast: burnt out, cauterized out.

He had seen her; he had even spoken to her. There was no danger in it. He knew as though instinctively that they now took almost no interest in his doings. He could have arranged to meet her a second time if either of them had wanted to. Actually it was by chance that

they had met. It was in the Park, on a vile, biting day in March, when the earth was like iron and all the grass seemed dead and there was not a bud anywhere except a few crocuses which had pushed themselves up to be dismembered by the wind. He was hurrying along with frozen hands and watering eyes when he saw her not ten metres away from him. It struck him at once that she had changed in some ill-defined way. They almost passed one another without a sign, then he turned and followed her, not very eagerly. He knew that there was no danger, nobody would take any interest in him. She did not speak. She walked obliquely away across the grass as though trying to get rid of him, then seemed to resign herself to having him at her side. Presently they were in among a clump of ragged leafless shrubs, useless either for concealment or as protection from the wind. They halted. It was vilely cold. The wind whistled through the twigs and fretted the occasional, dirty-looking crocuses. He put his arm round her waist.

There was no telescreen, but there must be hidden microphones: besides, they could be seen. It did not matter, nothing mattered. They could have lain down on the ground and done THAT if they had wanted to. His flesh froze with horror at the thought of it. She made no response whatever to the clasp of his arm; she did not even try to disengage herself. He knew now what had changed in her. Her face was sallower, and there was a long scar, partly hidden by the hair, across her forehead and temple; but that was not the change. It was that her waist had grown thicker, and, in a surprising way, had stiffened. He remembered how once, after the explosion of a rocket bomb, he had helped to drag a corpse out of some ruins, and had been astonished not only by the incredible weight of the thing, but by its rigidity and awkwardness to handle, which made it seem more like stone than flesh. Her body felt like that. It occurred to him that the texture of her skin would be quite different from what it had once been.

He did not attempt to kiss her, nor did they speak. As they walked back across the grass, she looked directly at him for the first time. It was only a momentary glance, full of contempt and dislike. He wondered whether it was a dislike that came purely out of the past or whether it was inspired also by his bloated face and the water that the

wind kept squeezing from his eyes. They sat down on two iron chairs, side by side but not too close together. He saw that she was about to speak. She moved her clumsy shoe a few centimetres and deliberately crushed a twig. Her feet seemed to have grown broader, he noticed.

'I betrayed you,' she said baldly.

'I betrayed you,' he said.

She gave him another quick look of dislike.

'Sometimes,' she said, 'they threaten you with something something you can't stand up to, can't even think about. And then you say, "Don't do it to me, do it to somebody else, do it to so-and-so." And perhaps you might pretend, afterwards, that it was only a trick and that you just said it to make them stop and didn't really mean it. But that isn't true. At the time when it happens you do mean it. You think there's no other way of saving yourself, and you're quite ready to save yourself that way. You WANT it to happen to the other person. You don't give a damn what they suffer. All you care about is yourself.'

'All you care about is yourself,' he echoed.

'And after that, you don't feel the same towards the other person any longer.'

'No,' he said, 'you don't feel the same.'

There did not seem to be anything more to say. The wind plastered their thin overalls against their bodies. Almost at once it became embarrassing to sit there in silence: besides, it was too cold to keep still. She said something about catching her Tube and stood up to go.

'We must meet again,' he said.

'Yes,' she said, 'we must meet again.'

He followed irresolutely for a little distance, half a pace behind her. They did not speak again. She did not actually try to shake him off, but walked at just such a speed as to prevent his keeping abreast of her. He had made up his mind that he would accompany her as far as the Tube station, but suddenly this process of trailing along in the cold seemed pointless and unbearable. He was overwhelmed by a desire not so much to get away from Julia as to get back to the Chestnut Tree Cafe, which had never seemed so attractive as at this

moment. He had a nostalgic vision of his corner table, with the newspaper and the chessboard and the ever-flowing gin. Above all, it would be warm in there. The next moment, not altogether by accident, he allowed himself to become separated from her by a small knot of people. He made a half-hearted attempt to catch up, then slowed down, turned, and made off in the opposite direction. When he had gone fifty metres he looked back. The street was not crowded, but already he could not distinguish her. Any one of a dozen hurrying figures might have been hers. Perhaps her thickened, stiffened body was no longer recognizable from behind.

'At the time when it happens,' she had said, 'you do mean it.' He had meant it. He had not merely said it, he had wished it. He had wished that she and not he should be delivered over to the ——

Something changed in the music that trickled from the telescreen. A cracked and jeering note, a yellow note, came into it. And then — perhaps it was not happening, perhaps it was only a memory taking on the semblance of sound — a voice was singing:

'Under the spreading chestnut tree

I sold you and you sold me — — '

The tears welled up in his eyes. A passing waiter noticed that his glass was empty and came back with the gin bottle.

He took up his glass and sniffed at it. The stuff grew not less but more horrible with every mouthful he drank. But it had become the element he swam in. It was his life, his death, and his resurrection. It was gin that sank him into stupor every night, and gin that revived him every morning. When he woke, seldom before eleven hundred, with gummed-up eyelids and fiery mouth and a back that seemed to be broken, it would have been impossible even to rise from the horizontal if it had not been for the bottle and teacup placed beside the bed overnight. Through the midday hours he sat with glazed face, the bottle handy, listening to the telescreen. From fifteen to closing-time he was a fixture in the Chestnut Tree. No one cared what he did any longer, no whistle woke him, no telescreen admonished him. Occasionally, perhaps twice a week, he went to a dusty, forgotten-looking office in the Ministry of Truth and did a little work, or what was called work. He had been appointed to a sub-committee of a sub-committee which had sprouted from one of the innumerable

committees dealing with minor difficulties that arose in the compilation of the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary. They were engaged in producing something called an Interim Report, but what it was that they were reporting on he had never definitely found out. It was something to do with the question of whether commas should be placed inside brackets, or outside. There were four others on the committee, all of them persons similar to himself. There were days when they assembled and then promptly dispersed again, frankly admitting to one another that there was not really anything to be done. But there were other days when they settled down to their work almost eagerly, making a tremendous show of entering up their minutes and drafting long memoranda which were never finished — when the argument as to what they were supposedly arguing about grew extraordinarily involved and abstruse, with subtle haggling over definitions, enormous digressions, quarrels — threats, even, to appeal to higher authority. And then suddenly the life would go out of them and they would sit round the table looking at one another with extinct eyes, like ghosts fading at cock-crow.

The telescreen was silent for a moment. Winston raised his head again. The bulletin! But no, they were merely changing the music. He had the map of Africa behind his eyelids. The movement of the armies was a diagram: a black arrow tearing vertically southward, and a white arrow horizontally eastward, across the tail of the first. As though for reassurance he looked up at the imperturbable face in the portrait. Was it conceivable that the second arrow did not even exist?

His interest flagged again. He drank another mouthful of gin, picked up the white knight and made a tentative move. Check. But it was evidently not the right move, because ——

Uncalled, a memory floated into his mind. He saw a candle-lit room with a vast white-counterpaned bed, and himself, a boy of nine or ten, sitting on the floor, shaking a dice-box, and laughing excitedly. His mother was sitting opposite him and also laughing.

It must have been about a month before she disappeared. It was a moment of reconciliation, when the nagging hunger in his belly was forgotten and his earlier affection for her had temporarily revived. He

remembered the day well, a pelting, drenching day when the water streamed down the window-pane and the light indoors was too dull to read by. The boredom of the two children in the dark, cramped bedroom became unbearable. Winston whined and grizzled, made futile demands for food, fretted about the room pulling everything out of place and kicking the wainscoting until the neighbours banged on the wall, while the younger child wailed intermittently. In the end his mother said, 'Now be good, and I'll buy you a toy. A lovely toy — you'll love it'; and then she had gone out in the rain, to a little general shop which was still sporadically open nearby, and came back with a cardboard box containing an outfit of Snakes and Ladders. He could still remember the smell of the damp cardboard. It was a miserable outfit. The board was cracked and the tiny wooden dice were so ill-cut that they would hardly lie on their sides. Winston looked at the thing sulkily and without interest. But then his mother lit a piece of candle and they sat down on the floor to play. Soon he was wildly excited and shouting with laughter as the tiddly-winks climbed hopefully up the ladders and then came slithering down the snakes again, almost to the starting-point. They played eight games, winning four each. His tiny sister, too young to understand what the game was about, had sat propped up against a bolster, laughing because the others were laughing. For a whole afternoon they had all been happy together, as in his earlier childhood.

He pushed the picture out of his mind. It was a false memory. He was troubled by false memories occasionally. They did not matter so long as one knew them for what they were. Some things had happened, others had not happened. He turned back to the chessboard and picked up the white knight again. Almost in the same instant it dropped on to the board with a clatter. He had started as though a pin had run into him.

A shrill trumpet-call had pierced the air. It was the bulletin! Victory! It always meant victory when a trumpet-call preceded the news. A sort of electric drill ran through the cafe. Even the waiters had started and pricked up their ears.

The trumpet-call had let loose an enormous volume of noise. Already an excited voice was gabbling from the telescreen, but even as it started it was almost drowned by a roar of cheering from

outside. The news had run round the streets like magic. He could hear just enough of what was issuing from the telescreen to realize that it had all happened, as he had foreseen; a vast seaborne armada had secretly assembled a sudden blow in the enemy's rear, the white arrow tearing across the tail of the black. Fragments of triumphant phrases pushed themselves through the din: 'Vast strategic manoeuvre — perfect co-ordination — utter rout — half a million prisoners — complete demoralization — control of the whole of Africa — bring the war within measurable distance of its end — victory — greatest victory in human history — victory, victory, victory!'

Under the table Winston's feet made convulsive movements. He had not stirred from his seat, but in his mind he was running, swiftly running, he was with the crowds outside, cheering himself deaf. He looked up again at the portrait of Big Brother. The colossus that bestrode the world! The rock against which the hordes of Asia dashed themselves in vain! He thought how ten minutes ago — yes, only ten minutes — there had still been equivocation in his heart as he wondered whether the news from the front would be of victory or defeat. Ah, it was more than a Eurasian army that had perished! Much had changed in him since that first day in the Ministry of Love, but the final, indispensable, healing change had never happened, until this moment.

The voice from the telescreen was still pouring forth its tale of prisoners and booty and slaughter, but the shouting outside had died down a little. The waiters were turning back to their work. One of them approached with the gin bottle. Winston, sitting in a blissful dream, paid no attention as his glass was filled up. He was not running or cheering any longer. He was back in the Ministry of Love, with everything forgiven, his soul white as snow. He was in the public dock, confessing everything, implicating everybody. He was walking down the white-tiled corridor, with the feeling of walking in sunlight, and an armed guard at his back. The long-hoped-for bullet was entering his brain.

He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from

the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.

Appendix.

The Principles of Newspeak

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism. In the year 1984 there was not as yet anyone who used Newspeak as his sole means of communication, either in speech or writing. The leading articles in 'The Times' were written in it, but this was a TOUR DE FORCE which could only be carried out by a specialist. It was expected that Newspeak would have finally superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050. Meanwhile it gained ground steadily, all Party members tending to use Newspeak words and grammatical constructions more and more in their everyday speech. The version in use in 1984, and embodied in the Ninth and Tenth Editions of the Newspeak Dictionary, was a provisional one, and contained many superfluous words and archaic formations which were due to be suppressed later. It is with the final, perfected version, as embodied in the Eleventh Edition of the Dictionary, that we are concerned here.

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought — that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc — should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word FREE still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as

‘This dog is free from lice’ or ‘This field is free from weeds’. It could not be used in its old sense of ‘politically free’ or ‘intellectually free’ since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless. Quite apart from the suppression of definitely heretical words, reduction of vocabulary was regarded as an end in itself, and no word that could be dispensed with was allowed to survive. Newspeak was designed not to extend but to DIMINISH the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum.

Newspeak was founded on the English language as we now know it, though many Newspeak sentences, even when not containing newly-created words, would be barely intelligible to an English-speaker of our own day. Newspeak words were divided into three distinct classes, known as the A vocabulary, the B vocabulary (also called compound words), and the C vocabulary. It will be simpler to discuss each class separately, but the grammatical peculiarities of the language can be dealt with in the section devoted to the A vocabulary, since the same rules held good for all three categories.

THE A VOCABULARY. The A vocabulary consisted of the words needed for the business of everyday life — for such things as eating, drinking, working, putting on one’s clothes, going up and down stairs, riding in vehicles, gardening, cooking, and the like. It was composed almost entirely of words that we already possess words like HIT, RUN, DOG, TREE, SUGAR, HOUSE, FIELD — but in comparison with the present-day English vocabulary their number was extremely small, while their meanings were far more rigidly defined. All ambiguities and shades of meaning had been purged out of them. So far as it could be achieved, a Newspeak word of this class was simply a staccato sound expressing ONE clearly understood concept. It would have been quite impossible to use the A vocabulary for literary purposes or for political or philosophical discussion. It was intended only to express simple, purposive thoughts, usually involving concrete objects or physical actions.

The grammar of Newspeak had two outstanding peculiarities. The first of these was an almost complete interchangeability between different parts of speech. Any word in the language (in principle this

applied even to very abstract words such as IF or WHEN) could be used either as verb, noun, adjective, or adverb. Between the verb and the noun form, when they were of the same root, there was never any variation, this rule of itself involving the destruction of many archaic forms. The word THOUGHT, for example, did not exist in Newspeak. Its place was taken by THINK, which did duty for both noun and verb. No etymological principle was followed here: in some cases it was the original noun that was chosen for retention, in other cases the verb. Even where a noun and verb of kindred meaning were not etymologically connected, one or other of them was frequently suppressed. There was, for example, no such word as CUT, its meaning being sufficiently covered by the noun-verb KNIFE. Adjectives were formed by adding the suffix — FUL to the noun-verb, and adverbs by adding — WISE. Thus for example, SPEEDFUL meant 'rapid' and SPEEDWISE meant 'quickly'. Certain of our present-day adjectives, such as GOOD, STRONG, BIG, BLACK, SOFT, were retained, but their total number was very small. There was little need for them, since almost any adjectival meaning could be arrived at by adding — FUL to a noun-verb. None of the now-existing adverbs was retained, except for a very few already ending in — WISE: the — WISE termination was invariable. The word WELL, for example, was replaced by GOODWISE.

In addition, any word — this again applied in principle to every word in the language — could be negatived by adding the affix UN-, or could be strengthened by the affix PLUS-, or, for still greater emphasis, DOUBLEPLUS-. Thus, for example, UNCOLD meant 'warm', while PLUSCOLD and DOUBLEPLUSCOLD meant, respectively, 'very cold' and 'superlatively cold'. It was also possible, as in present-day English, to modify the meaning of almost any word by prepositional affixes such as ANTE-, POST-, UP-, DOWN-, etc. By such methods it was found possible to bring about an enormous diminution of vocabulary. Given, for instance, the word GOOD, there was no need for such a word as BAD, since the required meaning was equally well — indeed, better — expressed by UNGOOD. All that was necessary, in any case where two words formed a natural pair of opposites, was to decide which of them to suppress. DARK, for example, could be replaced by UNLIGHT, or

LIGHT by UNDARK, according to preference.

The second distinguishing mark of Newspeak grammar was its regularity. Subject to a few exceptions which are mentioned below all inflexions followed the same rules. Thus, in all verbs the preterite and the past participle were the same and ended in — ED. The preterite of STEAL was STEALED, the preterite of THINK was THINKED, and so on throughout the language, all such forms as SWAM, GAVE, BROUGHT, SPOKE, TAKEN, etc., being abolished. All plurals were made by adding — S or — ES as the case might be. The plurals OF MAN, OX, LIFE, were MANS, OXES, LIFES. Comparison of adjectives was invariably made by adding — ER, — EST (GOOD, GOODER, GOODEST), irregular forms and the MORE, MOST formation being suppressed.

The only classes of words that were still allowed to inflect irregularly were the pronouns, the relatives, the demonstrative adjectives, and the auxiliary verbs. All of these followed their ancient usage, except that WHOM had been scrapped as unnecessary, and the SHALL, SHOULD tenses had been dropped, all their uses being covered by WILL and WOULD. There were also certain irregularities in word-formation arising out of the need for rapid and easy speech. A word which was difficult to utter, or was liable to be incorrectly heard, was held to be ipso facto a bad word; occasionally therefore, for the sake of euphony, extra letters were inserted into a word or an archaic formation was retained. But this need made itself felt chiefly in connexion with the B vocabulary. WHY so great an importance was attached to ease of pronunciation will be made clear later in this essay.

THE B VOCABULARY. The B vocabulary consisted of words which had been deliberately constructed for political purposes: words, that is to say, which not only had in every case a political implication, but were intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them. Without a full understanding of the principles of Ingsoc it was difficult to use these words correctly. In some cases they could be translated into Oldspeak, or even into words taken from the A vocabulary, but this usually demanded a long paraphrase and always involved the loss of certain overtones. The B words were a sort of verbal shorthand, often packing whole

ranges of ideas into a few syllables, and at the same time more accurate and forcible than ordinary language.

The B words were in all cases compound words. [Compound words such as SPEAKWRITE, were of course to be found in the A vocabulary, but these were merely convenient abbreviations and had no special ideological colour.] They consisted of two or more words, or portions of words, welded together in an easily pronounceable form. The resulting amalgam was always a noun-verb, and inflected according to the ordinary rules. To take a single example: the word GOODTHINK, meaning, very roughly, 'orthodoxy', or, if one chose to regard it as a verb, 'to think in an orthodox manner'. This inflected as follows: noun-verb, GOODTHINK; past tense and past participle, GOODTHINKED; present participle, GOOD-THINKING; adjective, GOODTHINKFUL; adverb, GOODTHINKWISE; verbal noun, GOODTHINKER.

The B words were not constructed on any etymological plan. The words of which they were made up could be any parts of speech, and could be placed in any order and mutilated in any way which made them easy to pronounce while indicating their derivation. In the word CRIMETHINK (thoughtcrime), for instance, the THINK came second, whereas in THINKPOL (Thought Police) it came first, and in the latter word POLICE had lost its second syllable. Because of the great difficulty in securing euphony, irregular formations were commoner in the B vocabulary than in the A vocabulary. For example, the adjective forms of MINITRUE, MINIPAX, and MINILUV were, respectively, MINITRUTHFUL, MINIPEACEFUL, and MINILOVELY, simply because — TRUEFUL, -PAXFUL, and — LOVEFUL were slightly awkward to pronounce. In principle, however, all B words could inflect, and all inflected in exactly the same way.

Some of the B words had highly subtilized meanings, barely intelligible to anyone who had not mastered the language as a whole. Consider, for example, such a typical sentence from a 'Times' leading article as OLDTHINKERS UNBELLYFEEL INGSOC. The shortest rendering that one could make of this in Oldspeak would be: 'Those whose ideas were formed before the Revolution cannot have a full emotional understanding of the principles of English

Socialism.' But this is not an adequate translation. To begin with, in order to grasp the full meaning of the Newspeak sentence quoted above, one would have to have a clear idea of what is meant by INGSOC. And in addition, only a person thoroughly grounded in Ingsoc could appreciate the full force of the word BELLYFEEL, which implied a blind, enthusiastic acceptance difficult to imagine today; or of the word OLDTHINK, which was inextricably mixed up with the idea of wickedness and decadence. But the special function of certain Newspeak words, of which OLDTHINK was one, was not so much to express meanings as to destroy them. These words, necessarily few in number, had had their meanings extended until they contained within themselves whole batteries of words which, as they were sufficiently covered by a single comprehensive term, could now be scrapped and forgotten. The greatest difficulty facing the compilers of the Newspeak Dictionary was not to invent new words, but, having invented them, to make sure what they meant: to make sure, that is to say, what ranges of words they cancelled by their existence.

As we have already seen in the case of the word FREE, words which had once borne a heretical meaning were sometimes retained for the sake of convenience, but only with the undesirable meanings purged out of them. Countless other words such as HONOUR, JUSTICE, MORALITY, INTERNATIONALISM, DEMOCRACY, SCIENCE, and RELIGION had simply ceased to exist. A few blanket words covered them, and, in covering them, abolished them. All words grouping themselves round the concepts of liberty and equality, for instance, were contained in the single word CRIMETHINK, while all words grouping themselves round the concepts of objectivity and rationalism were contained in the single word OLDTHINK. Greater precision would have been dangerous. What was required in a Party member was an outlook similar to that of the ancient Hebrew who knew, without knowing much else, that all nations other than his own worshipped 'false gods'. He did not need to know that these gods were called Baal, Osiris, Moloch, Ashtaroth, and the like: probably the less he knew about them the better for his orthodoxy. He knew Jehovah and the commandments of Jehovah: he knew, therefore, that all gods with other names or

other attributes were false gods. In somewhat the same way, the party member knew what constituted right conduct, and in exceedingly vague, generalized terms he knew what kinds of departure from it were possible. His sexual life, for example, was entirely regulated by the two Newspeak words SEXCRIME (sexual immorality) and GOODSEX (chastity). SEXCRIME covered all sexual misdeeds whatever. It covered fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and other perversions, and, in addition, normal intercourse practised for its own sake. There was no need to enumerate them separately, since they were all equally culpable, and, in principle, all punishable by death. In the C vocabulary, which consisted of scientific and technical words, it might be necessary to give specialized names to certain sexual aberrations, but the ordinary citizen had no need of them. He knew what was meant by GOODSEX — that is to say, normal intercourse between man and wife, for the sole purpose of begetting children, and without physical pleasure on the part of the woman: all else was SEXCRIME. In Newspeak it was seldom possible to follow a heretical thought further than the perception that it WAS heretical: beyond that point the necessary words were nonexistent.

No word in the B vocabulary was ideologically neutral. A great many were euphemisms. Such words, for instance, as JOYCAMP (forced-labour camp) or MINIPAX (Ministry of Peace, i.e. Ministry of War) meant almost the exact opposite of what they appeared to mean. Some words, on the other hand, displayed a frank and contemptuous understanding of the real nature of Oceanic society. An example was PROLEFEED, meaning the rubbishy entertainment and spurious news which the Party handed out to the masses. Other words, again, were ambivalent, having the connotation ‘good’ when applied to the Party and ‘bad’ when applied to its enemies. But in addition there were great numbers of words which at first sight appeared to be mere abbreviations and which derived their ideological colour not from their meaning, but from their structure.

So far as it could be contrived, everything that had or might have political significance of any kind was fitted into the B vocabulary. The name of every organization, or body of people, or doctrine, or country, or institution, or public building, was invariably cut down into the familiar shape; that is, a single easily pronounced word with

the smallest number of syllables that would preserve the original derivation. In the Ministry of Truth, for example, the Records Department, in which Winston Smith worked, was called RECDEP, the Fiction Department was called FICDEP, the Teleprogrammes Department was called TELEDEP, and so on. This was not done solely with the object of saving time. Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, telescoped words and phrases had been one of the characteristic features of political language; and it had been noticed that the tendency to use abbreviations of this kind was most marked in totalitarian countries and totalitarian organizations. Examples were such words as NAZI, GESTAPO, COMINTERN, INPRECORR, AGITPROP. In the beginning the practice had been adopted as it were instinctively, but in Newspeak it was used with a conscious purpose. It was perceived that in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it. The words COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL, for instance, call up a composite picture of universal human brotherhood, red flags, barricades, Karl Marx, and the Paris Commune. The word COMINTERN, on the other hand, suggests merely a tightly-knit organization and a well-defined body of doctrine. It refers to something almost as easily recognized, and as limited in purpose, as a chair or a table. COMINTERN is a word that can be uttered almost without taking thought, whereas COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL is a phrase over which one is obliged to linger at least momentarily. In the same way, the associations called up by a word like MINITRUE are fewer and more controllable than those called up by MINISTRY OF TRUTH. This accounted not only for the habit of abbreviating whenever possible, but also for the almost exaggerated care that was taken to make every word easily pronounceable.

In Newspeak, euphony outweighed every consideration other than exactitude of meaning. Regularity of grammar was always sacrificed to it when it seemed necessary. And rightly so, since what was required, above all for political purposes, was short clipped words of unmistakable meaning which could be uttered rapidly and which roused the minimum of echoes in the speaker's mind. The words of the B vocabulary even gained in force from the fact that nearly all of

them were very much alike. Almost invariably these words — GOODTHINK, MINIPAX, PROLEFEED, SEXCRIME, JOYCAMP, INGSOC, BELLYFEEL, THINKPOL, and countless others — were words of two or three syllables, with the stress distributed equally between the first syllable and the last. The use of them encouraged a gabbling style of speech, at once staccato and monotonous. And this was exactly what was aimed at. The intention was to make speech, and especially speech on any subject not ideologically neutral, as nearly as possible independent of consciousness. For the purposes of everyday life it was no doubt necessary, or sometimes necessary, to reflect before speaking, but a Party member called upon to make a political or ethical judgement should be able to spray forth the correct opinions as automatically as a machine gun spraying forth bullets. His training fitted him to do this, the language gave him an almost foolproof instrument, and the texture of the words, with their harsh sound and a certain wilful ugliness which was in accord with the spirit of Ingsoc, assisted the process still further.

So did the fact of having very few words to choose from. Relative to our own, the Newspeak vocabulary was tiny, and new ways of reducing it were constantly being devised. Newspeak, indeed, differed from most all other languages in that its vocabulary grew smaller instead of larger every year. Each reduction was a gain, since the smaller the area of choice, the smaller the temptation to take thought. Ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centres at all. This aim was frankly admitted in the Newspeak word DUCKSPEAK, meaning ‘to quack like a duck’. Like various other words in the B vocabulary, DUCKSPEAK was ambivalent in meaning. Provided that the opinions which were quacked out were orthodox ones, it implied nothing but praise, and when ‘The Times’ referred to one of the orators of the Party as a DOUBLEPLUSGOOD DUCKSPEAKER it was paying a warm and valued compliment.

THE C VOCABULARY. The C vocabulary was supplementary to the others and consisted entirely of scientific and technical terms. These resembled the scientific terms in use today, and were constructed from the same roots, but the usual care was taken to

define them rigidly and strip them of undesirable meanings. They followed the same grammatical rules as the words in the other two vocabularies. Very few of the C words had any currency either in everyday speech or in political speech. Any scientific worker or technician could find all the words he needed in the list devoted to his own speciality, but he seldom had more than a smattering of the words occurring in the other lists. Only a very few words were common to all lists, and there was no vocabulary expressing the function of Science as a habit of mind, or a method of thought, irrespective of its particular branches. There was, indeed, no word for 'Science', any meaning that it could possibly bear being already sufficiently covered by the word INGSOC.

From the foregoing account it will be seen that in Newspeak the expression of unorthodox opinions, above a very low level, was well-nigh impossible. It was of course possible to utter heresies of a very crude kind, a species of blasphemy. It would have been possible, for example, to say BIG BROTHER IS UNGOOD. But this statement, which to an orthodox ear merely conveyed a self-evident absurdity, could not have been sustained by reasoned argument, because the necessary words were not available. Ideas inimical to Ingsoc could only be entertained in a vague wordless form, and could only be named in very broad terms which lumped together and condemned whole groups of heresies without defining them in doing so. One could, in fact, only use Newspeak for unorthodox purposes by illegitimately translating some of the words back into Oldspeak. For example, ALL MANS ARE EQUAL was a possible Newspeak sentence, but only in the same sense in which ALL MEN ARE REDHAIRED is a possible Oldspeak sentence. It did not contain a grammatical error, but it expressed a palpable untruth — i.e. that all men are of equal size, weight, or strength. The concept of political equality no longer existed, and this secondary meaning had accordingly been purged out of the word EQUAL. In 1984, when Oldspeak was still the normal means of communication, the danger theoretically existed that in using Newspeak words one might remember their original meanings. In practice it was not difficult for any person well grounded in DOUBLETHINK to avoid doing this, but within a couple of generations even the possibility of such a lapse

would have vanished. A person growing up with Newspeak as his sole language would no more know that EQUAL had once had the secondary meaning of 'politically equal', or that FREE had once meant 'intellectually free', than for instance, a person who had never heard of chess would be aware of the secondary meanings attaching to QUEEN and ROOK. There would be many crimes and errors which it would be beyond his power to commit, simply because they were nameless and therefore unimaginable. And it was to be foreseen that with the passage of time the distinguishing characteristics of Newspeak would become more and more pronounced — its words growing fewer and fewer, their meanings more and more rigid, and the chance of putting them to improper uses always diminishing.

When Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded, the last link with the past would have been severed. History had already been rewritten, but fragments of the literature of the past survived here and there, imperfectly censored, and so long as one retained one's knowledge of Oldspeak it was possible to read them. In the future such fragments, even if they chanced to survive, would be unintelligible and untranslatable. It was impossible to translate any passage of Oldspeak into Newspeak unless it either referred to some technical process or some very simple everyday action, or was already orthodox (GOODTHINKFUL would be the Newspeak expression) in tendency. In practice this meant that no book written before approximately 1960 could be translated as a whole. Pre-revolutionary literature could only be subjected to ideological translation — that is, alteration in sense as well as language. Take for example the well-known passage from the Declaration of Independence:

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. THAT TO SECURE THESE RIGHTS, GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED AMONG MEN, DERIVING THEIR POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED. THAT WHENEVER ANY FORM OF GOVERNMENT BECOMES DESTRUCTIVE OF

THOSE ENDS, IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO ALTER OR ABOLISH IT, AND TO INSTITUTE NEW GOVERNMENT . . .

It would have been quite impossible to render this into Newspeak while keeping to the sense of the original. The nearest one could come to doing so would be to swallow the whole passage up in the single word CRIMETHINK. A full translation could only be an ideological translation, whereby Jefferson's words would be changed into a panegyric on absolute government.

A good deal of the literature of the past was, indeed, already being transformed in this way. Considerations of prestige made it desirable to preserve the memory of certain historical figures, while at the same time bringing their achievements into line with the philosophy of Ingsoc. Various writers, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, Dickens, and some others were therefore in process of translation: when the task had been completed, their original writings, with all else that survived of the literature of the past, would be destroyed. These translations were a slow and difficult business, and it was not expected that they would be finished before the first or second decade of the twenty-first century. There were also large quantities of merely utilitarian literature — indispensable technical manuals, and the like — that had to be treated in the same way. It was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050.

The Memoirs

Eton College, where Orwell studied until 1921

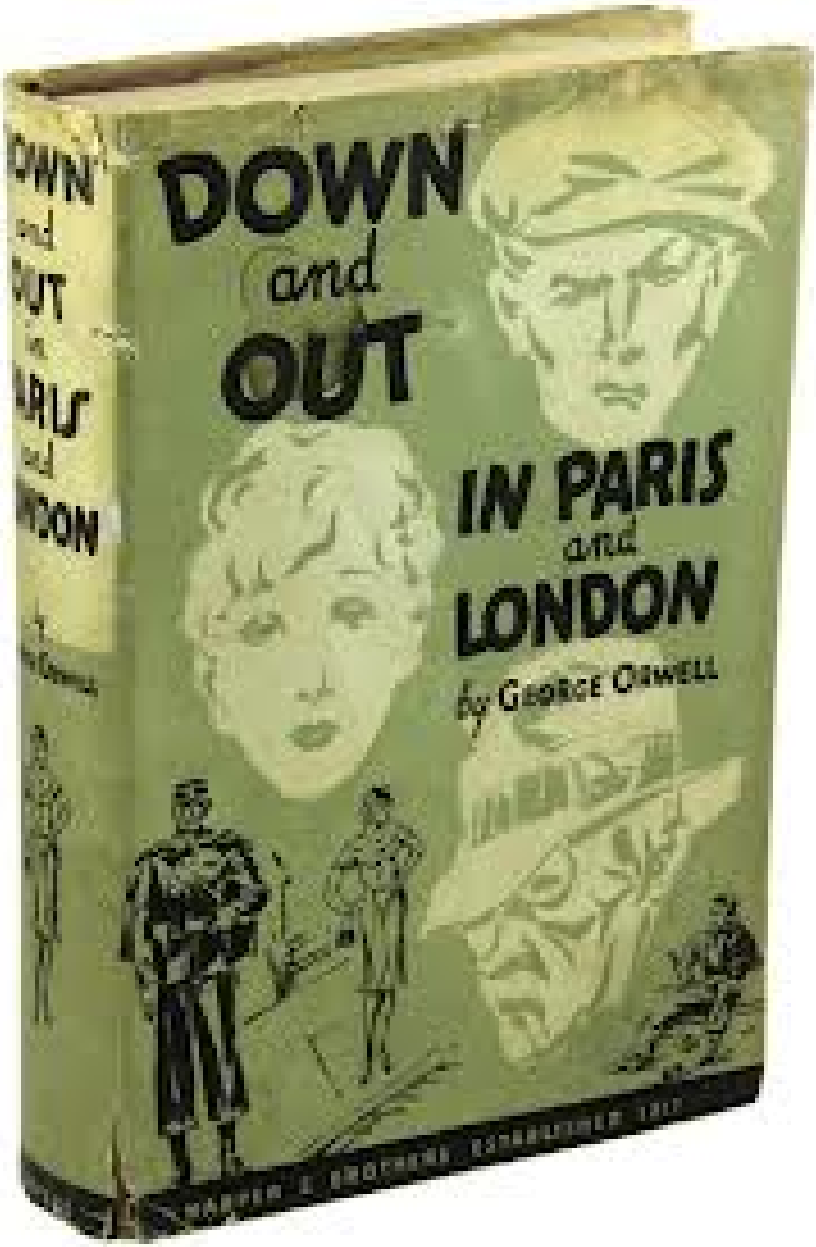
DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON

Orwell's first memoir, *Down and Out in Paris and London,* was published by Victor Gollancz on the 9th of January 1933 and recounts the author's experiences living in poverty and working in hard, under-paid manual jobs. While the book is not strictly autobiographical in chronology, Orwell maintained that everything in the text happened to him at some point. After leaving his police job in Burma Orwell returned to London in the hope of becoming a writer. In 1928 he moved to Paris and initially lived a social literary life, managing to get some of his articles published in journals. However, in March 1929 he fell ill which coincided with someone stealing his money. He was left destitute and it was these final two months in Paris which provided part of the material for *Down and Out in Paris and London.*

The first section of the text chronicles Orwell's descent into poverty in Paris where he joins forces with a Russian waiter and they search for work. Orwell gets employment as a dishwasher in a hotel and describes the awful conditions of Paris's working poor, who are so exhausted by the hours and underpaid that they can only just afford to survive. Orwell maintains that the workers are barely in a better position than slaves and that if they considered their situation they would form unions to demand better treatment. However, life is so difficult and they have become enslaved to such a degree that they are unable to think about their exploitation.

The second section of the book details the narrator's travels across London living as a tramp. He sleeps in various lodgings but must constantly move on because those who ran shelters only allowed the homeless to stay a night at a time. Orwell recounts the different accommodations he slept in and the tramps he encountered. He wrote that it taught him to appreciate that tramps were not the foul drunken wretches of popular belief and that one should not expect them to feel gratitude at being offered the smallest mercies by those of good fortune. The experiences chronicled in *Down and Out in Paris and*

London include themes, ideas and opinions that Orwell would spend much of his writing career exploring.



The first edition

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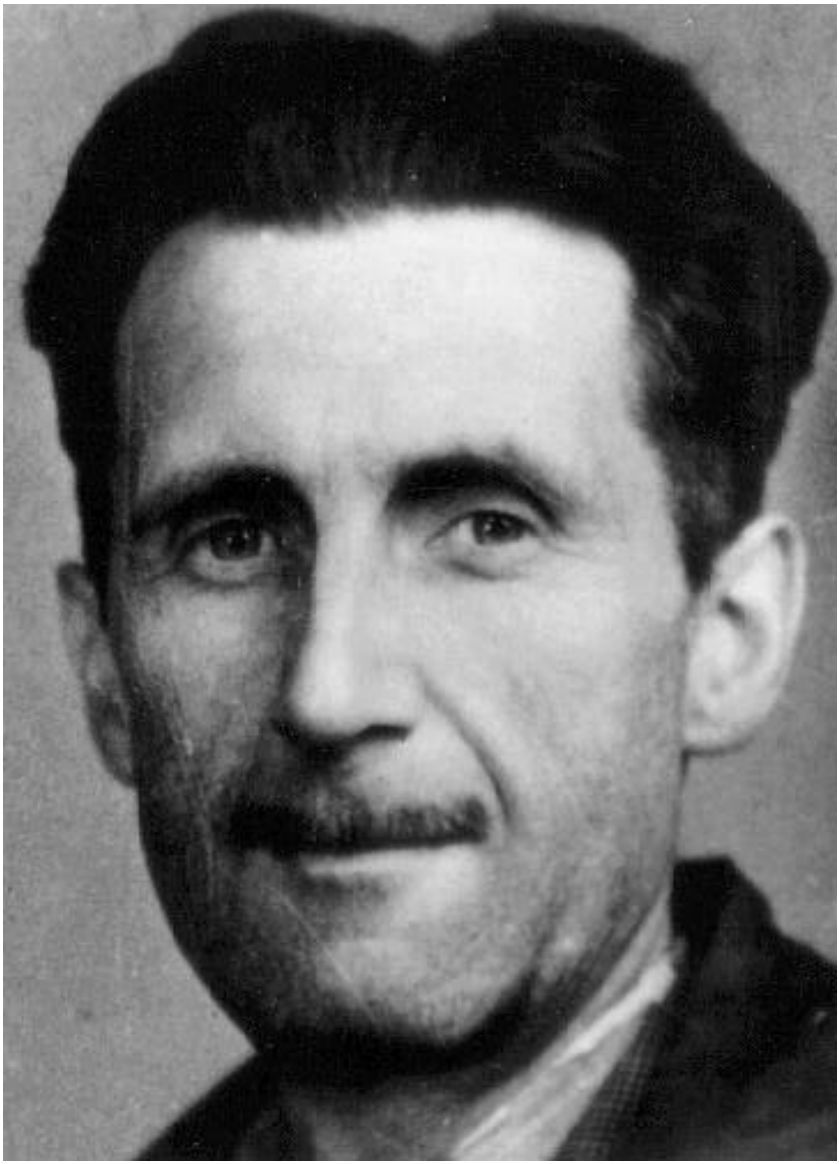


Orwell, close to the time of publication, c. 1933

CHAPTER 1

The rue du Coq d'Or, Paris, seven in the morning. A succession of furious, choking yells from the street. Madame Monce, who kept the little hotel opposite mine, had come out on to the pavement to address a lodger on the third floor. Her bare feet were stuck into sabots and her grey hair was streaming down.

MADAME MONCE: 'SALOPE! SALOPE! How many times have I told you not to squash bugs on the wallpaper? Do you think you've bought the hotel, eh? Why can't you throw them out of the window like everyone else? PUTAIN! SALOPE!'

THE WOMAN ON THE THIRD FLOOR: 'VACHE!'

Thereupon a whole variegated chorus of yells, as windows were flung open on every side and half the street joined in the quarrel. They shut up abruptly ten minutes later, when a squadron of cavalry rode past and people stopped shouting to look at them.

I sketch this scene, just to convey something of the spirit of the rue du Coq d'Or. Not that quarrels were the only thing that happened there — but still, we seldom got through the morning without at least one outburst of this description. Quarrels, and the desolate cries of street hawkers, and the shouts of children chasing orange-peel over the cobbles, and at night loud singing and the sour reek of the refuse-carts, made up the atmosphere of the street.

It was a very narrow street — a ravine of tall, leprous houses, lurching towards one another in queer attitudes, as though they had all been frozen in the act of collapse. All the houses were hotels and packed to the tiles with lodgers, mostly Poles, Arabs and Italians. At the foot of the hotels were tiny BISTROs, where you could be drunk for the equivalent of a shilling. On Saturday nights about a third of the male population of the quarter was drunk. There was fighting over women, and the Arab navvies who lived in the cheapest hotels used to conduct mysterious feuds, and fight them out with chairs and occasionally revolvers. At night the policemen would only come through the street two together. It was a fairly rackety place. And yet amid the noise and dirt lived the usual respectable French shopkeepers, bakers and laundresses and the like, keeping

themselves to themselves and quietly piling up small fortunes. It was quite a representative Paris slum.

My hotel was called the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. It was a dark, rickety warren of five storeys, cut up by wooden partitions into forty rooms. The rooms were small arid inveterately dirty, for there was no maid, and Madame F., the PATRONNE, had no time to do any sweeping. The walls were as thin as matchwood, and to hide the cracks they had been covered with layer after layer of pink paper, which had come loose and housed innumerable bugs. Near the ceiling long lines of bugs marched all day like columns of soldiers, and at night came down ravenously hungry, so that one had to get up every few hours and kill them in hecatombs. Sometimes when the bugs got too bad one used to burn sulphur and drive them into the next room; whereupon the lodger next door would retort by having his room sulphured, and drive the bugs back. It was a dirty place, but homelike, for Madame F. and her husband were good sorts. The rent of the rooms varied between thirty and fifty francs a week.

The lodgers were a floating population, largely foreigners, who used to turn up without luggage, stay a week and then disappear again. They were of every trade — cobblers, bricklayers, stonemasons, navvies, students, prostitutes, rag-pickers. Some of them were fantastically poor. In one of the attics there was a Bulgarian student who made fancy shoes for the American market. From six to twelve he sat on his bed, making a dozen pairs of shoes and earning thirty-five francs; the rest of the day he attended lectures at the Sorbonne. He was studying for the Church, and books of theology lay face-down on his leather-strewn floor. In another room lived a Russian woman and her son, who called himself an artist. The mother worked sixteen hours a day, darning socks at twenty-five centimes a sock, while the son, decently dressed, loafed in the Montparnasse cafes. One room was let to two different lodgers, one a day worker and the other a night worker. In another room a widower shared the same bed with his two grown-up daughters, both consumptive.

There were eccentric characters in the hotel. The Paris slums are a gathering-place for eccentric people — people who have fallen into solitary, half-mad grooves of life and given up trying to be normal or

decent. Poverty frees them from ordinary standards of behaviour, just as money frees people from work. Some of the lodgers in our hotel lived lives that were curious beyond words.

There were the Rougiers, for instance, an old, ragged, dwarfish couple who plied an extraordinary trade. They used to sell postcards on the Boulevard St Michel. The curious thing was that the postcards were sold in sealed packets as pornographic ones, but were actually photographs of chateaux on the Loire; the buyers did not discover this till too late, and of course never complained. The Rougiers earned about a hundred francs a week, and by strict economy managed to be always half starved and half drunk. The filth of their room was such that one could smell it on the floor below. According to Madame F., neither of the Rougiers had taken off their clothes for four years.

Or there was Henri, who worked in the sewers. He was a tall, melancholy man with curly hair, rather romantic-looking in his long, sewer-man's boots. Henri's peculiarity was that he did not speak, except for the purposes of work, literally for days together. Only a year before he had been a chauffeur in good employ and saving money. One day he fell in love, and when the girl refused him he lost his temper and kicked her. On being kicked the girl fell desperately in love with Henri, and for a fortnight they lived together and spent a thousand francs of Henri's money. Then the girl was unfaithful; Henri planted a knife in her upper arm and was sent to prison for six months. As soon as she had been stabbed the girl fell more in love with Henri than ever, and the two made up their quarrel and agreed that when Henri came out of jail he should buy a taxi and they would marry and settle down. But a fortnight later the girl was unfaithful again, and when Henri came out she was with child, Henri did not stab her again. He drew out all his savings and went on a drinking-bout that ended in another month's imprisonment; after that he went to work in the sewers. Nothing would induce Henri to talk. If you asked him why he worked in the sewers he never answered, but simply crossed his wrists to signify handcuffs, and jerked his head southward, towards the prison. Bad luck seemed to have turned him half-witted in a single day.

Or there was R., an Englishman, who lived six months of the year

in Putney with his parents and six months in France. During his time in France he drank four litres of wine a day, and six litres on Saturdays; he had once travelled as far as the Azores, because the wine there is cheaper than anywhere in Europe. He was a gentle, domesticated creature, never rowdy or quarrelsome, and never sober. He would lie in bed till midday, and from then till midnight he was in his comer of the BISTRO, quietly and methodically soaking. While he soaked he talked, in a refined, womanish voice, about antique furniture. Except myself, R. was the only Englishman in the quarter.

There were plenty of other people who lived lives just as eccentric as these: Monsieur Jules, the Roumanian, who had a glass eye and would not admit it, Furex the Limousin stonemason, Roucolle the miser — he died before my time, though — old Laurent the rag-merchant, who used to copy his signature from a slip of paper he carried in his pocket. It would be fun to write some of their biographies, if one had time. I am trying to describe the people in our quarter, not for the mere curiosity, but because they are all part of the story. Poverty is what I am writing about, and I had my first contact with poverty in this slum. The slum, with its dirt and its queer lives, was first an object-lesson in poverty, and then the background of my own experiences. It is for that reason that I try to give some idea of what life was like there.

CHAPTER 2

Life in the quarter. Our BISTRO, for instance, at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. A tiny brick-floored room, half underground, with wine-sodden tables, and a photograph of a funeral inscribed 'CREDIT EST MORT'; and red-sashed workmen carving sausage with big jack-knives; and Madame F., a splendid Auvergnat peasant woman with the face of a strong-minded cow, drinking Malaga all day 'for her stomach'; and games of dice for APERITIFS; and songs about 'LES PRAISES ET LES FRAMBOISES', and about Madelon, who said, 'COMMENT EPOUSER UN SOLDAT, MOI QUI AIME TOUT LE REGIMENT?'; and extraordinarily public love-making. Half the hotel used to meet in the BISTRO in the evenings. I wish one could find a pub in London a quarter as cheery.

One heard queer conversations in the BISTRO. As a sample I give you Charlie, one of the local curiosities, talking.

Charlie was a youth of family and education who had run away from home and lived on occasional remittances. Picture him very pink and young, with the fresh cheeks and soft brown hair of a nice little boy, and lips excessively red and wet, like cherries. His feet are tiny, his arms abnormally short, his hands dimpled like a baby's. He has a way of dancing and capering while he talks, as though he were too happy and too full of life to keep still for an instant. It is three in the afternoon, and there is no one in the BISTRO except Madame F. and one or two men who are out of work; but it is all the same to Charlie whom he talks to, so long as he can talk about himself. He declaims like an orator on a barricade, rolling the words on his tongue and gesticulating with his short arms. His small, rather piggy eyes glitter with enthusiasm. He is, somehow, profoundly disgusting to see.

He is talking of love, his favourite subject.

'AH, L'AMOUR, L'AMOUR! AH, QUE LES FEMMES M'ONT TUE! Alas, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, women have been my ruin, beyond all hope my ruin. At twenty-two I am utterly worn out and finished. But what things I have learned, what abysses of wisdom have I not plumbed! How great a thing it is to have acquired the true

wisdom, to have become in the highest sense of the word a civilized man, to have become RAFFINE, VICIEUX,' etc. etc.

'MESSIEURS ET DAFFIES, I perceive that you are sad. AH, MAIS LA VIE EST BELLE — you must not be sad. Be more gay, I beseech you!

'Fill high ze bowl vid Samian vine,
Ve vill not sink of semes like zese!

'AH, QUE LA VIE EST BELLE! LISTEN, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, out of the fullness of my experience I will discourse to you of love. I will explain to you what is the true meaning of love — what is the true sensibility, the higher, more refined pleasure which is known to civilized men alone. I will tell you of the happiest day of my life. Alas, but I am past the time when I could know such happiness as that. It is gone for ever — the very possibility, even the desire for it, are gone.

'Listen, then. It was two years ago; my brother was in Paris — he is a lawyer — and my parents had told him to find me and take me out to dinner. We hate each other, my brother and I, but we preferred not to disobey my parents. We dined, and at dinner he grew very drunk upon three bottles of Bordeaux. I took him back to his hotel, and on the way I bought a bottle of brandy, and when we had arrived I made my brother drink a tumblerful of it — I told him it was something to make him sober. He drank it, and immediately he fell down like somebody in a fit, dead drunk. I lifted him up and propped his back against the bed; then I went through his pockets. I found eleven hundred francs, and with that I hurried down the stairs, jumped into a taxi, and escaped. My brother did not know my address — I was safe.

'Where does a man go when he has money? To the BORDELS, naturally. But you do not suppose that I was going to waste my time on some vulgar debauchery fit only for navvies? Confound it, one is a civilized man! I was fastidious, exigeant, you understand, with a thousand francs in my pocket. It was midnight before I found what I was looking for. I had fallen in with a very smart youth of eighteen, dressed EN SMOKING and with his hair cut A L'AMERICAINE,

and we were talking in a quiet BISTRO away from the boulevards. We understood one another well, that youth and I. We talked of this and that, and discussed ways of diverting oneself. Presently we took a taxi together and were driven away.

'The taxi stopped in a narrow, solitary street with a single gas-lamp flaring at the end. There were dark puddles among the stones. Down one side ran the high, blank wall of a convent. My guide led me to a tall, ruinous house with shuttered windows, and knocked several times at the door. Presently there was a sound of footsteps and a shooting of bolts, and the door opened a little. A hand came round the edge of it; it was a large, crooked hand, that held itself palm upwards under our noses, demanding money.

'My guide put his foot between the door and the step. "How much do you want?" he said.

'"A thousand francs," said a woman's voice. "Pay up at once or you don't come in."

'I put a thousand francs into the hand and gave the remaining hundred to my guide: he said good night and left me. I could hear the voice inside counting the notes, and then a thin old crow of a woman in a black dress put her nose out and regarded me suspiciously before letting me in. It was very dark inside: I could see nothing except a flaring gas-jet that illuminated a patch of plaster wall, throwing everything else into deeper shadow. There was a smell of rats and dust. Without speaking, the old woman lighted a candle at the gas-jet, then hobbled in front of me down a stone passage to the top of a flight of stone steps.

'"VOILA!" she said; "go down into the cellar there and do what you like. I shall see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing. You are free, you understand — perfectly free."

'Ha, MESSIEURS, need I describe to YOU — FORCEMENT, you know it yourselves — that shiver, half of terror and half of joy, that goes through one at these moments? I crept down, feeling my way; I could hear my breathing and the scraping of my shoes on the stones, otherwise all was silence. At the bottom of the stairs my hand met an electric switch. I turned it, and a great electrolier of twelve red globes flooded the cellar with a red light. And behold, I was not in a cellar, but in a bedroom, a great, rich, garish bedroom, coloured

blood red from top to bottom. Figure it to yourselves, MESSIEURS ET DAMES! Red carpet on the floor, red paper on the walls, red plush on the chairs, even the ceiling red; everywhere red, burning into the eyes. It was a heavy, stifling red, as though the light were shining through bowls of blood. At the far end stood a huge, square bed, with quilts red like the rest, and on it a girl was lying, dressed in a frock of red velvet. At the sight of me she shrank away and tried to hide her knees under the short dress.

'I had halted by the door. "Come here, my chicken," I called to her.

'She gave a whimper of fright. With a bound I was beside the bed; she tried to elude me, but I seized her by the throat — like this, do you see? — tight! She struggled, she began to cry out for mercy, but I held her fast, forcing back her head and staring down into her face. She was twenty years old, perhaps; her face was the broad, dull face of a stupid child, but it was coated with paint and powder, and her blue, stupid eyes, shining in the red light, wore that shocked, distorted look that one sees nowhere save in the eyes of these women. She was some peasant girl, doubtless, whom her parents had sold into slavery.

'Without another word I pulled her off the bed and threw her on to the floor. And then I fell upon her like a tiger! Ah, the joy, the incomparable rapture of that time! There, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, is what I would expound to you; VOILA L'AMOUR! There is the true love, there is the only thing in the world worth striving for; there is the thing beside which all your arts and ideals, all your philosophies and creeds, all your fine words and high attitudes, are as pale and profitless as ashes. When one has experienced love — the true love — what is there in the world that seems more than a mere ghost of joy?

'More and more savagely I renewed the attack. Again and again the girl tried to escape; she cried out for mercy anew, but I laughed at her.

'"Mercy!" I said, "do you suppose I have come here to show mercy? Do you suppose I have paid a thousand francs for that?" I swear to you, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, that if it were not for that accursed law that robs us of our liberty, I would have murdered her

at that moment.

'Ah, how she screamed, with what bitter cries of agony. But there was no one to hear them; down there under the streets of Paris we were as secure as at the heart of a pyramid. Tears streamed down the girl's face, washing away the powder in long, dirty smears. Ah, that irrecoverable time! You, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, you who have not cultivated the finer sensibilities of love, for you such pleasure is almost beyond conception. And I too, now that my youth is gone — ah, youth! — shall never again see life so beautiful as that. It is finished.

'Ah yes, it is gone — gone for ever. Ah, the poverty, the shortness, the disappointment of human joy! For in reality — CAR EN REALITE, what is the duration of the supreme moment of love. It is nothing, an instant, a second perhaps. A second of ecstasy, and after that — dust, ashes, nothingness.

'And so, just for one instant, I captured the supreme happiness, the highest and most refined emotion to which human beings can attain. And in the same moment it was finished, and I was left — to what? All my savagery, my passion, were scattered like the petals of a rose. I was left cold and languid, full of vain regrets; in my revulsion I even felt a kind of pity for the weeping girl on the floor. Is it not nauseous, that we should be the prey of such mean emotions? I did not look at the girl again; my sole thought was to get away. I hastened up the steps of the vault and out into the street. It was dark and bitterly cold, the streets were empty, the stones echoed under my heels with a hollow, lonely ring. All my money was gone, I had not even the price of a taxi fare. I walked back alone to my cold, solitary room.

'But there, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, that is what I promised to expound to you. That is Love. That was the happiest day of my life.'

He was a curious specimen, Charlie. I describe him, just to show what diverse characters could be found flourishing in the Coq d'Or quarter.

CHAPTER 3

I lived in the Coq d'Or quarter for about a year and a half. One day, in summer, I found that I had just four hundred and fifty francs left, and beyond this nothing but thirty-six francs a week, which I earned by giving English lessons. Hitherto I had not thought about the future, but I now realized that I must do something at once. I decided to start looking for a job, and — very luckily, as it turned out — I took the precaution of paying two hundred francs for a month's rent in advance. With the other two hundred and fifty francs, besides the English lessons, I could live a month, and in a month I should probably find work. I aimed at becoming a guide to one of the tourist companies, or perhaps an interpreter. However, a piece of bad luck prevented this.

One day there turned up at the hotel a young Italian who called himself a compositor. He was rather an ambiguous person, for he wore side whiskers, which are the mark either of an apache or an intellectual, and nobody was quite certain in which class to put him. Madame F. did not like the look of him, and made him pay a week's rent in advance. The Italian paid the rent and stayed six nights at the hotel. During this time he managed to prepare some duplicate keys, and on the last night he robbed a dozen rooms, including mine. Luckily, he did not find the money that was in my pockets, so I was not left penniless. I was left with just forty-seven francs — that is, seven and tenpence.

This put an end to my plans of looking for work. I had now got to live at the rate of about six francs a day, and from the start it was too difficult to leave much thought for anything else. It was now that my experiences of poverty began — for six francs a day, if not actual poverty, is on the fringe of it. Six francs is a shilling, and you can live on a shilling a day in Paris if you know how. But it is a complicated business.

It is altogether curious, your first contact with poverty. You have thought so much about poverty — it is the thing you have feared all your life, the thing you knew would happen to you sooner or later; and it, is all so utterly and prosaically different. You thought it would

be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complicated. You thought it would be terrible; it is merely squalid and boring. It is the peculiar LOWNESS of poverty that you discover first; the shifts that it puts you to, the complicated meanness, the crust-wiping.

You discover, for instance, the secrecy attaching to poverty. At a sudden stroke you have been reduced to an income of six francs a day. But of course you dare not admit it — you have got to pretend that you are living quite as usual. From the start it tangles you in a net of lies, and even with the lies you can hardly manage it. You stop sending clothes to the laundry, and the laundress catches you in the street and asks you why; you mumble something, and she, thinking you are sending the clothes elsewhere, is your enemy for life. The tobacconist keeps asking why you have cut down your smoking. There are letters you want to answer, and cannot, because stamps are too expensive. And then there are your meals — meals are the worst difficulty of all. Every day at meal-times you go out, ostensibly to a restaurant, and loaf an hour in the Luxembourg Gardens, watching the pigeons. Afterwards you smuggle your food home in your pockets. Your food is bread and margarine, or bread and wine, and even the nature of the food is governed by lies. You have to buy rye bread instead of household bread, because the rye loaves, though dearer, are round and can be smuggled in your pockets. This wastes you a franc a day. Sometimes, to keep up appearances, you have to spend sixty centimes on a drink, and go correspondingly short of food. Your linen gets filthy, and you run out of soap and razor-blades. Your hair wants cutting, and you try to cut it yourself, with such fearful results that you have to go to the barber after all, and spend the equivalent of a day's food. All day you arc telling lies, and expensive lies.

You discover the extreme precariousness of your six francs a day. Mean disasters happen and rob you of food. You have spent your last eighty centimes on half a litre of milk, and are boiling it over the spirit lamp. While it boils a bug runs down your forearm; you give the bug a flick with your nail, and it falls, plop! straight into the milk. There is nothing for it but to throw the milk away and go foodless.

You go to the baker's to buy a pound of bread, and you wait while the girl cuts a pound for another customer. She is clumsy, and cuts

more than a pound. 'PARDON, MONSIEUR,' she says, 'I suppose you don't mind paying two sous extra?' Bread is a franc a pound, and you have exactly a franc. When you think that you too might be asked to pay two sous extra, and would have to confess that you could not, you bolt in panic. It is hours before you dare venture into a baker's shop again.

You go to the greengrocer's to spend a franc on a kilogram of potatoes. But one of the pieces that make up the franc is a Belgian piece, and the shopman refuses it. You slink out of the shop, and can never go there again.

You have strayed into a respectable quarter, and you see a prosperous friend coming. To avoid him you dodge into the nearest cafe. Once in the cafe you must buy something, so you spend your last fifty centimes on a glass of black coffee with a dead fly in it. One could multiply these disasters by the hundred. They are part of the process of being hard up.

You discover what it is like to be hungry. With bread and margarine in your belly, you go out and look into the shop windows. Everywhere there is food insulting you in huge, wasteful piles; whole dead pigs, baskets of hot loaves, great yellow blocks of butter, strings of sausages, mountains of potatoes, vast Gruyere cheeses like grindstones. A snivelling self-pity comes over you at the sight of so much food. You plan to grab a loaf and run, swallowing it before they catch you; and you refrain, from pure funk.

You discover the boredom which is inseparable from poverty; the times when you have nothing to do and, being underfed, can interest yourself in nothing. For half a day at a time you lie on your bed, feeling like the JEUNE SQUELETTE in Baudelaire's poem. Only food could rouse you. You discover that a man who has gone even a week on bread and margarine is not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs.

This — one could describe it further, but it is all in the same style — is life on six francs a day. Thousands of people in Paris live it — struggling artists and students, prostitutes when their luck is out, out-of-work people of all kinds. It is the suburbs, as it were, of poverty.

I continued in this style for about three weeks. The forty-seven francs were soon gone, and I had to do what I could on thirty-six

francs a week from the English lessons. Being inexperienced, I handled the money badly, and sometimes I was a day without food. When this happened I used to sell a few of my clothes, smuggling them out of the hotel in small packets and taking them to a secondhand shop in the rue de la Montagne St Genevieve. The shopman was a red-haired Jew, an extraordinary disagreeable man, who used to fall into furious rages at the sight of a client. From his manner one would have supposed that we had done him some injury by coming to him. 'MERDE!' he used to shout, 'YOU here again? What do you think this is? A soup kitchen?' And he paid incredibly low prices. For a hat which I had bought for twenty-five shillings and scarcely worn he gave five francs; for a good pair of shoes, five francs; for shirts, a franc each. He always preferred to exchange rather than buy, and he had a trick of thrusting some useless article into one's hand and then pretending that one had accepted it. Once I saw him take a good overcoat from an old woman, put two white billiard-balls into her hand, and then push her rapidly out of the shop before she could protest. It would have been a pleasure to flatten the Jew's nose, if only one could have afforded it.

These three weeks were squalid and uncomfortable, and evidently there was worse coming, for my rent would be due before long. Nevertheless, things were not a quarter as bad as I had expected. For, when you are approaching poverty, you make one discovery which outweighs some of the others. You discover boredom and mean complications and the beginnings of hunger, but you also discover the great redeeming feature of poverty: the fact that it annihilates the future. Within certain limits, it is actually true that the less money you have, the less you worry. When you have a hundred francs in the world you are liable to the most craven panics. When you have only three francs you are quite indifferent; for three francs will feed you till tomorrow, and you cannot think further than that. You are bored, but you are not afraid. You think vaguely, 'I shall be starving in a day or two — shocking, isn't it?' And then the mind wanders to other topics. A bread and margarine diet does, to some extent, provide its own anodyne.

And there is another feeling that is a great consolation in poverty. I believe everyone who has been hard up has experienced it. It is a

feeling of relief, almost of pleasure, at knowing yourself at last genuinely down and out. You have talked so often of going to the dogs — and well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it. It takes off a lot of anxiety,

CHAPTER 4

One day my English lessons ceased abruptly. The weather was getting hot and one of my pupils, feeling too lazy to go on with his lessons, dismissed me. The other disappeared from his lodgings without notice, owing me twelve francs. I was left with only thirty centimes and no tobacco. For a day and a half I had nothing to cat or smoke, and then, too hungry to put it off any longer, I packed my remaining clothes into my suitcase and took them to the pawnshop. This put an end to all pretence of being in funds, for I could not take my clothes out of the hotel without asking Madame F.'s leave. I remember, however, how surprised she was at my asking her instead of removing the clothes on the sly, shooting the moon being a common trick in our quarter.

It was the first time that I had been in a French pawnshop. One went through grandiose stone portals (marked, of course, 'LIBERTE, EGATITE, FRATERNITE' they write that even over the police stations in France) into a large, bare room like a school classroom, with a counter and rows of benches. Forty or fifty people were waiting. One handed one's pledge over the counter and sat down. Presently, when the clerk had assessed its value he would call out, 'NUMERO such and such, will you take fifty francs?' Sometimes it was only fifteen francs, or ten, or five — whatever it was, the whole room knew it. As I Came in the clerk called with an air of offence, 'NUMERO 83 — here!' and gave a little whistle and a beckon, as though calling a dog. NUMERO 83 stepped to the counter; he was an old bearded man, with an overcoat buttoned up at the neck and frayed trouser-ends. Without a word the clerk shot the bundle across the counter — evidently it was worth nothing. It fell to the ground and came open, displaying four pairs of men's woollen pants. No one could help laughing. Poor NUMERO 83 gathered up his pants and shambled out, muttering to himself.

The clothes I was pawning, together with the suitcase, had cost over twenty pounds, and were in good condition. I thought they must be worth ten pounds, and a quarter of this (one expects quarter value at a pawnshop) was two hundred and fifty or three hundred francs. I

waited without anxiety, expecting two hundred francs at the worst.

At last the clerk called my number: 'NUMERO 97!'

'Yes,' I said, standing up.

'Seventy francs?'

Seventy francs for ten pounds' worth of clothes! But it was no use arguing; I had seen someone else attempt to argue, and the clerk had instantly refused the pledge. I took the money and the pawnticket and walked out. I had now no clothes except what I stood up in — the coat badly out at the elbow — an overcoat, moderately pawnable, and one spare shirt. Afterwards, when it was too late, I learned that it was wiser to go to a pawnshop in the afternoon. The clerks are French, and, like most French people, are in a bad temper till they have eaten their lunch.

When I got home, Madame F. was sweeping the BISTRO floor. She came up the steps to meet me. I could see in her eye that she was uneasy about my rent.

'Well,' she said, 'what did you get for your clothes? Not much, eh?'

'Two hundred francs,' I said promptly.

'TIENS!' she said, surprised; 'well, THAT'S not bad. How expensive those English clothes must be!'

The lie saved a lot of trouble, and, strangely enough, it came true. A few days later I did receive exactly two hundred francs due to me for a newspaper article, and, though it hurt to do it, I at once paid every penny of it in rent. So, though I came near to starving in the following weeks, I was hardly ever without a roof.

It was now absolutely necessary to find work, and I remembered a friend of mine, a Russian waiter named Boris, who might be able to help me. I had first met him in the public ward of a hospital, where he was being treated for arthritis in the left leg. He had told me to come to him if I were ever in difficulties.

I must say something about Boris, for he was a curious character and my close friend for a long time. He was a big, soldierly man of about thirty-five, and had been good looking, but since his illness he had grown immensely fat from lying in bed. Like most Russian refugees, he had had an adventurous life. His parents, killed in the Revolution, had been rich people, and he had served through the war

in the Second Siberian Rifles, which, according to him, was the best regiment in the Russian Army. After the war he had first worked in a brush factory, then as a porter at Les Halles, then had become a dishwasher, and had finally worked his way up to be a waiter. When he fell ill he was at the Hotel Scribe, and taking a hundred francs a day in tips. His ambition was to become a MAITRE D'HOTEL, save fifty thousand francs, and set up a small, select restaurant on the Right Bank.

Boris always talked of the war as the happiest time of his life. War and soldiering were his passion; he had read innumerable books of strategy and military history, and could tell you all about the theories of Napoleon, Kutuzof, Clausewitz, Moltke and Foch. Anything to do with soldiers pleased him. His favourite cafe was the Gloserie des Lilas in Montparnasse, simply because the statue of Marshal Ney stands outside it. Later on, Boris and I sometimes went to the rue du Commerce together. If we went by Metro, Boris always got out at Cambronne station instead of Commerce, though Commerce was nearer; he liked the association with General Cambronne, who was called on to surrender at Waterloo, and answered simply, 'MERDE!'

The only things left to Boris by the Revolution were his medals and some photographs of his old regiment; he had kept these when everything else went to the pawnshop. Almost every day he would spread the photographs out on the bed and talk about them:

'VOILA, MON AMI. There you see me at the head of my company. Fine big men, eh? Not like these little rats of Frenchmen. A captain at twenty — not bad, eh? Yes, a captain in the Second Siberian Rifles; and my father was a colonel.

'AH, MAIS, MON AMI, the ups and downs of life! A captain in the Russian Army, and then, piff! the Revolution — every penny gone. In 1916 I stayed a week at the Hotel Edouard Sept; in 1920 I was trying for a job as night watchman there. I have been night watchman, cellarman, floor scrubber, dishwasher, porter, lavatory attendant. I have tipped waiters, and I have been tipped by waiters.

'Ah, but I have known what it is to live like a gentleman, MON AMI. I do not say it to boast, but the other day I was trying to compute how many mistresses I have had in my life, and I made it

out to be over two hundred. Yes, at least two hundred . . . Ah, well, CA REVIENDRA. Victory is to him who fights the longest. Courage!' etc. etc.

Boris had a queer, changeable nature. He always wished himself back in the army, but he had also been a waiter long enough to acquire the waiter's outlook. Though he had never saved more than a few thousand francs, he took it for granted that in the end he would be able to set up his own restaurant and grow rich. All waiters, I afterwards found, talk and think of this; it is what reconciles them to being waiters. Boris used to talk interestingly about Hotel life:

'Waiting is a gamble,' he used to say; 'you may die poor, you may make your fortune in a year. You are not paid wages, you depend on tips — ten per cent of the bill, and a commission from the wine companies on champagne corks. Sometimes the tips are enormous. The barman at Maxim's, for instance, makes five hundred francs a day. More than five hundred, in the season . . . I have made two hundred francs a day myself. It was at a Hotel in Biarritz, in the season. The whole staff, from the manager down to the PLONGEURS, was working twenty-one hours a day. Twenty-one hours' work and two and a half hours in bed, for a month on end. Still, it was worth it, at two hundred francs a day.

'You never know when a stroke of luck is coming. Once when I was at the Hotel Royal an American customer sent for me before dinner and ordered twenty-four brandy cocktails. I brought them all together on a tray, in twenty-four glasses. "Now, GUARCON," said the customer (he was drunk), "I'll drink twelve and you'll drink twelve, and if you can walk to the door afterwards you get a hundred francs." I walked to the door, and he gave me a hundred francs. And every night for six days he did the same thing; twelve brandy cocktails, then a hundred francs. A few months later I heard he had been extradited by the American Government — embezzlement. There is something fine, do you not think, about these Americans?'

I liked Boris, and we had interesting times together, playing chess and talking about war and Hotels. Boris used often to suggest that I should become a waiter. 'The life would suit you,' he used to say; 'when you are in work, with a hundred francs a day and a nice mistress, it's not bad. You say you go in for writing. Writing is bosh.

There is only one way to make money at writing, and that is to marry a publisher's daughter. But you would make a good waiter if you shaved that moustache off. You are tall and you speak English — those are the chief things a waiter needs. Wait till I can bend this accursed leg, MON AMI. And then, if you are ever out of a job, come to me.'

Now that I was short of my rent, and getting hungry, I remembered Boris's promise, and decided to look him up at once. I did not hope to become a waiter so easily as he had promised, but of course I knew how to scrub dishes, and no doubt he could get me a job in the kitchen. He had said that dishwashing jobs were to be had for the asking during the summer. It was a great relief to remember that I had after all one influential friend to fall back on.

CHAPTER 5

A short time before, Boris had given me an address in the rue du Marche des Blancs Manteaux. All he had said in his letter was that 'things were not marching too badly', and I assumed that he was back at the Hotel Scribe, touching his hundred francs a day. I was full of hope, and wondered why I had been fool enough not to go to Boris before. I saw myself in a cosy restaurant, with jolly cooks singing love-songs as they broke eggs into the pan, and five solid meals a day. I even squandered two francs fifty on a packet of Gaulois Bleu, in anticipation of my wages.

In the morning I walked down to the rue du Marche des Blancs Manteaux; with a shock, I found it a shimmy back street-as bad as my own. Boris's hotel was the dirtiest hotel in the street. From its dark doorway there came out a vile, sour odour, a mixture of slops and synthetic soup — it was Bouillon Zip, twenty-five centimes a packet. A misgiving came over me. People who drink Bouillon Zip are starving, or near it. Could Boris possibly be earning a hundred francs a day? A surly PATRON, sitting in the office, said to me. Yes, the Russian was at home — in the attic. I went up six nights of narrow, winding stairs, the Bouillon Zip growing stronger as one got higher. Boris did not answer when I knocked at his door, so I opened it and went in.

The room was an attic, ten feet square, lighted only by a skylight, its sole furniture a narrow iron bedstead, a chair, and a washhand-stand with one game leg. A long S-shaped chain of bugs marched slowly across the wall above the bed. Boris was lying asleep, naked, his large belly making a mound under the grimy sheet. His chest was spotted with insect bites. As I came in he woke up, rubbed his eyes, and groaned deeply.

'Name of Jesus Christ!' he exclaimed, 'oh, name of Jesus Christ, my back! Curse it, I believe my back is broken!'

'What's the matter?' I exclaimed.

'My back is broken, that is all. I have spent the night on the floor. Oh, name of Jesus Christ! If you knew what my back feels like!'

'My dear Boris, are you ill?'

‘Not ill, only starving — yes, starving to death if this goes on much longer. Besides sleeping on the floor, I have lived on two francs a day for weeks past. It is fearful. You have come at a bad moment, MON AMI.’

It did not seem much use to ask whether Boris still had his job at the Hotel Scribe. I hurried downstairs and bought a loaf of bread. Boris threw himself on the bread and ate half of it, after which he felt better, sat up in bed, and told me what was the matter with him. He had failed to get a job after leaving the hospital, because he was still very lame, and he had spent all his money and pawned everything, and finally starved for several days. He had slept a week on the quay under the Font d’Austerlitz, among some empty wine barrels. For the past fortnight he had been living in this room, together with a Jew, a mechanic. It appeared (there was some complicated explanation.) that the Jew owed Boris three hundred francs, and was repaying this by letting him sleep on the floor and allowing him two francs a day for food. Two francs would buy a bowl of coffee and three rolls. The Jew went to work at seven in the mornings, and after that Boris would leave his sleeping-place (it was beneath the skylight, which let in the rain) and get into the bed. He could not sleep much even there owing to the bugs, but it rested his back after the floor.

It was a great disappointment, when I had come to Boris for help, to find him even worse off than myself. I explained that I had only about sixty francs left and must get a job immediately. By this time, however, Boris had eaten the rest of the bread and was feeling cheerful and talkative. He said carelessly:

‘Good heavens, what are you worrying about? Sixty francs — why, it’s a fortune! Please hand me that shoe, MON AMI. I’m going to smash some of those bugs if they come within reach.’

‘But do you think there’s any chance of getting a job?’

‘Chance? It’s a certainty. In fact, I have got something already. There is a new Russian restaurant which is to open in a few days in the rue du Commerce. It is UNE CHOSE ENTENDUE that I am to be MAITRE D’HOTEL. I can easily get you a job in the kitchen. Five hundred francs a month and your food — tips, too, if you are lucky.’

‘But in the meantime? I’ve got to pay my rent before long.’

‘Oh, we shall find something. I have got a few cards-up my sleeve. There are people who owe me money, for instance — Paris is full of them. One of them is bound to pay up before long. Then think of all the women who have been my mistress! A woman never forgets, you know — I have only to ask and they will help me. Besides, the Jew tells me he is going to steal some magnetos from the garage where he works, and he will pay us five francs a day to clean them before he sells them. That alone would keep us. Never worry, MON AMI. Nothing is easier to get than money.’

‘Well, let’s go out now and look for a job.’

‘Presently, MON AMI. We shan’t starve, don’t you fear. This is only the fortune of war — I’ve been in a worse hole scores of times. It’s only a question of persisting. Remember Foch’s maxim: “ATTAQUEZ! ATTAQUEZ! ATTAQUEZ!”’

It was midday before Boris decided to get up. All the clothes he now had left were one suit, with one shirt, collar and tie, a pair of shoes almost worn out, and a pair of socks all holes. He had also an overcoat which was to be pawned in the last extremity. He had a suitcase, a wretched twenty-franc cardboard thing, but very important, because the PATRON of the hotel believed that it was full of clothes — without that, he would probably have turned Boris out of doors. What it actually contained were the medals and photographs, various odds and ends, and huge bundles of love-letters. In spite of all this Boris managed to keep a fairly smart appearance. He shaved without soap and with a razor-blade two months old, tied his tie so that the holes did not show, and carefully stuffed the soles of his shoes with newspaper. Finally, when he was dressed, he produced an ink-bottle and inked the skin of his ankles where it showed through his socks. You would never have thought, when it was finished, that he had recently been sleeping under the Seine bridges.

We went to a small cafe off the rue de Rivoli, a well-known rendezvous of hotel managers and employees. At the back was a dark, cave-like room where all kinds of hotel workers were sitting — smart young waiters, others not so smart and clearly hungry, fat pink cooks, greasy dish-washers, battered old scrubbing-women. Everyone had an untouched glass of black coffee in front of him. The

place was, in effect, an employment bureau, and the money spent on drinks was the PATRON'S commission. Sometimes a stout, important-looking man, obviously a restaurateur, would come in and speak to the barman, and the barman would call to one of the people at the back of the cafe. But he never called to Boris or me, and we left after two hours, as the etiquette was that you could only stay two hours for one drink. We learned afterwards, when it was too late, that the dodge was to bribe the barman; if you could afford twenty francs he would generally get you a job.

We went to the Hotel Scribe and waited an hour on the pavement, hoping that the manager would come out, but he never did. Then we dragged ourselves down to the rue du Commerce, only to find that the new restaurant, which was being redecorated, was shut up and the PATRON away. It was now night. We had walked fourteen kilometres over pavement, and we were so tired that we had to waste one franc fifty on going home by Metro. Walking was agony to Boris with his game leg, and his optimism wore thinner and thinner as the day went on. When he got out of the Metro at the Place d'Italie he was in despair. He began to say that it was no use looking for work — there was nothing for it but to try crime.

'Sooner rob than starve, MON AMI. I have often planned it. A fat, rich American — some dark corner down Montparnasse way — a cobblestone in a stocking — bang! And then go through his pockets and bolt. It is feasible, do you not think? I would not flinch — I have been a soldier, remember.'

He decided against the plan in the end, because we were both foreigners and easily recognized.

When we had got back to my room we spent another one franc fifty on bread and chocolate. Boris devoured his share, and at once cheered up like magic; food seemed to act on his system as rapidly as a cocktail. He took out a pencil and began making a list of the people who would probably give us jobs. There were dozens of them, he said.

'Tomorrow we shall find something, MON AMI, I know it in my bones. The luck always changes. Besides, we both have brains — a man with brains can't starve.

'What things a man can do with brains! Brains will make money

out of anything. I had a friend once, a Pole, a real man of genius; and what do you think he used to do? He would buy a gold ring and pawn it for fifteen francs. Then — you know how carelessly the clerks fill up the tickets — where the clerk had written “EN OR” he would add “ET DIAMANTS” and he would change “fifteen francs” to “fifteen thousand”. Neat, eh? Then, you see, he could borrow a thousand francs on the security of the ticket. That is what I mean by brains . . . ‘

For the rest of the evening Boris was in a hopeful mood, talking of the times we should have together when we were waiters together at Nice or Biarritz, with smart rooms and enough money to set up mistresses. He was too tired to walk the three kilometres back to his hotel, and slept the night on the floor of my room, with his coat rolled round his shoes for a pillow.

CHAPTER 6

We again failed to find work the next day, and it was three weeks before the luck changed. My two hundred francs saved me from trouble about the rent, but everything else went as badly as possible. Day after day Boris and I went up and down Paris, drifting at two miles an hour through the crowds, bored and hungry, and finding nothing. One day, I remember, we crossed the Seine eleven times. We loitered for hours outside service doorways, and when the manager came out we would go up to him ingratiatingly, cap in hand. We always got the same answer: they did not want a lame man, nor a man without experience. Once we were very nearly engaged. While we spoke to the manager Boris stood straight upright, not supporting himself with his stick, and the .manager did not see that he was lame. 'Yes,' he said, 'we want two men in the cellars. Perhaps you would do. Come inside.' Then Boris moved, the game was up. 'Ah,' said the manager, 'you limp. MALHEUREUSEMENT— '

We enrolled our names at agencies and answered advertisements, but walking everywhere made us slow, and we seemed to miss every job by half an hour. Once we very nearly got a job swabbing out railway trucks, but at the last moment they rejected us in favour of Frenchmen. Once we answered an advertisement calling for hands at a circus. You had to shift benches and clean up litter, and, during the performance, stand on two tubs and let a lion jump through your legs. When we got to the place, an hour before the time named, we found a queue of fifty men already waiting. There is some attraction in lions, evidently.

Once an agency to which I had applied months earlier sent me a PETIT BLEU, telling me of an Italian gentleman who wanted English lessons. The PETIT BLEU said 'Come at once' and promised twenty francs an hour. Boris and I were in despair. Here was a splendid chance, and I could not take it, for it was impossible to go to the agency with my coat out at the elbow. Then it occurred to us that I could wear Boris's coat — it did not match my trousers, but the trousers were grey and might pass for flannel at a short distance. The coat was so much too big for me that I had to wear it

unbuttoned and keep one hand in my pocket. I hurried out, and wasted seventy-five centimes on a bus fare to get to the agency. When I got there I found that the Italian had changed his mind and left Paris.

Once Boris suggested that I should go to Les Halles and try for a job as a porter. I arrived at half-past four in the morning, when the work was getting into its swing. Seeing a short, fat man in a bowler hat directing some porters, I went up to him and asked for work. Before answering he seized my right hand and felt the palm.

'You are strong, eh?' he said.

'Very strong,' I said untruly.

'BIEN. Let me see you lift that crate.'

It was a huge wicker basket full of potatoes. I took hold of it, and found that, so far from lifting it, I could not even move it. The man in the bowler hat watched me, then shrugged his shoulders and turned away. I made off. When I had gone some distance I looked back and saw FOUR men lifting the basket on to a cart. It weighed three hundredweight, possibly. The man had seen that I was no use, and taken this way of getting rid of me.

Sometimes in his hopeful moments Boris spent fifty centimes on a stamp and wrote to one of his ex-mistresses, asking for money. Only one of them ever replied. It was a woman who, besides having been his mistress, owed him two hundred francs. When Boris saw the letter waiting and recognized the handwriting, he was wild with hope. We seized the letter and rushed up to Boris's room to read it, like a child with stolen sweets. Boris read the letter, then handed it silently to me. It ran:

My Little Cherished Wolf,

With what delight did I open thy charming letter, reminding me of the days of our perfect love, and of the so dear kisses which I have received from thy lips. Such memories linger for ever in the heart, like the perfume of a flower that is dead.

As to thy request for two hundred francs, alas! it is impossible. Thou dost not know, my dear one, how I am desolated to hear of thy embarrassments. But what wouldst thou? In this life which is so sad, trouble conies to everyone. I too have had my share. My little sister has been ill (ah, the poor little one, how she suffered!) and we are

obliged to pay I know not what to the doctor. All our money is gone and we are passing, I assure thee, very difficult days.

Courage, my little wolf, always the courage! Remember that the bad days are not for ever, and the trouble which seems so terrible will disappear at last.

Rest assured, my dear one, that I will remember thee always. And receive the most sincere embraces of her who has never ceased to love thee, thy

Yvonne

This letter disappointed Boris so much that he went straight to bed and would not look for work again that day. My sixty francs lasted about a fortnight. I had given up the pretence of going out to restaurants, and we used to eat in my room, one of us sitting on the bed and the other on the chair. Boris would contribute his two francs and I three or four francs, and we would buy bread, potatoes, milk and cheese, and make soup over my spirit lamp. We had a saucepan and a coffee-bowl and one spoon; every day there was a polite squabble as to who should eat out of the saucepan and who out of the coffee-bowl (the saucepan held more), and every day, to my secret anger, Boris gave in first and had the saucepan. Sometimes we had more bread in the evening, sometimes not. Our linen was getting filthy, and it was three weeks since I had had a bath; Boris, so he said, had not had a bath for months. It was tobacco that made everything tolerable. We had plenty of tobacco, for some time before Boris had met a soldier (the soldiers are given their tobacco free) and bought twenty or thirty packets at fifty centimes each.

All this was far worse for Boris than for me. The walking and sleeping on the floor kept his leg and back in constant pain, and with his vast Russian appetite he suffered torments of hunger, though he never seemed to grow thinner. On the whole he was surprisingly gay, and he had vast capacities for hope. He used to say seriously that he had a PATRON saint who watched over him, and when things were very bad he would search the gutter for money, saying that the saint often dropped a two-franc piece there. One day we were waiting in the rue Royale; there was a Russian restaurant near by, and we were going to ask for a job there. Suddenly, Boris made up his mind to go into the Madeleine and bum a fifty-centime candle to his PATRON

saint. Then, coming out, he said that he would be on the safe side, and solemnly put a match to a fifty-centime stamp, as a sacrifice to the immortal gods. Perhaps the gods and the saints did not get on together; at any rate, we missed the job.

On some mornings Boris collapsed in the most utter despair. He would lie in bed almost weeping, cursing the Jew with whom he lived. Of late the Jew had become restive about paying the daily two francs, and, what was worse, had begun putting on intolerable airs of PATRONage. Boris said that I, as an Englishman, could not conceive what torture it was to a Russian of family to be at the mercy of a Jew.

'A Jew, MON AMI, a veritable Jew! And he hasn't even the decency to be ashamed of it. To think that I, a captain in the Russian Army — have I ever told you, MON AMI, that I was a captain in the Second Siberian Rifles? Yes, a captain, and my father was a colonel. And here I am, eating the bread of a Jew. A Jew . . .

'I will tell you what Jews are like. Once, in the early months of the war, we were on the march, and we had halted at a village for the night. A horrible old Jew, with a red beard like Judas Iscariot, came sneaking up to my billet. I asked him what he wanted. "Your honour," he said, "I have brought a girl for you, a beautiful young girl only seventeen. It will only be fifty francs." "Thank you," I said, "you can take her away again. I don't want to catch any diseases." "Diseases!" cried the Jew, "MAIS, MONSIEUR LE CAPITAINE, there's no fear of that. It's my own daughter!" That is the Jewish national character for you.

'Have I ever told you, MON AMI, that in the old Russian Army it was considered bad form to spit on a Jew? Yes, we thought a Russian officer's spittle was too precious to be wasted on Jews . . . ' etc. etc.

On these days Boris usually declared himself too ill to go out and look for work. He would lie till evening in the greyish, verminous sheets, smoking and reading old newspapers. Sometimes we played chess. We had no board, but we wrote down the moves on a piece of paper, and afterwards we made a board from the side of a packing — case, and a set of men from buttons, Belgian coins and the like. Boris, like many Russians, had a passion for chess. It was a saying of his that the rules of chess are the same as the rules of love and war,

and that if you can win at one you can win at the others. But he also said that if you have a chessboard you do not mind being hungry, which was certainly not true in my case.

CHAPTER 7

My money oozed away — to eight francs, to four francs, to one franc, to twenty-five centimes; and twenty-five centimes is useless, for it will buy nothing except a newspaper. We went several days on dry bread, and then I was two and a half days with nothing to eat whatever. This was an ugly experience. There are people who do fasting cures of three weeks or more, and they say that fasting is quite pleasant after the fourth day; I do not know, never having gone beyond the third day. Probably it seems different when one is doing it voluntarily and is not underfed at the start.

The first day, too inert to look for work, I borrowed a rod and went fishing in the Seine, baiting with bluebottles. I hoped to catch enough for a meal, but of course I did not. The Seine is full of dace, but they grew cunning during the siege of Paris, and none of them has been caught since, except in nets. On the second day I thought of pawning my overcoat, but it seemed too far to walk to the pawnshop, and I spent the day in bed, reading the MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES. It was all that I felt equal to, without food. Hunger reduces one to an utterly spineless, brainless condition, more like the after-effects of influenza than anything else. It is as though one had been turned into a jellyfish, or as though all one's blood had been pumped out and luke-wann water substituted. Complete inertia is my chief memory of hunger; that, and being obliged to spit very frequently, and the spittle being curiously white and flocculent, like cuckoo-spit. I do not know the reason for this, but everyone who has gone hungry several days has noticed it.

On the third morning I felt very much better. I realized that I must do something at once, and I decided to go and ask Boris to let me share his two francs, at any rate for a day or two. When I arrived I found Boris in bed, and furiously angry. As soon as I came in he burst out, almost choking:

'He has taken it back, the dirty thief! He has taken it back!'

'Who's taken what?' I said.

'The Jew! Taken my two francs, the dog, the thief! He robbed me in my sleep!'

It appeared that on the previous night the Jew had flatly refused to pay the daily two francs. They had argued and argued, and at last the Jew had consented to hand over the money; he had done it, Boris said, in the most offensive manner, making a little speech about how kind he was, and extorting abject gratitude. And then in the morning he had stolen the money back before Boris was awake.

This was a blow. I was horribly disappointed, for I had allowed my belly to expect food, a great mistake when one is hungry. However, rather to my surprise, Boris was far from despairing. He sat up in bed, lighted his pipe and reviewed the situation.

'Now listen, MON AMI, this is a tight comer. We have only twenty-five centimes between us, and I don't suppose the Jew will ever pay my two francs again. In any case his behaviour is becoming intolerable. Will you believe it, the other night he had the indecency to bring a woman in here, while I was there on the floor. The low animal! And I have a worse thing to tell you. The Jew intends clearing out of here. He owes a week's rent, and his idea is to avoid paying that and give me the slip at the same time. If the Jew shoots the moon I shall be left without a roof, and the PATRON will take my suitcase in lieu of rent, curse him! We have got to make a vigorous move.'

'All right. But what can we do? It seems to me that the only thing is to pawn our overcoats and get some food.'

'We'll do that, of course, but I must get my possessions out of this house first. To think of my photographs being seized! Well, my plan is ready. I'm going to forestall the Jew and shoot the moon myself. F —— LE CAMP — retreat, you understand. I think that is the correct move, eh?'

'But, my dear Boris, how can you, in daytime? You're bound to be caught.'

'Ah well, it will need strategy, of course. Our PATRON is on the watch for people slipping out without paying their rent; he's been had that way before. He and his wife take it in turns all day to sit in the office — what misers, these Frenchmen! But I have thought of a way to do it, if you will help.'

I did not feel in a very helpful mood, but I asked Boris what his plan was. He explained it carefully.

‘Now listen. We must start by pawning our overcoats. First go back to your room and fetch your overcoat, then come back here and fetch mine, and smuggle it out under cover of yours. Take them to the pawnshop in the rue des Francs Bourgeois. You ought to get twenty francs for the two, with luck. Then go down to the Seine bank and fill your pockets with stones, and bring them back and put them in my suitcase. You see the idea? I shall wrap as many of my things as I can carry in a newspaper, and go down and ask the PATRON the way to the nearest laundry. I shall be very brazen and casual, you understand, and of course the PATRON will think the bundle is nothing but dirty linen. Or, if he does suspect anything, he will do what he always does, the mean sneak; he will go up to my room and feel the weight of my suitcase. And when he feels the weight of stones he will think it is still full. Strategy, eh? Then afterwards I can come back and carry my other things out in my pockets.’

‘But what about the suitcase?’

‘Oh, that? We shall have to abandon it. The miserable thing only cost about twenty francs. Besides, one always abandons something in a retreat. Look at Napoleon at the Beresina! He abandoned his whole army.’

Boris was so pleased with this scheme (he called it UNE RUSE DE GUERRE) that he almost forgot being hungry. Its main weakness — that he would have nowhere to sleep after shooting the moon — he ignored.

At first the RUSE DE GUERRE worked well. I went home and fetched my overcoat (that made already nine kilometres, on an empty belly) and smuggled Boris’s coat out successfully. Then a hitch occurred. The receiver at the pawnshop, a nasty, sour-faced, interfering, little man — a typical French official — refused the coats on the ground that they were not wrapped up in anything. He said that they must be put either in a valise or a cardboard box. This spoiled everything, for we had no box of any kind, and with only twenty-five centimes between us we could not buy one.

I went back and told Boris the bad news. ‘MERDE!’ he said, ‘that makes it awkward. Well, no matter, there is always a way. We’ll put the overcoats in my suitcase.’

‘But how are we to get the suitcase past the PATRON? He’s

sitting almost in the door of the office. It's impossible!'

'How easily you despair, MON AMI! Where is that English obstinacy that I have read of? Courage! We'll manage it.'

Boris thought for a little while, and then produced another cunning plan. The essential difficulty was to hold the PATRON's attention for perhaps five seconds, while we could slip past with the suitcase. But, as it happened, the PATRON had just one weak spot — that he was interested in LE SPORT, and was ready to talk if you approached him on this subject. Boris read an article about bicycle races in an old copy of the PETIT PARISIEN, and then, when he had reconnoitred the stairs, went down and managed to set the PATRON talking. Meanwhile, I waited at the foot of the stairs, with the overcoats under one arm and the suitcase under the other. Boris was to give a cough when he thought the moment favourable. I waited trembling, for at any moment the PATRON'S wife might come out of the door opposite the office, and then the game was up. However, presently Boris coughed. I sneaked rapidly past the office and out into the street, rejoicing that my shoes did not creak. The plan might have failed if Boris had been thinner, for his big shoulders blocked the doorway of the office. His nerve was splendid, too; he went on laughing and talking in the most casual way, and so loud that he quite covered any noise I made. When I was well away he came and joined me round the corner, and we bolted.

And then, after all our trouble, the receiver at the pawnshop again refused the overcoats. He told me (one could see his French soul revelling in the pedantry of it) that I had not sufficient papers of identification; my CARTE D'IDENTITE was not enough, and I must show a passport or addressed envelopes. Boris had addressed envelopes by the score, but his CARTE D'IDENTITE was out of order (he never renewed it, so as to avoid the tax), so we could not pawn the overcoats in his name. All we could do was to trudge up to my room, get the necessary papers, and take the coats to the pawnshop in the Boulevard Port Royal.

I left Boris at my room and went down to the pawnshop. When I got there I found that it was shut and would not open till four in the afternoon. It was now about half-past one, and I had walked twelve kilometres and had no food for sixty hours. Fate seemed to be

playing a series of extraordinarily unamusing jokes.

Then the luck changed as though by a miracle. I was walking home through the Rue Broca when suddenly, glittering on the cobbles, I saw a five-sou piece. I pounced on it, hurried home, got our other five-sou piece and bought a pound of potatoes. There was only enough alcohol in the stove to parboil them, and we had no salt, but we wolfed them, skins and all. After that we felt like new men, and sat playing chess till the pawnshop opened.

At four o'clock I went back to the pawnshop. I was not hopeful, for if I had only got seventy francs before, what could I expect for two shabby overcoats in a cardboard suitcase? Boris had said twenty francs, but I thought it would be ten francs, or even five. Worse yet, I might be refused altogether, like poor NUMERO 83 on the previous occasion. I sat on the front bench, so as not to see people laughing when the clerk said five francs.

At last the clerk called my number: 'NUMERO 117!'

'Yes,' I said, standing up.

'Fifty francs?'

It was almost as great a shock as the seventy francs had been the time before. I believe now that the clerk had mixed my number up with someone else's, for one could not have sold the coats outright for fifty francs. I hurried home and walked into my room with my hands behind my back, saying nothing. Boris was playing with the chessboard. He looked up eagerly.

'What did you get?' he exclaimed. 'What, not twenty francs? Surely you got ten francs, anyway? NOM DE DIEU, five francs — that is a bit too thick. MON AMI, DON'T say it was five francs. If you say it was five francs I shall really begin to think of suicide.'

I threw the fifty-franc, note on to the table. Boris turned white as chalk, and then, springing up, seized my hand and gave it a grip that almost broke the bones. We ran out, bought bread and wine, a piece of meat and alcohol for the stove, and gorged.

After eating, Boris became more optimistic than I had ever known him. 'What did I tell you?' he said. 'The fortune of war! This morning with five sous, and now look at us. I have always said it, there is nothing easier to get than money. And that reminds me, I have a friend in the rue Fondary whom we might go and see. He has

cheated me of four thousand francs, the thief. He is the greatest thief alive when he is sober, but it is a curious thing, he is quite honest when he is drunk. I should think he would be drunk by six in the evening. Let's go and find him. Very likely he will pay up a hundred on account. MERDE! He might pay two hundred. ALLONS-Y!'

We went to the rue Fondary and found the man, and he was drunk, but we did not get our hundred francs. As soon as he and Boris met there was a terrible altercation on the pavement. The other man declared that he did not owe Boris a penny, but that on the contrary Boris owed HIM four thousand francs, and both of them kept appealing to me for my opinion. I never understood the rights of the matter. The two argued and argued, first in the street, then in a BISTRO, then in a PRIX FIXE restaurant where we went for dinner, then in another BISTRO. Finally, having called one another thieves for two hours, they went off together on a drinking bout that finished up the last sou of Boris's money.

Boris slept the night at the house of a cobbler, another Russian refugee, in the Commerce quarter. Meanwhile, I had eight francs left, and plenty of cigarettes, and was stuffed to the eyes with food and drink. It was a marvellous change for the better after two bad days.

CHAPTER 8

We had now twenty-eight francs in hand, and could start looking for work once more. Boris was still sleeping, on some mysterious terms, at the house of the cobbler, and he had managed to borrow another twenty francs from a Russian friend. He had friends, mostly ex-officers like himself, here and there all over Paris. Some were waiters or dishwashers, some drove taxis, a few lived on women, some had managed to bring money away from Russia and owned garages or dancing-halls. In general, the Russian refugees in Paris are hard-working people, and have put up with their bad luck far better than one can imagine Englishmen of the same class doing. There are exceptions, of course. Boris told me of an exiled Russian duke whom he had once met, who frequented expensive restaurants. The duke would find out if there was a Russian officer among the waiters, and, after he had dined, call him in a friendly way to his table.

'Ah,' the duke would say, 'so you are an old soldier, like myself? These are bad days, eh? Well, well, the Russian soldier fears nothing. And what was your regiment?'

'The so-and-so, sir,' the waiter would answer.

'A very gallant regiment! I inspected them in 1912. By the way, I have unfortunately left my notecase at home. A Russian officer will, I know, oblige me with three hundred francs.'

If the waiter had three hundred francs he would hand it over, and, of course, never see it again. The duke made quite a lot in this way. Probably the waiters did not mind being swindled. A duke is a duke, even in exile.

It was through one of these Russian refugees that Boris heard of something which seemed to promise money. Two days after we had pawned the overcoats, Boris said to me rather mysteriously:

'Tell me, MON AMI, have you any political opinions?'

'No,'I said.

'Neither have I. Of course, one is always a patriot; but still — Did not Moses say something about spoiling the Egyptians? As an Englishman you will have read the Bible. What I mean is, would you object to earning money from Communists?'

‘No, of course not.’

‘Well, it appears that there is a Russian secret society in Paris who might do something for us. They are Communists; in fact they are agents for the Bolsheviks. They act as a friendly society, get in touch with exiled Russians, and try to get them to turn Bolshevik. My friend has joined their society, and he thinks they would help us if we went to them.’

‘But what can they do for us? In any case they won’t help me, as I’m not a Russian.’

‘That is just the point. It seems that they are correspondents for a Moscow paper, and they want some articles on English politics. If we got to them at once they may commission you to write the articles.’

‘Me? But I don’t know anything about politics.’

‘MERDE! Neither do they. Who DOES know anything about politics? It’s easy. All you have to do is to copy it out of the English papers. Isn’t there a Paris DAILY MAIL? Copy it from that.’

‘But the DAILY MAIL is a Conservative paper. They loathe the Communists.’

‘Well, say the opposite of what the DAILY MAIL says, then you can’t be wrong. We mustn’t throw this chance away, MON AMI. It might mean hundreds of francs.’

I did not like the idea, for the Paris police are very hard on Communists, especially if they are foreigners, and I was already under suspicion. Some months before, a detective had seen me come out of the office of a Communist weekly paper, and I had had a great deal of trouble with the police. If they caught me going to this secret society, it might mean deportation. However, the chance seemed too good to be missed. That afternoon Boris’s friend, another waiter, came to take us to the rendezvous. I cannot remember the name of the street — it was a shabby street running south from the Seine bank, somewhere near the Chamber of Deputies. Boris’s friend insisted on great caution. We loitered casually down the street, marked the doorway we were to enter — it was a laundry — and then strolled back again, keeping an eye on all the windows and cafes. If the place were known as a haunt of Communists it was probably watched, and we intended to go home if we saw anyone at

all like a detective. I was frightened, but Boris enjoyed these conspiratorial proceedings, and quite forgot that he was about to trade with the slayers of his parents.

When we were certain that the coast was clear we dived quickly into the doorway. In the laundry was a Frenchwoman ironing clothes, who told us that 'the Russian gentlemen' lived up a staircase across the courtyard. We went up several flights of dark stairs and emerged on to a landing. A strong, surly-looking young man, with hair growing low on his head, was standing at the top of the stairs. As I came up he looked at me suspiciously, barred the way with his arm and said something in Russian.

'MOT D'ORDRE!' he said sharply when I did not answer.

I stopped, startled. I had not expected passwords.

'MOT D'ORDRE!' repeated the Russian.

Boris's friend, who was walking behind, now came forward and said something in Russian, either the password or an explanation. At this, the surly young man seemed satisfied, and led us into a small, shabby room with frosted windows. It was like a very poverty-stricken office, with propaganda posters in Russian lettering and a huge, crude picture of Lenin tacked on the walls. At the table sat an unshaven Russian in shirt sleeves, addressing newspaper wrappers from a pile in front of him. As I came in he spoke to me in French, with a bad accent.

'This is very careless!' he exclaimed fussily. 'Why have you come here without a parcel of washing?'

'Washing?'

'Everybody who comes here brings washing. It looks as though they were going to the laundry downstairs. Bring a good, large bundle next time. We don't want the police on our tracks.'

This was even more conspiratorial than I had expected. Boris sat down in the only vacant chair, and there was a great deal of talking in Russian. Only the unshaven man talked; the surly one leaned against the wall with his eyes on me, as though he still suspected me. It was queer, standing in the little secret room with its revolutionary posters, listening to a conversation of which I did not understand a word. The Russians talked quickly and eagerly, with smiles and shrugs of the shoulders. I wondered what it was all about. They would be calling

each other ‘little father’, I thought, and ‘little dove’, and ‘Ivan Alexandrovitch’, like the characters in Russian novels. And the talk would be of revolutions. The unshaven man would be saying firmly, ‘We never argue. Controversy is a bourgeois pastime. Deeds are our arguments.’ Then I gathered that it was not this exactly. Twenty francs was being demanded, for an entrance fee apparently, and Boris was promising to pay it (we had just seventeen francs in the world). Finally Boris produced our precious store of money and paid five francs on account.

At this the surly man looked less suspicious, and sat down on the edge of the table. The unshaven one began to question me in French, making notes on a slip of paper. Was I a Communist? he asked. By sympathy, I answered; I had never joined any organization. Did I understand the political situation in England? Oh, of course, of course. I mentioned the names of various Ministers, and made some contemptuous remarks about the Labour Party. And what about LE SPORT? Could I do articles on LE SPORT? (Football and Socialism have some mysterious connexion on the Continent.) Oh, of course, again. Both men nodded gravely. The unshaven one said:

‘EVIDEMMENT, you have a thorough knowledge of conditions in England. Could you undertake to write a series of articles for a Moscow weekly paper? We will give you the particulars.’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then, comrade, you will hear from us by the first post tomorrow. Or possibly the second post. Our rate of pay is a hundred and fifty francs an article. Remember to bring a parcel of washing next time you come. AU REVOIR, comrade.’

We went downstairs, looked carefully out of the laundry to see if there was anyone in the street, and slipped out. Boris was wild with joy. In a sort of sacrificial ecstasy he rushed into the nearest tobacconist’s and spent fifty centimes on a cigar. He came out thumping his stick on the pavement and beaming.

‘At last! At last! Now, MON AMI, out fortune really is made. You took them in finely. Did you hear him call you comrade? A hundred and fifty francs an article — NOM DE DIEU, what luck!’

Next morning when I heard the postman I rushed down to the BISTRO for my letter; to my disappointment, it had not come. I

stayed at home for the second post; still no letter. When three days had gone by and I had not heard from the secret society, we gave up hope, deciding that they must have found somebody else to do their articles.

Ten days later we made another visit to the office of the secret society, taking care to bring a parcel that looked like washing. And the secret society had vanished! The woman in the laundry knew nothing — she simply said that 'CES MESSIEURS' had left some days ago, after trouble about the rent. What fools we looked, standing there with our parcel! But it was a consolation that we had paid only five francs instead of twenty.

And that was the last we ever heard of the secret society. Who or what they really were, nobody knew. Personally I do not think they had anything to do with the Communist Party; I think they were simply swindlers, who preyed upon Russian refugees by extracting entrance fees to an imaginary society. It was quite safe, and no doubt they are still doing it in some other city. They were clever fellows, and played their part admirably. Their office looked exactly as a secret Communist office should look, and as for that touch about bringing a parcel of washing, it was genius.

CHAPTER 9

For three more days we continued traipsing about looking for work, coming home for diminishing meals of soup and bread in my bedroom. There were now two gleams of hope. In the first place, Boris had heard of a possible job at the Hotel X, near the Place de la Concorde, and in the second, the PATRON of the new restaurant in the rue du Commerce had at last come back. We went down in the afternoon and saw him. On the way Boris talked of the vast fortunes we should make if we got this job, and on the importance of making a good impression on the PATRON.

'Appearance — appearance is everything, MON AMI. Give me a new suit and I will borrow a thousand francs by dinner-time. What a pity I did not buy a collar when we had money. I turned my collar inside out this morning; but what is the use, one side is as dirty as the other. Do you think I look hungry, MON AMI?'

'You look pale.'

'Curse it, what can one do on bread and potatoes? It is fatal to look hungry. It makes people want to kick you. Wait.'

He stopped at a jeweller's window and smacked his cheeks sharply to bring the blood into them. Then, before the flush had faded, we hurried into the restaurant and introduced ourselves to the PATRON.

The PATRON was a short, fattish, very dignified man with wavy grey hair, dressed in a smart, double-breasted flannel suit and smelling of scent. Boris told me that he too was an ex-colonel of the Russian Army. His wife was there too, a horrid, fat Frenchwoman with a dead-white face and scarlet lips, reminding me of cold veal and tomatoes. The PATRON greeted Boris genially, and they talked together in Russian for a few minutes. I stood in the background, preparing to tell some big lies about my experience as a dish-washer.

Then the PATRON came over towards me. I shuffled uneasily, trying to look servile. Boris had rubbed it into me that a PLONGEUR is a slave's slave, and I expected the PATRON. to treat me like dirt. To my astonishment, he seized me warmly by the hand.

'So you are an Englishman!' he exclaimed. 'But how charming! I

need not ask, then, whether you are a golfer?'

'MAIS CERTAINEMENT,' I said, seeing that this was expected of me.

'All my life I have wanted to play golf. Will you, my dear MONSIEUR, be so kind as to show me a few of the principal strokes?'

Apparently this was the Russian way of doing business. The PATRON listened attentively while I explained the difference between a driver and an iron, and then suddenly informed me that it was all ENTENDU; Boris was to be MAITRE D'HOTEL when the restaurant opened, and I PLONGEUR, with a chance of rising to lavatory attendant if trade was good. When would the restaurant open? I asked. 'Exactly a fortnight from today,' the PATRON answered grandly (he had a manner of waving his hand and flicking off his cigarette ash at the same time, which looked very grand), 'exactly a fortnight from today, in time for lunch.' Then, with obvious pride, he showed us over the restaurant.

It was a smallish place, consisting of a bar, a dining-room, and a kitchen no bigger than the average bathroom. The PATRON was decorating it in a trumpery 'picturesque' style (he called it 'LE NORMAND'; it was a matter of sham beams stuck on the plaster, and the like) and proposed to call it the Auberge de Jehan Cottard, to give a medieval effect. He had a leaflet printed, full of lies about the historical associations of the quarter, and this leaflet actually claimed, among other things, that there had once been an inn on the site of the restaurant which was frequented by Charlemagne. The PATRON was very pleased with this touch. He was also having the bar decorated with indecent pictures by an artist from the Salon. Finally he gave us each an expensive cigarette, and after some more talk he went home.

I felt strongly that we should never get any good from this restaurant. The PATRON had looked to me like a cheat, and, what was worse, an incompetent cheat, and I had seen two unmistakable duns hanging about the back door. But Boris, seeing himself a MAITRE D'HOTEL once more, would not be discouraged.

'We've brought it off — only a fortnight to hold out. What is a fortnight? JE M'EN F —— . To think that in only three weeks I shall

have my mistress! Will she be dark or fair, I wonder? I don't mind, so long as she is not too thin.'

Two bad days followed. We had only sixty centimes left, and we spent it on half a pound of bread, with a piece of garlic to rub it with. The point of rubbing garlic on bread is that the taste lingers and gives one the illusion of having fed recently. We sat most of that day in the Jardin des Plantes. Boris had shots with stones at the tame pigeons, but always missed them, and after that we wrote dinner menus on the backs of envelopes. We were too hungry even to try and think of anything except food. I remember the dinner Boris finally selected for himself. It was: a dozen oysters, bortch soup (the red, sweet, beetroot soup with cream on top), crayfishes, a young chicken en CASSEROLE, beef with stewed plums, new potatoes, a salad, suet pudding and Roquefort cheese, with a litre of Burgundy and some old brandy. Boris had international tastes in food. Later on, when we were prosperous, I occasionally saw him eat meals almost as large without difficulty.

When our money came to an end I stopped looking for work, and was another day without food. I did not believe that the Auberge de Jehan Cottard was really going to open, and I could see no other prospect, but I was too lazy to do anything but lie in bed. Then the luck changed abruptly. At night, at about ten o'clock, I heard an eager shout from the street. I got up and went to the window. Boris was there, waving his stick and beaming. Before speaking he dragged a bent loaf from his pocket and threw it up to me.

'MON AMI, MON CHER AMI, we're saved! What do you think?'

'Surely you haven't got a job!'

'At the Hotel X, near the Place de la Concorde — five hundred francs a month, and food. I have been working there today. Name of Jesus Christ, how I have eaten!'

After ten or twelve hours' work, and with his game leg, his first thought had been to walk three kilometres to my hotel and tell me the good news! What was more, he told me to meet him in the Tuileries the next day during his afternoon interval, in case he should be able to steal some food for me. At the appointed time I met Boris on a public bench. He undid his waistcoat and produced a large, crushed,

newspaper packet; in it were some minced veal, a wedge of Gamembert cheese, bread and an eclair, all jumbled together.

'VOILA!' said Boris, 'that's all I could smuggle out for you. The doorkeeper is a cunning swine.'

It is disagreeable to eat out of a newspaper on a public seat, especially in the Tuileries, which are generally full of pretty girls, but I was too hungry to care. While I ate, Boris explained that he was working in the cafeterie of the hotel — that is, in English, the stillroom. It appeared that the cafeterie was the very lowest post in the hotel, and a dreadful come-down for a waiter, but it would do until the Auberge de Jehan Gottard opened. Meanwhile I was to meet Boris every day in the Tuileries, and he would smuggle out as much food as he dared. For three days we continued with this arrangement, and I lived entirely on the stolen food. Then all our troubles came to an end, for one of the PLONGEURS left the Hotel X, and on Boris's recommendation I was given a job there myself.

CHAPTER 10

The Hotel X was a vast, grandiose place with a classical facade, and at one side a little, dark doorway like a rat-hole, which was the service entrance. I arrived at a quarter to seven in the morning. A stream of men with greasy trousers were hurrying in and being checked by a doorkeeper who sat in a tiny office. I waited, and presently the CHEF DU PERSONNEL, a sort of assistant manager, arrived and began to question me. He was an Italian, with a round, pale face, haggard from overwork. He asked whether I was an experienced dishwasher, and I said that I was; he glanced at my hands and saw that I was lying, but on hearing that I was an Englishman he changed his tone and engaged me.

'We have been looking for someone to practise our English on,' he said. 'Our clients are all Americans, and the only English we know is — — ' He repeated something that little boys write on the walls in London. 'You may be useful. Come downstairs.'

He led me down a winding staircase into a narrow passage, deep underground, and so low that I had to stoop in places. It was stiflingly hot and very dark, with only dim, yellow bulbs several yards apart. There seemed to be miles of dark labyrinthine passages — actually, I suppose, a few hundred yards in all — that reminded one queerly of the lower decks of a liner; there were the same heat and cramped space and warm reek of food, and a humming, whirring noise (it came from the kitchen furnaces) just like the whir of engines. We passed doorways which let out sometimes a shouting of oaths, sometimes the red glare of a fire, once a shuddering draught from an ice chamber. As we went along, something struck me violently in the back. It was a hundred-pound block of ice, carried by a blue-aproned porter. After him came a boy with a great slab of veal on his shoulder, his cheek pressed into the damp, spongy flesh. They shoved me aside with a cry of 'SAUVE-TOI, IDIOT!' and rushed on. On the wall, under one of the lights, someone had written in a very neat hand: 'Sooner will you find a cloudless sky in winter, than a woman at the Hotel X who has her maidenhead.' It seemed a queer sort of place.

One of the passages branched off into a laundry, where an old, skull-faced woman gave me a blue apron and a pile of dishcloths. Then the CHEF DU PERSONNEL took me to a tiny underground den — a cellar below a cellar, as it were — where there were a sink and some gas-ovens. It was too low for me to stand quite upright, and the temperature was perhaps 110 degrees Fahrenheit. The CHEF DU PERSONNEL explained that my job was to fetch meals for the higher hotel employees, who fed in a small dining-room above, clean their room and wash their crockery. When he had gone, a waiter, another Italian, thrust a fierce, fuzzy head into the doorway and looked down at me.

'English, eh?' he said. 'Well, I'm in charge here. If you work well' — he made the motion of up-ending a bottle and sucked noisily. 'If you don't' — he gave the doorpost several vigorous kicks. 'To me, twisting your neck would be no more than spitting on the floor. And if there's any trouble, they'll believe me, not you. So be careful.'

After this I set to work rather hurriedly. Except for about an hour, I was at work from seven in the morning till a quarter past nine at night; first at washing crockery, then at scrubbing the tables and floors of the employees' dining-room, then at polishing glasses and knives, then at fetching meals, then at washing crockery again, then at fetching more meals and washing more crockery. It was easy work, and I got on well with it except when I went to the kitchen to fetch meals. The kitchen was like nothing I had ever seen or imagined — a stifling, low-ceilinged inferno of a cellar, red-lit from the fires, and deafening with oaths and the clanging of pots and pans. It was so hot that all the metal-work except the stoves had to be covered with cloth. In the middle were furnaces, where twelve cooks skipped to and fro, their faces dripping sweat in spite of their white caps. Round that were counters where a mob of waiters and PLONGEURS clamoured with trays. Scullions, naked to the waist, were stoking the fires and scouring huge copper saucepans with sand. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry and a rage. The head cook, a fine, scarlet man with big moustachios, stood in the middle booming continuously, 'CA MARCHE DEUX AUFS BROUILLES! CA MARCHE UN CHATEAUBRIAND AUX POMMES SAUTEES!'

except when he broke off to curse at a PLONGEUR. There were three counters, and the first time I went to the kitchen I took my tray unknowingly to the wrong one. The head cook walked up to me, twisted his moustaches, and looked me up and down. Then he beckoned to the breakfast cook and pointed at me.

'Do you see THAT? That is the type of PLONGEUR they send us nowadays. Where do you come from, idiot? From Charenton, I suppose?' (There is a large lunatic asylum at Charenton.)

'From England,' I said.

'I might have known it. Well, MAN CHER MONSIEUR L'ANGLAIS, may I inform you that you are the son of a whore? And now — the camp to the other counter, where you belong.'

I got this kind of reception every time I went to the kitchen, for I always made some mistake; I was expected to know the work, and was cursed accordingly. From curiosity I counted the number of times I was called MAQUEREAU during the day, and it was thirty-nine.

At half past four the Italian told me that I could stop working, but that it was not worth going out, as we began at five. I went to the lavatory for a smoke; smoking was strictly forbidden, and Boris had warned me that the lavatory was the only safe place. After that I worked again till a quarter past nine, when the waiter put his head into the doorway and told me to leave the rest of the crockery. To my astonishment, after calling me pig, mackerel, etc., all day, he had suddenly grown quite friendly. I realized that the curses I had met with were only a kind of probation.

'That'll do, MAN P'TIT,' said the waiter. 'TU N'ES PAS DEBROUILLARD, but you work all right. Come up and have your dinner. The hotel allows us two litres of wine each, and I've stolen another bottle. We'll have a fine booze.'

We had an excellent dinner from the leavings of the higher employees. The waiter, grown mellow, told me stories about his love-affairs, and about two men whom he had stabbed in Italy, and about how he had dodged Us military service. He was a good fellow when one got to know him; he reminded me of Benvenuto Cellini, somehow. I was tired and drenched with sweat, but I felt a new man after a day's solid food. The work did not seem difficult, and I felt

that this job would suit me. It was not certain, however, that it would continue, for I had been engaged as an 'extra' for the day only, at twenty-five francs. The sour-faced doorkeeper counted out the money, less fifty centimes which he said was for insurance (a lie, I discovered afterwards). Then he stepped out into the passage, made me take off my coat, and carefully prodded me all over, searching for stolen food. After this the CHEF DU PERSONNEL appeared and spoke to me. Like the waiter, he had grown more genial on seeing that I was willing to work.

'We will give you a permanent job if you like,' he said. 'The head waiter says he would enjoy calling an Englishman names. Will you sign on for a month?'

Here was a job at last, and I was ready to jump at it. Then I remembered the Russian restaurant, due to open in a fortnight. It seemed hardly fair to promise working a month, and then leave in the middle. I said that I had other work in prospect — could I be engaged for a fortnight? But at that the CHEF DU PERSONNEL shrugged his shoulders and said that the hotel only engaged men by the month. Evidently I had lost my chance of a job.

Boris, by arrangement, was waiting for me in the Arcade of the Rue de Rivoli. When I told him what had happened, he was furious. For the first time since I had known him he forgot his manners and called me a fool.

'Idiot! Species of idiot! What's the good of my finding you a job when you go and chuck it up the next moment? How could you be such a fool as to mention the other restaurant? You'd only to promise you would work for a month.'

'It seemed more honest to say I might have to leave,' I objected.

'Honest! Honest! Who ever heard of a PLONGEUR being honest? MON AMI' — suddenly he seized my lapel and spoke very earnestly— 'MON AMI, you have worked here all day. You see what hotel work is like. Do you think a PLONGEUR can afford a sense of honour?'

'No, perhaps not.'

'Well, then, go back quickly and tell the CHEF DU PERSONNEL you are quite ready to work for a month. Say you will throw the other job over. Then, when our restaurant opens, we have only to

walk out.'

'But what about my wages if I break my contract?

'Boris banged his stick on the pavement and cried out at such stupidity. 'Ask to be paid by the day, then you won't lose a sou. Do you suppose they would prosecute a PLONGEUR for breaking Us contract? A PLONGEUR is too low to be prosecuted.'

I hurried back, found the CHEF DU PERSONNEL, and told him that I would work for a month, whereat he signed me on. Ibis was my first lesson in PLONGEUR morality. Later I realized how foolish it had been to have any scruples, for the big hotels are quite merciless towards their employees. They engage or discharge men as the work demands, and they all sack ten per cent or more of their staff when the season is over. Nor have they any difficulty in replacing a man who leaves at short notice, for Paris is thronged by hotel employees out of work.

CHAPTER 11

As it turned out, I did not break my contract, for it was six weeks before the Auberge de Jehan Cottard even showed signs of opening. In the meantime I worked at the Hotel X, four days a week in the cafeterie, one day helping the waiter on the fourth floor, and one day replacing the woman who washed up for the dining-room. My day off, luckily, was Sunday, but sometimes another man was ill and I had to work that day as well. The hours were from seven in the morning till two in the afternoon, and from five in the evening till nine — eleven hours; but it was a fourteen-hour day when I washed up for the dining-room. By the ordinary standards of a Paris PLONGEUR, these are exceptionally short hours. The only hardship of life was the fearful heat and stuffiness of these labyrinthine cellars. Apart from this the hotel, which was large and well organized, was considered a comfortable one.

Our cafeterie was a murky cellar measuring twenty feet by seven by eight high, and so crowded with coffee-urns, breadcutters and the like that one could hardly move without banging against something. It was lighted by one dim electric bulb, and four or five gas-fires that sent out a fierce red breath. There was a thermometer there, and the temperature never fell below 110 degrees Fahrenheit — it neared 130 at some times of the day. At one end were five service lifts, and at the other an ice cupboard where we stored milk and butter. When you went into the ice cupboard you dropped a hundred degrees of temperature at a single step; it used to remind me of the hymn about Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand. Two men worked in the cafeterie besides Boris and myself. One was Mario, a huge, excitable Italian — he was like a city policeman with operatic gestures — and the other, a hairy, uncouth animal whom we called the Magyar; I think he was a Transylvanian, or something even more remote. Except the Magyar we were all big men, and at the rush hours we collided incessantly.

The work in the cafeterie was spasmodic. We were never idle, but the real work only came in bursts of two hours at a time — we called each burst 'UN COUP DE FEU'. The first COUP DE FEU came at

eight, when the guests upstairs began to wake up and demand breakfast. At eight a sudden banging and yelling would break out all through the basement; bells rang on all sides, blue-aproned men rushed through the passages, our service lifts came down with a simultaneous crash, and the waiters on all five floors began shouting Italian oaths down the shafts. I don't remember all our duties, but they included making tea, coffee and chocolate, fetching meals from the kitchen, wines from the cellar and fruit and so forth from the dining-room, slicing bread, making toast, rolling pats of butter, measuring jam, opening milk-cans, counting lumps of sugar, boiling eggs, cooking porridge, pounding ice, grinding coffee — all this for from a hundred to two hundred customers. The kitchen was thirty yards away, and the dining-room sixty or seventy yards. Everything we sent up in the service lifts had to be covered by a voucher, and the vouchers had to be carefully filed, and there was trouble if even a lump of sugar was lost. Besides this, we had to supply the staff with bread and coffee, and fetch the meals for the waiters upstairs. All in all, it was a complicated job.

I calculated that one had to walk and run about fifteen miles during the day, and yet the strain of the work was more mental than physical. Nothing could be easier, on the face of it, than this stupid scullion work, but it is astonishingly hard when one is in a hurry. One has to leap to and fro between a multitude of jobs — it is like sorting a pack of cards against the clock. You are, for example, making toast, when bang! down comes a service lift with an order for tea, rolls and three different kinds of jam, and simultaneously bang! down comes another demanding scrambled eggs, coffee and grapefruit; you run to the kitchen for the eggs and to the dining-room for the fruit, going like lightning so as to be back before your toast bums, and having to remember about the tea and coffee, besides half a dozen other orders that are still pending; and at the same time some waiter is following you and making trouble about a lost bottle of soda-water, and you are arguing with him. It needs more brains than one might think. Mario said, no doubt truly, that it took a year to make a reliable cafetier.

The time between eight and half past ten was a sort of delirium. Sometimes we were going as though we had only five minutes to

live; sometimes there were sudden lulls when the orders stopped and everything seemed quiet for a moment. Then we swept up the litter from the floor, threw down fresh sawdust, and swallowed gallipots of wine or coffee or water — anything, so long as it was wet. Very often we used to break off chunks of ice and suck them while we worked. The heat among the gas-fires was nauseating; we swallowed quarts of drink during the day, and after a few hours even our aprons were drenched with sweat. At times we were hopelessly behind with the work, and some of the customers would have gone without their breakfast, but Mario always pulled us through. He had worked fourteen years in the cafeterie, and he had the skill that never wastes a second between jobs. The Magyar was very stupid and I was inexperienced, and Boris was inclined to shirk, partly because of his lame leg, partly because he was ashamed of working in the cafeterie after being a waiter; but Mario was wonderful. The way he would stretch his great arms right across the cafeterie to fill a coffee-pot with one hand and boil an egg with the other, at the same time watching toast and shouting directions to the Magyar, and between whiles singing snatches from RIGOLETTO, was beyond all praise. The PATRON knew his value, and he was paid a thousand francs a month, instead of five hundred like the rest of us.

The breakfast pandemonium stopped at half past ten. Then we scrubbed the cafeterie tables, swept the floor and polished the brasswork, and, on good mornings, went one at a time to the lavatory for a smoke. This was our slack time — only relatively slack, however, for we had only ten minutes for lunch, and we never got through it uninterrupted. The customers' luncheon hour, between twelve and two, was another period of turmoil like the breakfast hour. Most of our work was fetching meals from the kitchen, which meant constant ENGUEULADES from the cooks. By this time the cooks had sweated in front of their furnaces for four or five hours, and their tempers were all warmed up.

At two we were suddenly free men. We threw off our aprons and put on our coats, hurried out of doors, and, when we had money, dived into the nearest BISTRO. It was strange, coming up into the street from those firelit cellars. The air seemed blindingly clear and cold, like arctic summer; and how sweet the petrol did smell, after

the stenches of sweat and food! Sometimes we met some of our cooks and waiters in the BISTROS, and they were friendly and stood us drinks. Indoors we were their slaves, but it is an etiquette in hotel life that between hours everyone is equal, and the ENGUEULADES do not count.

At a quarter to five we went back to the hotel. Till half-past six there were no orders, and we used this time to polish silver, clean out the coffee-urns, and do other odd jobs. Then the grand turmoil of the day started — the dinner hour. I wish I could be Zola for a little while, just to describe that dinner hour. The essence of the situation was that a hundred or two hundred people were demanding individually different meals of five or six courses, and that fifty or sixty people had to cook and serve them and clean up the mess afterwards; anyone with experience of catering will know what that means. And at this time when the work was doubled, the whole staff was tired out, and a number of them were drunk. I could write pages about the scene without giving a true idea of it. The chargings to and fro in the narrow passages, the collisions, the yells, the struggling with crates and trays and blocks of ice, the heat, the darkness, the furious festering quarrels which there was no time to fight out — they pass description. Anyone coming into the basement for the first time would have thought himself in a den of maniacs. It was only later, when I understood the working of a hotel, that I saw order in all this chaos.

At half past eight the work stopped very suddenly. We were not free till nine, but we used to throw ourselves full length on the floor, and lie there resting our legs, too lazy even to go to the ice cupboard for a drink. Sometimes the CHEF DU PERSONNEL would come in with bottles of beer, for the hotel stood us an extra beer when we had had a hard day. The food we were given was no more than eatable, but the PATRON was not mean about drink; he allowed us two litres of wine a day each, knowing that if a PLONGEUR is not given two litres he will steal three. We had the heeltaps of bottles as well, so that we often drank too much — a good thing, for one seemed to work faster when partially drunk.

Four days of the week passed like this; of the other two working days, one was better and one worse. After a week of this life I felt in

need of a holiday. It was Saturday night, so the people in our BISTRO were busy getting drunk, and with a free day ahead of me I was ready to join them. We all went to bed, drunk, at two in the morning, meaning to sleep till noon. At half past five I was suddenly awakened. A night-watchman, sent from the hotel, was standing at my bedside. He stripped the clothes back and shook me roughly.

'Get up!' he said. 'TU T'ES BIEN SAOULE LA GNEULE, EH? Well, never mind that, the hotel's a man short. You've got to work today.'

'Why should I work?' I protested. 'This is my day off.'

'Day off, nothing! The work's got to be done. Get up!'

I got up and went out, feeling as though my back were broken and my skull filled with hot cinders. I did not think that I could possibly do a day's work. And yet, after only an hour in the basement, I found that I was perfectly well. It seemed that in the heat of those cellars, as in a turkish bath, one could sweat out almost any quantity of drink. PLONGEURS know this, and count on it. The power of swallowing quarts of wine, and then sweating it out before it can do much damage, is one of the compensations of their life.

CHAPTER 12

By far my best time at the hotel was when I went to help the waiter on the fourth floor. We worked in a small pantry which communicated with the cafeterie by service lifts. It was delightfully cool after the cellars, and the work was chiefly polishing silver and glasses, which is a humane job. Valenti, the waiter, was a decent sort, and treated me almost as an equal when we were alone, though he had to speak roughly when there was anyone else present, for it does not do for a waiter to be friendly with PLONGEURS. He used sometimes to tip me five francs when he had had a good day. He was a comely youth, aged twenty-four but looking eighteen, and, like most waiters, he carried himself well and knew how to wear his clothes. With his black tail-coat and white tie, fresh face and sleek brown hair, he looked just like an Eton boy; yet he had earned his living since he was twelve, and worked his way up literally from the gutter. Crossing the Italian frontier without a passport, and selling chestnuts from a barrow on the northern boulevards, and being given fifty days' imprisonment in London for working without a permit, and being made love to by a rich old woman in a hotel, who gave him a diamond ring and afterwards accused him of stealing it, were among his experiences. I used to enjoy talking to him, at slack times when we sat smoking down the lift shaft.

My bad day was when I washed up for the dining-room. I had not to wash the plates, which were done in the kitchen, but only the other crockery, silver, knives and glasses; yet, even so, it meant thirteen hours' work, and I used between thirty and forty dishcloths during the day. The antiquated methods used in France double the work of washing up. Plate-racks are unheard-of, and there are no soap-flakes, only the treacly soft soap, which refuses to lather in the hard, Paris water. I worked in a dirty, crowded little den, a pantry and scullery combined, which gave straight on the dining-room. Besides washing up, I had to fetch the waiters' food and serve them at table; most of them were intolerably insolent, and I had to use my fists more than once to get common civility. The person who normally washed up was a woman, and they made her life a misery.

It was amusing to look round the filthy little scullery and think that only a double door was between us and the dining-room. There sat the customers in all their splendour — spotless table-cloths, bowls of flowers, mirrors and gilt cornices and painted cherubim; and here, just a few feet away, we in our disgusting filth. For it really was disgusting filth. There was no time to sweep the floor till evening, and we slithered about in a compound of soapy water, lettuce-leaves, torn paper and trampled food. A dozen waiters with their coats off, showing their sweaty armpits, sat at the table mixing salads and sticking their thumbs into the cream pots. The room had a dirty, mixed smell of food and sweat. Everywhere in the cupboards, behind the piles of crockery, were squalid stores of food that the waiters had stolen. There were only two sinks, and no washing basin, and it was nothing unusual for a waiter to wash his face in the water in which clean crockery was rinsing. But the customers saw nothing of this. There were a coco-nut mat and a mirror outside the dining-room door, and the waiters used to preen themselves up and go in looking the picture of cleanliness.

It is an instructive sight to see a waiter going into a hotel dining-room. As he passes the door a sudden change comes over him. The set of his shoulders alters; all the dirt and hurry and irritation have dropped off in an instant. He glides over the carpet, with a solemn priest-like air. I remember our assistant MAITRE D'HOTEL, a fiery Italian, pausing at the dining-room door to address an apprentice who had broken a bottle of wine. Shaking his fist above his head he yelled (luckily the door was more or less soundproof):

'TU ME FAIS — Do you call yourself a waiter, you young bastard? You a waiter! You're not fit to scrub floors in the brothel your mother came from. MAQUEREAU!'

Words failing him, he turned to the door; and as he opened it he delivered a final insult in the same manner as Squire Western in TOM JONES.

Then he entered the dining-room and sailed across it dish in hand, graceful as a swan. Ten seconds later he was bowing reverently to a customer. And you could not help thinking, as you saw him bow and smile, with that benign smile of the trained waiter, that the customer was put to shame by having such an aristocrat to serve him.

This washing up was a thoroughly odious job — not hard, but boring and silly beyond words. It is dreadful to think that some people spend their whole decades at such occupations. The woman whom I replaced was quite sixty years old, and she stood at the sink thirteen hours a day, six days a week, the year round; she was, in addition, horribly bullied by the waiters. She gave out that she had once been an actress — actually, I imagine, a prostitute; most prostitutes end as charwomen. It was strange to see that in spite of her age and her life she still wore a bright blonde wig, and darkened her eyes and painted her face like a girl of twenty. So apparently even a seventy-eight-hour week can leave one with some vitality.

CHAPTER 13

On my third day at the hotel the CHEF DU PERSONNEL, who had generally spoken to me in quite a pleasant tone, called me up and said sharply:

'Here, you, shave that moustache off at once! NOM DE DIEU, who ever heard of a PLONGEUR with a moustache?'

I began to protest, but he cut me short. 'A PLONGEUR with a moustache — nonsense! Take care I don't see you with it tomorrow.'

On the way home I asked Boris what this meant. He shrugged his shoulders. 'You must do what he says, MON AMI. No one in the hotel wears a moustache, except the cooks. I should have thought you would have noticed it. Reason? There is no reason. It is the custom.'

I saw that it was an etiquette, like not wearing a white tie with a dinner-jacket, and shaved off my moustache. Afterwards I found out the explanation of the custom, which is this: waiters in good hotels do not wear moustaches, and to show their superiority they decree that PLONGEURS shall not wear them either; and the cooks wear their moustaches to show their contempt for the waiters.

This gives some idea of the elaborate caste system existing in a hotel. Our staff, amounting to about a hundred and ten, had their prestige graded as accurately as that of soldiers, and a cook or waiter was as much above a PLONGEUR as a captain above a private. Highest of all came the manager, who could sack anybody, even the cooks. We never saw the PATRON, and all we knew of him was that his meals had to be prepared more carefully than that of the customers; all the discipline of the hotel depended on the manager. He was a conscientious man, and always on the lookout for slackness, but we were too clever for him. A system of service bells ran through the hotel, and the whole staff used these for signalling to one another. A long ring and a short ring, followed by two more long rings, meant that the manager was coming, and when we heard it we took care to look busy.

Below the manager came the MAITRE D'HOTEL. He did not serve at table, unless to a lord or someone of that kind, but directed

the other waiters and helped with the catering. His tips, and his bonus from the champagne companies (it was two francs for each cork he returned to them), came to two hundred francs a day. He was in a position quite apart from the rest of the staff, and took his meals in a private room, with silver on the table and two apprentices in clean white jackets to serve him. A little below the head waiter came the head cook, drawing about five thousand francs a month; he dined in the kitchen, but at a separate table, and one of the apprentice cooks waited on him. Then came the CHEF DU PERSONNEL; he drew only fifteen hundred francs a month, but he wore a black coat and did no manual work, and he could sack PLONGEURS and fine waiters. Then came the other cooks, drawing anything between three thousand and seven hundred and fifty ^ francs a month; then the waiters, making about seventy francs a day in tips, besides a small retaining fee; then the laundresses and sewing women; then the apprentice waiters, who received no tips, but were paid seven hundred and fifty francs a month; then the PLONGEURS, also at seven hundred and fifty francs; then the chambermaids, at five or six hundred francs a month; and lastly the cafetiers, at five hundred a month. We of the cafeterie were the very dregs of the hotel, despised and TUTOIED by everyone.

There were various others — the office employees, called generally couriers, the storekeeper, the cellarman, some porters and pages, the ice man, the bakers, the night-watchman, the doorkeeper. Different jobs were done by different races. The office employees and the cooks and sewing-women were French, the waiters Italians and Germans (there is hardly such a thing as a French waiter in Paris), the PLONGEURS of every race in Europe, beside Arabs and Negroes. French was the lingua franca, even the Italians speaking it to one another.

All the departments had their special perquisites. In all Paris hotels it is the custom to sell the broken bread to bakers for eight sous a pound, and the kitchen scraps to pigkeepers for a trifle, and to divide the proceeds of this among the PLONGEURS. There was much pilfering, too. The waiters all stole food — in fact, I seldom saw a waiter trouble to eat the rations provided for him by the hotel — and the cooks did it on a larger scale in the kitchen, and we in the

cafeterie swilled illicit tea and coffee. The cellarman stole brandy. By a rule of the hotel the waiters were not allowed to keep stores of spirits, but had to go to the cellarman for each drink as it was ordered. As the cellarman poured out the drinks he would set aside perhaps a teaspoonful from each glass, and he amassed quantities in this way. He would sell you the stolen brandy for five sous a swig if he thought he could trust you.

There were thieves among the staff, and if you left money in your coat pockets it was generally taken. The doorkeeper, who paid our wages and searched us for stolen food, was the greatest thief in the hotel. Out of my five hundred francs a month, this man actually managed to cheat me of a hundred and fourteen francs in six weeks. I had asked to be paid daily, so the doorkeeper paid me sixteen francs each evening, and, by not paying for Sundays (for which of course payment was due), pocketed sixty-four francs. Also, I sometimes worked on a Sunday, for which, though I did not know it, I was entitled to an extra twenty-five francs. The doorkeeper never paid me this either, and so made away with another seventy-five francs. I only realized during my last week that I was being cheated, and, as I could prove nothing, only twenty-five francs were refunded. The doorkeeper played similar tricks on any employee who was fool enough to be taken in. He called himself a Greek, but in reality he was an Armenian. After knowing him I saw the force of the proverb 'Trust a snake before a Jew and a Jew before a Greek, but don't trust an Armenian.'

There were queer characters among the waiters. One was a gentleman — a youth who had been educated at a university, and had had a well-paid job in a business office. He had caught a venereal disease, lost his job, drifted, and now considered himself lucky to be a waiter. Many of the waiters had slipped into France without passports, and one or two of them were spies — it is a common profession for a spy to adopt. One day there was a fearful row in the waiters' dining-room between Morandi, a dangerous-looking man with eyes set too far apart, and another Italian. It appeared that Morandi had taken the other man's mistress. The other man, a weakling and obviously frightened of Morandi, was threatening vaguely.

Morandi jeered at him. ‘Well, what are you going to do about it? I’ve slept with your girl, slept with her three times. It was fine. What can you do, eh?’

‘I can denounce you to the secret police. You are an Italian spy.’

Morandi did not deny it. He simply produced a razor from his tail pocket and made two swift strokes in the air, as though slashing a man’s cheeks open. Whereat the other waiter took it back.

The queerest type I ever saw in the hotel was an ‘extra’. He had been engaged at twenty-five francs for the day to replace the Magyar, who was ill. He was a Serbian, a thick-set nimble fellow of about twenty-five, speaking six languages, including English. He seemed to know all about hotel work, and up till midday he worked like a slave. Then, as soon as it had struck twelve, he turned sulky, shirked Us work, stole wine, and finally crowned all by loafing about openly with a pipe in his mouth. Smoking, of course, was forbidden under severe penalties. The manager himself heard of it and came down to interview the Serbian, fuming with rage.

‘What the devil do you mean by smoking here?’ he cried.

‘What the devil do you mean by having a face like that?’ answered the Serbian, calmly.

I cannot convey the blasphemy of such a remark. The head cook, if a PLONGEUR had spoken to him like that, would have thrown a saucepan of hot soup in his face. The manager said instantly, ‘You’re sacked!’ and at two o’clock the Serbian was given his twenty-five francs and duly sacked. Before he went out Boris asked him in Russian what game he was playing. He said the Serbian answered:

‘Look here, MON VIEUX, they’ve got to pay me a day’s wages if I work up to midday, haven’t they? That’s the law. And where’s the sense of working after I get my wages? So I’ll tell you what I do. I go to a hotel and get a job as an extra, and up to midday I work hard. Then, the moment it’s struck twelve, I start raising such hell that they’ve no choice but to sack me. Neat, eh? Most days I’m sacked by half past twelve; today it was two o’clock; but I don’t care, I’ve saved four hours’ work. The only trouble is, one can’t do it at the same hotel twice.’

It appeared that he had played this game at half the hotels and restaurants in Paris. It is probably quite an easy game to play during

the summer, though the hotels protect themselves against it as well as they can by means of a black list.

CHAPTER 14

In a few days I had grasped the main principles on which the hotel was run. The thing that would astonish anyone coming for the first time into the service quarters of a hotel would be the fearful noise and disorder during the rush hours. It is something so different from the steady work in a shop or a factory that it looks at first sight like mere bad management. But it is really quite unavoidable, and for this reason. Hotel work is not particularly hard, but by its nature it comes in rushes and cannot be economized. You cannot, for instance, grill a steak two hours before it is wanted; you have to wait till the last moment, by which time a mass of other work has accumulated, and then do it all together, in frantic haste. The result is that at mealtimes everyone is doing two men's work, which is impossible without noise and quarrelling. Indeed the quarrels are a necessary part of the process, for the pace would never be kept up if everyone did not accuse everyone else of idling. It was for this reason that during the rush hours the whole staff raged and cursed like demons. At those times there was scarcely a verb in the hotel except FOUTRE. A girl in the bakery, aged sixteen, used oaths that would have defeated a cabman. (Did not Hamlet say 'cursing like a scullion'? No doubt Shakespeare had watched scullions at work.) But we are not losing our heads and wasting time; we were just stimulating one another for the effort of packing four hours' work into two hours.

What keeps a hotel going is the fact that the employees take a genuine pride in their work, beastly and silly though it is. If a man idles, the others soon find him out, and conspire against him to get him sacked. Cooks, waiters and PLONGEURS differ greatly in outlook, but they are all alike in being proud of their efficiency.

Undoubtedly the most workmanlike class, and the least servile, are the cooks. They do not earn quite so much as waiters, but their prestige is higher and their employment steadier. The cook does not look upon himself as a servant, but as a skilled workman; he is generally called 'UN OUVRIER' which a waiter never is. He knows his power — knows that he alone makes or mars a restaurant, and that if he is five minutes late everything is out of gear. He despises

the whole non-cooking staff, and makes it a point of honour to insult everyone below the head waiter. And he takes a genuine artistic pride in his work, which demands very great skill. It is not the cooking that is so difficult, but the doing everything to time. Between breakfast and luncheon the head cook at the Hotel X would receive orders for several hundred dishes, all to be served at different times; he cooked few of them himself, but he gave instructions about all of them and inspected them before they were sent up. His memory was wonderful. The vouchers were pinned on a board, but the head cook seldom looked at them; everything was stored in his mind, and exactly to the minute, as each dish fell due, he would call out, 'FAITES MARCHER UNE COTELETTE DE VEAU' (or whatever it was) unfailingly. He was an insufferable bully, but he was also an artist. It is for their punctuality, and not for any superiority in technique, that men cooks arc preferred to women.

The waiter's outlook is quite different. He too is proud in a way of his skill, but his skill is chiefly in being servile. His work gives him the mentality, not of a workman, but of a snob. He lives perpetually in sight of rich people, stands at their tables, listens to their conversation, sucks up to them with smiles and discreet little jokes. He has the pleasure of spending money by proxy. Moreover, there is always the chance that he may become rich himself, for, though most waiters die poor, they have long runs of luck occasionally. At some cafes on the Grand Boulevard there is so much money to be made that the waiters actually pay the PATRON for their employment. The result is that between constantly seeing money, and hoping to get it, the waiter comes to identify himself to some extent with his employers. He will take pains to serve a meal in style, because he feels that he is participating in the meal himself.

I remember Valenti telling me of some banquet at Nice at which he had once served, and of how it cost two hundred thousand francs and was talked of for months afterwards. 'It was splendid, MON P'TIT, MAIS MAGNIFIQUE! Jesus Christ! The champagne, the silver, the orchids — I have never seen anything like them, and I have seen some things. Ah, it was glorious!'

'But,' I said, 'you were only there to wait?'

'Oh, of course. But still, it was splendid.'

The moral is, never be sorry for a waiter. Sometimes when you sit in a restaurant, still stuffing yourself half an hour after closing time, you feel that the tired waiter at your side must surely be despising you. But he is not. He is not thinking as he looks at you, 'What an overfed lout'; he is thinking, 'One day, when I have saved enough money, I shall be able to imitate that man.' He is ministering to a kind of pleasure he thoroughly understands and admires. And that is why waiters are seldom Socialists, have no effective trade union, and will work twelve hours a day — they work fifteen hours, seven days a week, in many cafes. They are snobs, and they find the servile nature of their work rather congenial.

The PLONGEURS, again, have a different outlook. Theirs is a job which offers no prospects, is intensely exhausting, and at the same time has not a trace of skill or interest; the sort of job that would always be done by women if women were strong enough. All that is required of them is to be constantly on the run, and to put up with long hours and a stuffy atmosphere. They have no way of escaping from this life, for they cannot save a penny from their wages, and working from sixty to a hundred hours a week leaves them no time to train for anything else. The best they can hope for is to find a slightly softer job as night-watchman or lavatory attendant.

And yet the PLONGEURS, low as they are, also have a kind of pride. It is the pride of the drudge — the man who is equal to no matter what quantity of work. At that level, the mere power to go on working like an ox is about the only virtue attainable. DEBROUILLARD is what every PLONGEUR wants to be called. A DEBROUILLARD is a man who, even when he is told to do the impossible, will SE DEBROUILLER — get it done somehow. One of the kitchen PLONGEURS at the Hotel X, a German, was well known as a DEBROUILLARD. One night an English lord came to the hotel, and the waiters were in despair, for the lord had asked for peaches, and there were none in stock; it was late at night, and the shops would be shut. 'Leave it to me,' said the German. He went out, and in ten minutes he was back with four peaches. He had gone into a neighbouring restaurant and stolen them. That is what is meant by a DEBROUILLARD. The English lord paid for the peaches at twenty francs each.

Mario, who was in charge of the cafeterie, had the typical drudge mentality. All he thought of was getting through the 'BOULOT', and he defied you to give him too much of it. Fourteen years underground had left him with about as much natural laziness as a piston rod. 'FAUT ETRE DUR,' he used to say when anyone complained. You will often hear PLONGEURS boast, 'JE SUIS DUR' — as though they were soldiers, not male charwomen.

Thus everyone in the hotel had his sense of honour, and when the press of work came we were all ready for a grand concerted effort to get through it. The constant war between the different departments also made for efficiency, for everyone clung to his own privileges and tried to stop the others idling and pilfering.

This is the good side of hotel work. In a hotel a huge and complicated machine is kept running by an inadequate staff, because every man has a well-defined job and does it scrupulously. But there is a weak point, and it is this — that the job the staff are doing is not necessarily what the customer pays for. The customer pays, as he sees it, for good service; the employee is paid, as he sees it, for the BOULOT — meaning, as a rule, an imitation of good service. The result is that, though hotels are miracles of punctuality, they are worse than the worst private houses in the things that matter.

Take cleanliness, for example. The dirt in the Hotel X, as soon as one penetrated into the service quarters, was revolting. Our cafeterie had year-old filth in all the dark corners, and the bread-bin was infested with cockroaches. Once I suggested killing these beasts to Mario. 'Why kill the poor animals?' he said reproachfully. The others laughed when I wanted to wash my hands before touching the butter. Yet we were clean where we recognized cleanliness as part of the BOULOT. We scrubbed the tables and polished the brasswork regularly, because we had orders to do that; but we had no orders to be genuinely clean, and in any case we had no time for it. We were simply carrying out our duties; and as our first duty was punctuality, we saved time by being dirty.

In the kitchen the dirt was worse. It is not a figure of speech, it is a mere statement of fact to say that a French cook will spit in the soup — that is, if he is not going to drink it himself. He is an artist, but his art is not cleanliness. To a certain extent he is even dirty because he

is an artist, for food, to look smart, needs dirty treatment. When a steak, for instance, is brought up for the head cook's inspection, he does not handle it with a fork. He picks it up in his fingers and slaps it down, runs his thumb round the dish and licks it to taste the gravy, runs it round and licks again, then steps back and contemplates the piece of meat like an artist judging a picture, then presses it lovingly into place with his fat, pink fingers, every one of which he has licked a hundred times that morning. When he is satisfied, he takes a cloth and wipes his fingerprints from the dish, and hands it to the waiter. And the waiter, of course, dips HIS fingers into the gravy — his nasty, greasy fingers which he is for ever running through his brilliantined hair. Whenever one pays more than, say, ten francs for a dish of meat in Paris, one may be certain that it has been fingered in this manner. In very cheap restaurants it is different; there, the same trouble is not taken over the food, and it is just forked out of the pan and flung on to a plate, without handling. Roughly speaking, the more one pays for food, the more sweat and spittle one is obliged to eat with it.

Dirtiness is inherent in hotels and restaurants, because sound food is sacrificed to punctuality and smartness. The hotel employee is too busy getting food ready to remember that it is meant to be eaten. A meal is simply 'UNE COMMANDE' to him, just as a man dying of cancer is simply 'a case' to the doctor. A customer orders, for example, a piece of toast. Somebody, pressed with work in a cellar deep underground, has to prepare it. How can he stop and say to himself, 'This toast is to be eaten — I must make it eatable'? All he knows is that it must look right and must be ready in three minutes. Some large drops of sweat fall from his forehead on to the toast. Why should he worry? Presently the toast falls among the filthy sawdust on the floor. Why trouble to make a new piece? It is much quicker to wipe the sawdust off. On the way upstairs the toast falls again, butter side down. Another wipe is all it needs. And so with everything. The only food at the Hotel X which was ever prepared cleanly was the staff's, and the PATRON'S. The maxim, repeated by everyone, was: 'Look out for the PATRON, and as for the clients, S'EN F — PAS MAL!' Everywhere in the service quarters dirt festered — a secret vein of dirt, running through the great garish

hotel like the intestines through a man's body.

Apart from the dirt, the PATRON swindled the customers wholeheartedly. For the most part the materials of the food were very bad, though the cooks knew how to serve it up in style. The meat was at best ordinary, and as to the vegetables, no good housekeeper would have looked at them in the market. The cream, by a standing order, was diluted with milk. The tea and coffee were of inferior sorts, and the jam was synthetic stuff out of vast, unlabelled tins. All the cheaper wines, according to Boris, were corked VIN ORDINAIRE. There was a rule that employees must pay for anything they spoiled, and in consequence damaged things were seldom thrown away. Once the waiter on the third floor dropped a roast chicken down the shaft of our service lift, where it fell into a litter of broken bread, torn paper and so forth at the bottom. We simply wiped it with a cloth and sent it up again. Upstairs there were dirty tales of once-used sheets not being washed, but simply damped, ironed and put back on the beds. The PATRON was as mean to us as to the customers. Throughout the vast hotel there was not, for instance, such a thing as a brush and pan; one had to manage with a broom and a piece of cardboard. And the staff lavatory was worthy of Central Asia, and there was no place to wash one's hands, except the sinks used for washing crockery.

In spite of all this the Hotel X was one of the dozen most expensive hotels in Paris, and the customers paid startling prices. The ordinary charge for a night's lodging, not including breakfast, was two hundred francs. All wine and tobacco were sold at exactly double shop prices, though of course the PATRON bought at the wholesale price. If a customer had a title, or was reputed to be a millionaire, all his charges went up automatically. One morning on the fourth floor an American who was on diet wanted only salt and hot water for his breakfast. Valenti was furious. 'Jesus Christ!' he said, 'what about my ten per cent? Ten per cent of salt and water!' And he charged twenty-five francs for the breakfast. The customer paid without a murmur.

According to Boris, the same kind of thing went on in all Paris hotels, or at least in all the big, expensive ones. But I imagine that the customers at the Hotel X were especially easy to swindle, for

they were mostly Americans, with a sprinkling of English — no French — and seemed to know nothing whatever about good food. They would stuff themselves with disgusting American ‘cereals’, and eat marmalade at tea, and drink vermouth after dinner, and order a POULET A LA REINE at a hundred francs and then souse it in Worcester sauce. One customer, from Pittsburg, dined every night in his bedroom on grape-nuts, scrambled eggs and cocoa. Perhaps it hardly matters whether such o people are swindled or not.

CHAPTER 15

I heard queer tales in the hotel. There were tales of dope fiends, of old debauchees who frequented hotels in search of pretty page boys, of thefts and blackmail. Mario told me of a hotel in which he had been, where a chambermaid stole a priceless diamond ring from an American lady. For days the staff were searched as they left work, and two detectives searched the hotel from top to bottom, but the ring was never found. The chambermaid had a lover in the bakery, and he had baked the ring into a roll, where it lay unsuspected until the search was over.

Once Valenti, at a slack time, told me a story about himself.

'You know, MON P'TIT, this hotel life is all very well, but it's the devil when you're out of work. I expect you know what it is to go without eating, eh? FORCEMENT, otherwise you wouldn't be scrubbing dishes. Well, I'm not a poor devil of a PLONGEUR; I'm a waiter, and I went five days without eating, once. Five days without even a crust of bread — Jesus Christ!

'I tell you, those five days were the devil. The only good thing was, I had my rent paid in advance. I was living in a dirty, cheap little hotel in the Rue Sainte Eloise up in the Latin quarter. It was called the Hotel Suzanne May, after some famous prostitute of the time of the Empire. I was starving, and there was nothing I could do; I couldn't even go to the cafes where the hotel proprietors come to engage waiters, because I hadn't the price of a drink. All I could do was to lie in bed getting weaker and weaker, and watching the bugs running about the ceiling. I don't want to go through that again, I can tell you.

'In the afternoon of the fifth day I went half mad; at least, that's how it seems to me now. There was an old faded print of a woman's head hanging on the wall of my room, and I took to wondering who it could be; and after about an hour I realized that it must be Sainte Eloise, who was the PATRON saint of the quarter. I had never taken any notice of the thing before, but now, as I lay staring at it, a most extraordinary idea came into my head.

'"ECOUTE, MON CHER," I said to myself, "you'll be starving to

death if this goes on much longer. You've got to do something. Why not try a prayer to Sainte Eloise? Go down on your knees and ask her to send you some money. After all, it can't do any harm. Try it!"

'Mad, eh? Still, a man will do anything when he's hungry. Besides, as I said, it couldn't do any harm. I got out of bed and began praying. I said:

'"Dear Sainte Eloise, if you exist, please send me some money. I don't ask for much — just enough to buy some bread and a bottle of wine and get my strength back. Three or four francs would do. You don't know how grateful I'll be, Sainte Eloise, if you help me this once. And be sure, if you send me anything, the first thing I'll do will be to go and bum a candle for you, at your church down the street. Amen."

'I put in that about the candle, because I had heard that saints like having candles burnt in their honour. I meant to keep my promise, of course. But I am an atheist and I didn't really believe that anything would come of it.

'Well, I got into bed again, and five minutes later there came a bang at the door. It was a girl called Maria, a big fat peasant girl who lived at our hotel. She was a very stupid girl, but a good sort, and I didn't much care for her to see me in the state I was in.

'She cried out at the sight of me. "NOM DE DIEU!" she said, "what's the matter with you? What are you doing in bed at this time of day? QUELLE MINE QUE TU AS! You look more like a corpse than a man."

'Probably I did look a sight. I had been five days without food, most of the time in bed, and it was three days since I had had a wash or a shave. The room was a regular pigsty, too.

'"What's the matter?" said Maria again.

'"The matter!" I said; "Jesus Christ! I'm starving. I haven't eaten for five days. That's what's the matter."

'Maria was horrified. "Not eaten for five days?" she said. "But why? Haven't you any money, then?"

'"Money!" I said. "Do you suppose I should be starving if I had money? I've got just five sous in the world, and I've pawned everything. Look round the room and see if there's anything more I can sell or pawn. If you can find anything that will fetch fifty

centimes, you're cleverer than I am."

'Maria began looking round the room. She poked here and there among a lot of rubbish that was lying about, and then suddenly she got quite excited. Her great thick mouth fell open with astonishment.

'"You idiot!" she cried out. "Imbecile! What's THIS, then?"

'I saw that she had picked up an empty oil BIDON that had been lying in the comer. I had bought it weeks before, for an oil lamp I had before I sold my things.

"That?" I said. "That's an oil BIDON. What about it?"

'"Imbecile! Didn't you pay three francs fifty deposit on it?"

'Now, of course I had paid the three francs fifty. They always make you pay a deposit on the BIDON, and you get it back when the BIDON is returned. But I'd forgotten all about it.

'"Yes— " I began.

'"Idiot!" shouted Maria again. She got so excited that she began to dance about until I thought her sabots would go through the floor, "Idiot! T'ES FOU! T'ES FOU! What have you got to do but take it back to the shop and get your deposit back? Starving, with three francs fifty staring you in the face! Imbecile!"

'I can hardly believe now that in all those five days I had never once thought of taking the BIDON back to the shop. As good as three francs fifty in hard cash, and it had never occurred to me! I sat up in bed. "Quick!" I shouted to Maria, "you take it for me. Take it to the grocer's at the corner — run like the devil. And bring back food!"

'Maria didn't need to be told. She grabbed the BIDON and went clattering down the stairs like a herd of elephants and in three minutes she was back with two pounds of bread under one arm and a half-litre bottle of wine under the other. I didn't stop to thank her; I just seized the bread and sank my teeth in it. Have you noticed how bread tastes when you have been hungry for a long time? Cold, wet, doughy — like putty almost. But, Jesus Christ, how good it was! As for the wine, I sucked it all down in one draught, and it seemed to go straight into my veins and flow round my body like new blood. Ah, that made a difference!

'I wolfed the whole two pounds of bread without stopping to take breath. Maria stood with her hands on her hips, watching me eat.

“Well, you feel better, eh?” she said when I had finished.

‘“Better!” I said. “I feel perfect! I’m not the same man as I was five minutes ago. There’s only one thing in the world I need now — a cigarette.”

‘Maria put her hand in her apron pocket. “You can’t have it,” she said. “I’ve no money. This is all I had left out of your three francs fifty — seven sous. It’s no good; the cheapest cigarettes are twelve sous a packet.”

‘“Then I can have them!” I said. “Jesus Christ, what a piece of luck! I’ve got five sous — it’s just enough.”

‘Maria took the twelve sous and was starting out to the tobacconist’s. And then something I had forgotten all this time came into my head. There was that cursed Sainte Eloise! I had promised her a candle if she sent me money; and really, who could say that the prayer hadn’t come true? “Three or four francs,” I had said; and the next moment along came three francs fifty. There was no getting away from it. I should have to spend my twelve sous on a candle.

‘I called Maria back. “It’s no use,” I said; “there is Sainte Eloise — I have promised her a candle. The twelve sous will have to go on that. Silly, isn’t it? I can’t have my cigarettes after all.”

‘“Sainte Eloise?” said Maria. “What about Sainte Eloise?”

‘“I prayed to her for money and promised her a candle,” I said. “She answered the prayer — at any rate, the money turned up. I shall have to buy that candle. It’s a nuisance, but it seems to me I must keep my promise.”

‘“But what put Sainte Eloise into your head?” said Maria.

‘“It was her picture,” I said, and I explained the whole thing. “There she is, you see,” I said, and I pointed to the picture on the wall.

‘Maria looked at the picture, and then to my surprise she burst into shouts of laughter. She laughed more and more, stamping about the room and holding her fat sides as though they would burst. I thought she had gone mad. It was two minutes before she could speak.

‘“Idiot!” she cried at last. “T’ES FOU! T’ES FOU! Do you mean to tell me you really knelt down and prayed to that picture? Who told you it was Sainte Eloise?”

‘“But I made sure it was Sainte Eloise!” I said.

‘“Imbecile! It isn’t Sainte Eloise at all. Who do you think it is?”

‘“Who?” I said.

‘“It is Suzanne May, the woman this hotel is called after.”

‘I had been praying to Suzanne May, the famous prostitute of the Empire . . .

‘But, after all, I wasn’t sorry. Maria and I had a good laugh, and then we talked it over, and we made out that I didn’t owe Sainte Eloise anything. Clearly it wasn’t she who had answered the prayer, and there was no need to buy her a candle. So I had my packet of cigarettes after all.’

CHAPTER 16

Time went on and the Auberge de Jehan Cottard showed no signs of opening. Boris and I went down there one day during our afternoon interval and found that none of the alterations had been done, except the indecent pictures, and there were three duns instead of two. The PATRON greeted us with his usual blandness, and the next instant turned to me (his prospective dishwasher) and borrowed five francs. After that I felt certain that the restaurant would never get beyond talk. The PATRON, however, again named the opening for 'exactly a fortnight from today', and introduced us to the woman who was to do the cooking, a Baltic Russian five feet tall and a yard across the hips. She told us that she had been a singer before she came down to cooking, and that she was very artistic and adored English literature, especially LA CASE DE L'ONCLE TOM.

In a fortnight I had got so used to the routine of a PLONGEUR'S life that I could hardly imagine anything different. It was a life without much variation. At a quarter to six one woke with a sudden start, tumbled into grease-stiffened clothes, and hurried out with dirty face and protesting muscles. It was dawn, and the windows were dark except for the workmen's cafes. The sky was like a vast flat wall of cobalt, with roofs and spires of black paper pasted upon it. Drowsy men were sweeping the pavements with ten-foot besoms, and ragged families picking over the dustbins. Workmen, and girls with a piece of chocolate in one hand and a CROISSANT in the other, were pouring into the Metro stations. Trams, filled with more workmen, boomed gloomily past. One hastened down to the station, fought for a place — one does literally have to fight on the Paris Metro at six in the morning — and stood jammed in the swaying mass of passengers, nose to nose with some hideous French face, breathing sour wine and garlic. And then one descended into the labyrinth of the hotel basement, and forgot daylight till two o'clock, when the sun was hot and the town black with people and cars.

After my first week at the hotel I always spent the afternoon interval in sleeping, or, when I had money, in a BISTRO. Except for a few ambitious waiters who went to English classes, the whole staff

wasted their leisure in this way; one seemed too lazy after the morning's work to do anything better. Sometimes half a dozen PLONGEURS would make up a party and go to an abominable brothel in the Rue de Sieyes, where the charge was only five francs twenty-five centimes — tenpence half-penny. It was nicknamed 'LE PRIX FIXE', and they used to describe their experiences there as a great joke. It was a favourite rendezvous of hotel workers. The PLONGEURS' wages did not allow them to marry, and no doubt work in the basement does not encourage fastidious feelings.

For another four hours one was in the cellars, and then one emerged, sweating, into the cool street. It was lamplight — that strange purplish gleam of the Paris lamps — and beyond the river the Eiffel Tower flashed from top to bottom with zigzag skysigns, like enormous snakes of fire. Streams of cars glided silently to and fro, and women, exquisite-looking in the dim light, strolled up and down the arcade. Sometimes a woman would glance at Boris or me, and then, noticing our greasy clothes, look hastily away again. One fought another battle in the Metro and was home by ten. Generally from ten to midnight I went to a little BISTRO in our street, an underground place frequented by Arab navvies. It was a bad place for fights, and I sometimes saw bottles thrown, once with fearful effect, but as a rule the Arabs fought among themselves and let Christians alone. Raki, the Arab drink, was very cheap, and the BISTRO was open at all hours, for the Arabs — lucky men — had the power of working all day and drinking all night.

It was the typical life of a PLONGEUR, and it did not seem a bad life at the time. I had no sensation of poverty, for even after paying my rent and setting aside enough for tobacco and journeys and my food on Sundays, I still had four francs a day for drinks, and four francs was wealth. There was — it is hard to express it — a sort of heavy contentment, the contentment a well-fed beast might feel, in a life which had become so simple. For nothing could be simpler than the life of a PLONGEUR. He lives in a rhythm between work and sleep, without time to think, hardly conscious of the exterior world; his Paris has shrunk to the hotel, the Metro, a few BISTROS and his bed. If he goes afield, it is only a few streets away, on a trip with some servant-girl who sits on his knee swallowing oysters and beer.

On his free day he lies in bed till noon, puts on a clean shirt, throws dice for drinks, and after lunch goes back to bed again. Nothing is quite real to him but the BOULOT, drinks and sleep; and of these sleep is the most important.

One night, in the small hours, there was a murder just beneath my window. I was woken by a fearful uproar, and, going to the window, saw a man lying flat on the stones below; I could see the murderers, three of them, flitting away at the end of the street. Some of us went down and found that the man was quite dead, his skull cracked with a piece of lead piping. I remember the colour of his blood, curiously purple, like wine; it was still on the cobbles when I came home that evening, and they said the school-children had come from miles round to see it. But the thing that strikes me in looking back is that I was in bed and asleep within three minutes of the murder. So were most of the people in the street; we just made sure that the man was done for, and went straight back to bed. We were working people, and where was the sense of wasting sleep over a murder?

Work in the hotel taught me the true value of sleep, just as being hungry had taught me the true value of food. Sleep had ceased to be a mere physical necessity; it was something voluptuous, a debauch more than a relief. I had no more trouble with the bugs. Mario had told me of a sure remedy for them, namely pepper, strewed thick over the bedclothes. It made me sneeze, but the bugs all hated it, and emigrated to other rooms.

CHAPTER 17

With thirty francs a week to spend on drinks I could take part in the social life of the quarter. We had some jolly evenings, on Saturdays, in the little BISTRO at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux.

The brick-floored room, fifteen feet square, was packed with twenty people, and the air dim with smoke. The noise was deafening, for everyone was either talking at the top of his voice or singing. Sometimes it was just a confused din of voices; sometimes everyone would burst out together in the same song — the 'Marseillaise', or the 'Internationale', or 'Madelon', or 'Les Fraises et les Framboises'. Azaya, a great clumping peasant girl who worked fourteen hours a day in a glass factory, sang a song about, 'IL A PERDU SES PANTALONS, TOUT EN DANSANT LE CHARLESTON.' Her friend Marinette, a thin, dark Corsican girl of obstinate virtue, tied her knees together and danced the DANSE DU VENTRE. The old Rougiers wandered in and out, cadging drinks and trying to tell a long, involved story about someone who had once cheated them over a bedstead. R., cadaverous and silent, sat in his comer quietly boozing. Charlie, drunk, half danced, half staggered to and fro with a glass of sham absinthe balanced in one fat hand, pinching the women's breasts and declaiming poetry. People played darts and diced for drinks. Manuel, a Spaniard, dragged the girls to the bar and shook the dice-box against their bellies, for luck. Madame F. stood at the bar rapidly pouring CHOPINES of wine through the pewter funnel, with a wet dishcloth always handy, because every man in the room tried to make love to her. Two children, bastards of big Louis the bricklayer, sat in a comer sharing a glass of SIROP. Everyone was very happy, overwhelmingly certain that the world was a good place and we a notable set of people.

For an hour the noise scarcely slackened. Then about midnight there was a piercing shout of 'CITOYENS!' and the sound of a chair falling over. A blond, red-faced workman had risen to his feet and was banging a bottle on the table. Everyone stopped singing; the word went round, 'Sh! Furex is starting!' Furex was a strange creature, a Limousin stonemason who worked steadily all the week

and drank himself into a kind of paroxysm on Saturdays. He had lost his memory and could not remember anything before the war, and he would have gone to pieces through drink if Madame F. had not taken care of him. On Saturday evenings at about five o'clock she would say to someone, 'Catch Furex before he spends his wages,' and when he had been caught she would take away his money, leaving him enough for one good drink. One week he escaped, and, rolling blind drunk in the Place Monge, was run over by a car and badly hurt.

The queer thing about Furex was that, though he was a Communist when sober, he turned violently patriotic when drunk. He started the evening with good Communist principles, but after four or five litres he was a rampant Chauvinist, denouncing spies, challenging all foreigners to fight, and, if he was not prevented, throwing bottles. It was at this stage that he made his speech — for he made a patriotic speech every Saturday night. The speech was always the same, word for word. It ran:

'Citizens of the Republic, are there any Frenchmen here? If there are any Frenchmen here, I rise to remind them — to remind them in effect, of the glorious days of the war. When one looks back upon that time of comradeship and heroism — one looks back, in effect, upon that time of comradeship and heroism. When one remembers the heroes who are dead — one remembers, in effect, the heroes who are dead. Citizens of the Republic, I was wounded at Verdun— '

Here he partially undressed and showed the wound he had received at Verdun. There were shouts of applause. We thought nothing in the world could be funnier than this speech of Furex's. He was a well-known spectacle in the quarter; people used to come in from other BISTROS to watch him when Us fit started.

The word was passed round to bait Furex. With a wink to the others someone called for silence, and asked him to sing the 'Marseillaise'. He sang it well, in a fine bass voice, with patriotic gurgling noises deep down in his chest when he came to 'AUX ARRMES, CITOYENS! FORRMEZ VOS BATAILLONS!' Veritable tears rolled down his cheeks; he was too drunk to see that everyone was laughing at him. Then, before he had finished, two strong workmen seized him by either arm and held him down, while Azaya shouted, 'VIVE L'ALLEMAGNE!' just out of his reach.

Furex's face went purple at such infamy. Everyone in the BISTRO began shouting together, 'VIVE L'ALLEMAGNE! A BAS LA FRANCE!' while Furex struggled to get at them. But suddenly he spoiled the fun. His face turned pale and doleful, his limbs went limp, and before anyone could stop him he was sick on the table. Then Madame F. hoisted him like a sack and carried him up to bed. In the morning he reappeared quiet and civil, and bought a copy of L'HUMANITE.

The table was wiped with a cloth, Madame F. brought more litre bottles and loaves of bread, and we Settled down to serious drinking. There were more songs. An itinerant singer came in with his banjo and performed for five-sou pieces. An Arab and a girl from the BISTRO down the street did a dance, the man wielding a painted wooden phallus the size of a rolling-pin. There were gaps in the noise now. People had begun to talk about their love-affairs, and the war, and the barbel fishing in the Seine, and the best way to FAIRE LA REVOLUTION, and to tell stories. Charlie, grown sober again, captured the conversation and talked about his soul for five minutes. The doors and windows were opened to cool the room. The street was emptying, and in the distance one could hear the lonely milk train thundering down the Boulevard St Michel. The air blew cold on our foreheads, and the coarse African wine still tasted good: we were still happy, but meditatively, with the shouting and hilarious mood finished.

By one o'clock we were not happy any longer. We felt the joy of the evening wearing thin, and called hastily for more bottles, but Madame F. was watering the wine now, and it did not taste the same. Men grew quarrelsome. The girls were violently kissed and hands thrust into their bosoms and they made off lest worse should happen. Big Louis, the bricklayer, was drunk, and crawled about the floor barking and pretending to be a dog. The others grew tired of him and kicked at him as he went past. People seized each other by the arm and began long rambling confessions, and were angry when these were not listened to. The crowd thinned. Manuel and another man, both gamblers, went across to the Arab BISTRO, where card-playing went on till daylight. Charlie suddenly borrowed thirty francs from Madame F. and disappeared, probably to a brothel. Men began to

empty their glasses, call briefly, ‘‘SIEURS, DAMES!’ and go off to bed.

By half past one the last drop of pleasure had evaporated, leaving nothing but headaches. We perceived that we were not splendid inhabitants of a splendid world, but a crew of underpaid workmen grown squalidly and dismally drunk. We went on swallowing the wine, but it was only from habit, and the stuff seemed suddenly nauseating. One’s head had swollen up like a balloon, the floor rocked, one’s tongue and lips were stained purple. At last it was no use keeping it up any longer. Several men went out into the yard behind the BISTRO and were sick. We crawled up to bed, tumbled down half dressed, and stayed there ten hours.

Most of my Saturday nights went in this way. On the whole, the two hours when one was perfectly and wildly happy seemed worth the subsequent headache. For many men in the quarter, unmarried and with no future to think of, the weekly drinking-bout was the one thing that made life worth living.

CHAPTER 18

Charlie told us a good story one Saturday night in the BISTRO. Try and picture him — drunk, but sober enough to talk consecutively. He bangs on the zinc bar and yells for silence:

'Silence, MESSIEURS ET DAMES — silence, I implore you! Listen to this story, that I am about to tell you. A memorable story, an instructive story, one of the souvenirs of a refined and civilized life. Silence, MESSIEURS ET DAMES!

'It happened at a time when I was hard up. You know what that is like — how damnable, that a man of refinement should ever be in such a condition. My money had not come from home; I had pawned everything, and there was nothing open to me except to work, which is a thing I will not do. I was living with a girl at the time — Yvonne her name was — a great half-witted peasant girl like Azaya there, with yellow hair and fat legs. The two of us had eaten nothing in three days. MON DIEU, what sufferings! The girl used to walk up and down the room with her hands on her belly, howling like a dog that she was dying of starvation. It was terrible.

'But to a man of intelligence nothing is impossible. I propounded to myself the question, "What is the easiest way to get money without working?" And immediately the answer came: "To get money easily one must be a woman. Has not every woman something to sell?" And then, as I lay reflecting upon the things I should do if I were a woman, an idea came into my head. I remembered the Government maternity hospitals — you know the Government maternity hospitals? They are places where women who are ENCEINTE are given meals free and no questions are asked. It is done to encourage childbearing. Any woman can go there and demand a meal, and she is given it immediately.

'"MON DIEU!" I thought, "if only I were a woman! I would eat at one of those places every day. Who can tell whether a woman is ENCEINTE or not, without an examination?"

'I turned to Yvonne. "Stop that insufferable bawling." I said, "I have thought of a way to get food."

'"How?" she said.

‘“It is simple,” I said. “Go to the Government maternity hospital. Tell them you are ENCEINTE and ask for food. They will give you a good meal and ask no questions.”

‘Yvonne was appalled. “MAIS, MON DIEU,” she cried, “I am not ENCEINTE!”

‘“Who cares?” I said. “That is easily remedied. What do you need except a cushion — two cushions if necessary? It is an inspiration from heaven, MA CHERE. Don’t waste it.”

‘Well, in the end I persuaded her, and then we borrowed a cushion and I got her ready and took her to the maternity hospital. They received her with open arms. They gave her cabbage soup, a ragout of beef, a puree of potatoes, bread and cheese and beer, and all kinds of advice about her baby. Yvonne gorged till she almost burst her skin, and managed to slip some of the bread and cheese into her pocket for me. I took her there every day until I had money again. My intelligence had saved us.

‘Everything went well until a year later. I was with Yvonne again, and one day we were walking down the Boulevard Port Royal, near the barracks. Suddenly Yvonne’s mouth fell open, and she began turning red and white, and red again.

‘“MON DIEU!” she cried, “look at that who is coming! It is the nurse who was in charge at the maternity hospital. I am ruined!”

‘“Quick!” I said, “run!” But it was too late. The nurse had recognized Yvonne, and she came straight up to us, smiling. She was a big fat woman with a gold pince-nez and red cheeks like the cheeks of an apple. A motherly, interfering kind of woman.

‘“I hope you are well, MA PETITE?” she said kindly. “And your baby, is he well too? Was it a boy, as you were hoping?”

‘Yvonne had begun trembling so hard that I had to grip her arm. “No,” she said at last.

‘“Ah, then, EVIDEMMENT, it was a girl?”

‘Thereupon Yvonne, the idiot, lost her head completely. “No,” she actually said again!

‘The nurse was taken aback. “COMMENT!” she exclaimed, “neither a boy nor a girl! But how can that be?”

‘Figure to yourselves, MESSIEURS ET DAMES, it was a dangerous moment. Yvonne had turned the colour of a beetroot and

she looked ready to burst into tears; another second and she would have confessed everything. Heaven knows what might have happened. But as for me, I had kept my head; I stepped in and saved the situation.

‘“It was twins,” I said calmly.

‘“Twins!” exclaimed the nurse. And she was so pleased that she took Yvonne by the shoulders and embraced her on both cheeks, publicly.

‘Yes, twins . . . ‘

CHAPTER 19

One day, when we had been at the Hotel X five or six weeks, Boris disappeared without notice. In the evening I found him waiting for me in the Rue de Rivoli. He slapped me gaily on the shoulder.

'Free at last, MON AMI! You can give notice in the morning. The Auberge opens tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow?'

'Well, possibly we shall need a day or two to arrange things. But, at any rate, no more CAFETERIA! NOUS SOMMES LANCES, MON AMI! My tail coat is out of pawn already.'

His manner was so hearty that I felt sure there was something wrong, and I did not at all want to leave my safe and comfortable job at the hotel. However, I had promised Boris, so I gave notice, and the next morning at seven went down to the Auberge de Jehan Cottard. It was locked, and I went in search of Boris, who had once more bolted from his lodgings and taken a room in the rue de la Groix Nivert. I found him asleep, together with a girl whom he had picked up the night before, and who he told me was 'of a very sympathetic temperament.' As to the restaurant, he said that it was all arranged; there were only a few little things to be seen to before we opened.

At ten I managed to get Boris out of bed, and we unlocked the restaurant. At a glance I saw what the 'few little things' amounted to. It was briefly this: that the alterations had not been touched since our last visit. The stoves for the kitchen had not arrived, the water and electricity had not been laid on, and there was all manner of painting, polishing and carpentering to be done. Nothing short of a miracle could open the restaurant within ten days, and by the look of things it might collapse without even opening. It was obvious what had happened. The PATRON was short of money, and he had engaged the staff (there were four of us) in order to use us instead of workmen. He would be getting our services almost free, for waiters are paid no wages, and though he would have to pay me, he would not be feeding me till the restaurant opened. In effect, he had swindled us of several hundred francs by sending for us before the restaurant was open. We had thrown up a good job for nothing.

Boris, however, was full of hope. He had only one idea in his head, namely, that here at last was a chance of being a waiter and wearing a tail coat once more. For this he was quite willing to do ten days' work unpaid, with the chance of being left jobless in the end. 'Patience!' he kept saying. 'That will arrange itself. Wait till the restaurant opens, and we'll get it all back. Patience, MON AMI!'

We needed patience, for days passed and the restaurant did not even progress towards opening. We cleaned out the cellars, fixed the shelves, distempered the walls, polished the woodwork, whitewashed the ceiling, stained the floor; but the main work, the plumbing and gas-fitting and electricity, was still not done, because the PATRON could not pay the bills. Evidently he was almost penniless, for he refused the smallest charges, and he had a trick of swiftly disappearing when asked for money. His blend of shiftiness and aristocratic manners made him very hard to deal with. Melancholy duns came looking for him at all hours, and by instruction we always told them that he was at Fontainebleau, or Saint Cloud, or some other place that was safely distant. Meanwhile, I was getting hungrier and hungrier. I had left the hotel with thirty francs, and I had to go back immediately to a diet of dry bread. Boris had managed in the beginning to extract an advance of sixty francs from the PATRON, but he had spent half of it, in redeeming his waiter's clothes, and half on the girl of sympathetic temperament. He borrowed three francs a day from Jules, the second waiter, and spent it on bread. Some days we had not even money for tobacco.

Sometimes the cook came to see how things were getting on, and when she saw that the kitchen was still bare of pots and pans she usually wept. Jules, the second waiter, refused steadily to help with the work. He was a Magyar, a little dark, sharp-featured fellow in spectacles, and very talkative; he had been a medical student, but had abandoned his training for lack of money. He had a taste for talking while other people were working, and he told me all about himself and his ideas. It appeared that he was a Communist, and had various strange theories (he could prove to you by figures that it was wrong to work), and he was also, like most Magyars, passionately proud. Proud and lazy men do not make good waiters. It was Jules's dearest boast that once when a customer in a restaurant had insulted him, he

had poured a plate of hot soup down the customer's neck, and then walked straight out without even waiting to be sacked.

As each day went by Jules grew more and more enraged at the trick the PATRON had played on us. He had a spluttering, oratorical way of talking. He used to walk up and down shaking his fist, and trying to incite me not to work:

'Put that brush down, you fool! You and I belong to proud races; we don't work for nothing, like these damned Russian serfs. I tell you, to be cheated like this is torture to me. There have been times in my life, when someone has cheated me even of five sous, when I have vomited — yes, vomited with rage.

'Besides, MON VIEUX, don't forget that I'm a Communist. A BAS LA BOURGEOISIE! Did any man alive ever see me working when I could avoid it? No. And not only I don't wear myself out working, like you other fools, but I steal, just to show my independence. Once I was in a restaurant where the PATRON thought he could treat me like a dog. Well, in revenge I found out a way to steal milk from the milk-cans and seal them up again so that no one should know. I tell you I just swilled that milk down night and morning. Every day I drank four litres of milk, besides half a litre of cream. The PATRON was at his wits' end to know where the milk was going. It wasn't that I wanted milk, you understand, because I hate the stuff; it was principle, just principle.

'Well, after three days I began to get dreadful pains in my belly, and I went to the doctor. "What have you been eating?" he said. I said: "I drink four litres of milk a day, and half a litre of cream." "Four litres!" he said. "Then stop it at once. You'll burst if you go on." "What do I care?" I said. "With me principle is everything. I shall go on drinking that milk, even if I do burst."

'Well, the next day the PATRON caught me stealing milk. "You're sacked," he said; "you leave at the end of the week." "PARDON, MONSIEUR," I said, "I shall leave this morning." "No, you won't," he said, "I can't spare you till Saturday." "Very well, MON PATRON," I thought to myself, "we'll see who gets tired of it first." And then I set to work to smash the crockery. I broke nine plates the first day and thirteen the second; after that the PATRON was glad to see the last of me.

‘Ah, I’m not one of your Russian MOUJIKS . . . ‘

Ten days passed. It was a bad time. I was absolutely at the end of my money, and my rent was several days overdue. We loafed about the dismal empty restaurant, too hungry even to get on with the work that remained. Only Boris now believed that the restaurant would open. He had set his heart on being MAITRE D’HOTEL, and he invented a theory that the PATRON’S money was tied up in shares and he was waiting a favourable moment for selling. On the tenth day I had nothing to eat or smoke, and I told the PATRON that I could not continue working without an advance on my wages. As blandly as usual, the PATRON promised the advance, and then, according to his custom, vanished. I walked part of the way home, but I did not feel equal to a scene with Madame F. over the rent, so I passed the night on a bench on the boulevard. It was very uncomfortable — the arm of the seat cuts into your back — and much colder than I had expected. There was plenty of time, in the long boring hours between dawn and work, to think what a fool I had been to deliver myself into the hands of these Russians.

Then, in the morning, the luck changed. Evidently the PATRON had come to an understanding with his creditors, for he arrived with money in his pockets, set the alterations going, and gave me my advance. Boris and I bought macaroni and a piece of horse’s liver, and had our first hot meal in ten days.

The workmen were brought in and the alterations made, hastily and with incredible shoddiness. The tables, for instance, were to be covered with baize, but when the PATRON found that baize was expensive he bought instead disused army blankets, smelling incorrigibly of sweat. The table cloths (they were check, to go with the ‘Norman’ decorations) would cover them, of course. On the last night we were at work till two in the morning, getting things ready. The crockery did not arrive till eight, and, being new, had all to be washed. The cutlery did not arrive till the next morning, nor the linen either, so that we had to dry the crockery with a shirt of the PATRON’s and an old pillowslip belonging to the concierge. Boris and I did all the work. Jules was skulking, and the PATRON and his wife sat in the bar with a dun and some Russian friends, drinking success to the restaurant. The cook was in the kitchen with her head

on the table, crying, because she was expected to cook for fifty people, and there were not pots and pans enough for ten. About midnight there was a fearful interview with some duns, who came intending to seize eight copper saucepans which the PATRON had obtained on credit. They were bought off with half a bottle of brandy.

Jules and I missed the last Metro home and had to sleep on the floor of the restaurant. The first thing we saw in the morning were two large rats sitting on the kitchen table, eating from a ham that stood there. It seemed a bad omen, and I was surer than ever that the Auberge de Jehan Cottard would turn out a failure.

CHAPTER 20

The PATRON had engaged me as kitchen PLONGEUR; that is, my job was to wash up, keep the kitchen clean, prepare vegetables, make tea, coffee and sandwiches, do the simpler cooking, and run errands. The terms were, as usual, five hundred francs a month and food, but I had no free day and no fixed working hours. At the Hotel X I had seen catering at its best, with unlimited money and good organization. Now, at the Auberge, I learned how things are done in a thoroughly bad restaurant. It is worth describing, for there are hundreds of similar restaurants in Paris, and every visitor feeds in one of them occasionally.

I should add, by the way, that the Auberge was not the ordinary cheap eating-house frequented by students and workmen. We did not provide an adequate meal at less than twenty-five francs, and we were picturesque and artistic, which sent up our social standing. There were the indecent pictures in the bar, and the Norman decorations — sham beams on the walls, electric lights done up as candlesticks, 'peasant' pottery, even a mounting-block at the door — and the PATRON and the head waiter were Russian officers, and many of the customers tided Russian refugees. In short, we were decidedly chic.

Nevertheless, the conditions behind the kitchen door were suitable for a pigsty. For this is what our service arrangements were like.

The kitchen measured fifteen feet long by eight broad, and half this space was taken up by the stoves and tables. All the pots had to be kept on shelves out of reach, and there was only room for one dustbin. This dustbin used to be crammed full by midday, and the floor was normally an inch deep in a compost of trampled food.

For firing we had nothing but three gas-stoves, without ovens, and all joints had to be sent out to the bakery.

There was no larder. Our substitute for one was a half-roofed shed in the yard, with a tree growing in the middle of it. The meat, vegetables and so forth lay there on the bare earth, raided by rats and cats.

There was no hot water laid on. Water for washing up had to be

heated in pans, and, as there was no room for these on the stoves when meals were cooking, most of the plates had to be washed in cold water. This, with soft soap and the hard Paris water, meant scraping the grease off with bits of newspaper.

We were so short of saucepans that I had to wash each one as soon as it was done with, instead of leaving them till the evening. This alone wasted probably an hour a day.

Owing to some scamping of expense in the installation, the electric light usually fused at eight in the evening. The PATRON would only allow us three candles in the kitchen, and the cook said three were unlucky, so we had only two.

Our coffee-grinder was borrowed from a BISTRO near by, and our dustbin and brooms from the concierge. After the first week a quantity of linen did not come back from the wash, as the bill was not paid. We were in trouble with the inspector of labour, who had discovered that the staff included no Frenchmen; he had several private interviews with the PATRON, who, I believe, was obliged to bribe him. The electric company was still dunning us, and when the duns found that we would buy them off with APERITIFS, they came every morning. We were in debt at the grocery, and credit would have been stopped, only the grocer's wife (a moustachio'd woman of sixty) had taken a fancy to Jules, who was sent every morning to cajole her. Similarly I had to waste an hour every day haggling over vegetables in the rue du Commerce, to save a few centimes.

These are the results of starting a restaurant on insufficient capital. And in these conditions the cook and I were expected to serve thirty or forty meals a day, and would later on be serving a hundred. From the first day it was too much for us. The cook's working hours were from eight in the morning till midnight, and mine from seven in the morning till half past twelve the next morning — seventeen and a half hours, almost without a break. We never had time to sit down till five in the afternoon, and even then there was no seat except the top of the dustbin. Boris, who lived near by and had not to catch the last Metro home, worked from eight in the morning till two the next morning — eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. Such hours, though not usual, are nothing extraordinary in Paris.

Life settled at once into a routine that made the Hotel X seem like

a holiday. Every morning at six I drove myself out of bed, did not shave, sometimes washed, hurried up to the Place d'ltalie and fought for a place on the Metro. By seven I was in the desolation of the cold, filthy kitchen, with the potato skins and bones and fishtails littered on the floor, and a pile of plates, stuck together in their grease, waiting from overnight. I could not start on the plates yet, because the water was cold, and I had to fetch milk and make coffee, for the others arrived at eight and expected to find coffee ready. Also, there were always several copper saucepans to clean. Those copper saucepans are the bane of a PLONGEUR'S life. They have to be scoured with sand and bunches of chain, ten minutes to each one, and then polished on the outside with Brasso. Fortunately, the art of making them has been lost and they are gradually vanishing from French kitchens, though one can still buy them second-hand.

When I had begun on the plates the cook would take me away from the plates to begin skinning onions, and when I had begun on the onions the PATRON would arrive and send me out to buy cabbages. When I came back with the cabbages the PATRON'S wife would tell me to go to some shop half a mile away and buy a pot of rouge; by the time I came back there would be more vegetables waiting, and the plates were still not done. In this way our incompetence piled one job on another throughout the day, everything in arrears.

Till ten, things went comparatively easily, though we were working fast, and no one lost his temper. The cook would find time to talk about her artistic nature, and say did I not think Tolstoy was EPATANT, and sing in a fine soprano voice as she minced beef on the board. But at ten the waiters began clamouring for their lunch, which they had early, and at eleven the first customers would be arriving. Suddenly everything became hurry and bad temper. There was not the same furious rushing and yelling as at the Hotel X, but an atmosphere of muddle, petty spite and exasperation. Discomfort was at the bottom of it. It was unbearably cramped in the kitchen, and dishes had to be put on the floor, and one had to be thinking constantly about not stepping on them. The cook's vast buttocks banged against me as she moved to and fro. A ceaseless, nagging chorus of orders streamed from her:

‘Unspeakable idiot! How many times have I told you not to bleed the beetroots? Quick, let me get to the sink! Put those knives away; get on with the potatoes. What have you done with my strainer? Oh, leave those potatoes alone. Didn’t I tell you to skim the BOUILLON? Take that can of water off the stove. Never mind the washing up, chop this celery. No, not like that, you fool, like this. There! Look at you letting those peas boil over! Now get to work and scale these herrings. Look, do you call this plate clean? Wipe it on your apron. Put that salad on the floor. That’s right, put it where I’m bound to step in it! Look out, that pot’s boiling over! Get me down that saucepan. No, the other one. Put this on the grill. Throw those potatoes away. Don’t waste time, throw them on the floor. Tread them in. Now throw down some sawdust; this Hoor’s like a skating-rink. Look, you fool, that steak’s burning! MON DIEU, why did they send me an idiot for a PLONGEUR? Who are you talking to? Do you realize that my aunt was a Russian countess?’ etc. etc. etc.

This went on till three o’clock without much variation, except that about eleven the cook usually had a CRISE DE NERFS and a flood of tears. From three to five was a fairly slack time for the waiters, but the cook was still busy, and I was working my fastest, for there was a pile of dirty plates waiting, and it was a race to get them done, or partly done, before dinner began. The washing up was doubled by the primitive conditions — a cramped draining-board, tepid water, sodden cloths, and a sink that got blocked once in an hour. By five the cook and I were feeling unsteady on our feet, not having eaten or sat down since seven. We used to collapse, she on the dustbin and I on the floor, drink a bottle of beer, and apologize for some of the things we had said in the morning. Tea was what kept us going. We took care to have a pot always stewing, and drank pints during the day.

At half-past five the hurry and quarrelling began again, and now worse than before, because everyone was tired out. The cook had a CRISE DE NERFS at six and another at nine; they came on so regularly that one could have told the time by them. She would flop down on the dustbin, begin weeping hysterically, and cry out that never, no, never had she thought to come to such a life as this; her nerves would not stand it; she had studied music at Vienna; she had a

bedridden husband to support, etc. etc. At another time one would have been sorry for her, but, tired as we all were, her whimpering voice merely infuriated us. Jules used to stand in the doorway and mimic her weeping. The PATRON'S wife nagged, and Boris and Jules quarrelled all day, because Jules shirked his work, and Boris, as head waiter, claimed the larger share of the tips. Only the second day after the restaurant opened, they came to blows in the kitchen over a two-franc tip, and the cook and I had to separate them. The only person who never forgot Us manners was the PATRON. He kept the same hours as the rest of us, but he had no work to do, for it was his wife who really managed things. His sole job, besides ordering the supplies, was to stand in the bar smoking cigarettes and looking gentlemanly, and he did that to perfection.

The cook and I generally found time to eat our dinner between ten and eleven o'clock. At midnight the cook would steal a packet of food for her husband, stow it under her clothes, and make off, whimpering that these hours would kill her and she would give notice in the morning. Jules also left at midnight, usually after a dispute with Boris, who had to look after the bar till two. Between twelve and half past I did what I could to finish the washing up. There was no time to attempt doing the work properly, and I used simply to rub the grease off the plates with table-napkins. As for the dirt on the floor, I let it lie, or swept the worst of it out of sight under the stoves.

At half past twelve I would put on my coat and hurry out. The PATRON, bland as ever, would stop me as I went down the alley-way past the bar. 'MAIS, MON CHER MONSIEUR, how tired you look! Please do me the favour of accepting this glass of brandy.'

He would hand me the glass of brandy as courteously as though I had been a Russian duke instead of a PLONGEUR. He treated all of us like this. It was our compensation for working seventeen hours a day.

As a rule the last Metro was almost empty — a great advantage, for one could sit down and sleep for a quarter of an hour. Generally I was in bed by half past one. Sometimes I missed the train and had to sleep on the floor of the restaurant, but it hardly mattered, for I could have slept on cobblestones at that time.

CHAPTER 21

This life went on for about a fortnight, with a slight increase of work as more customers came to the restaurant. I could have saved an hour a day by taking a room near the restaurant, but it seemed impossible to find time to change lodgings — or, for that matter, to get my hair cut, look at a newspaper, or even undress completely. After ten days I managed to find a free quarter of an hour, and wrote to my friend B. in London asking him if he could get me a job of some sort — anything, so long as it allowed more than five hours sleep. I was simply not equal to going on with a seventeen-hour day, though there are plenty of people who think nothing of it. When one is overworked, it is a good cure for self-pity to think of the thousands of people in Paris restaurants who work such hours, and will go on doing it, not for a few weeks, but for years. There was a girl in a BISTRO near my hotel who worked from seven in the morning till midnight for a whole year, only sitting down to her meals. I remember once asking her to come to a dance, and she laughed and said that she had not been farther than the street comer for several months. She was consumptive, and died about the time I left Paris.

After only a week we were all neurasthenic with fatigue, except Jules, who skulked persistently. The quarrels, intermittent at first, had now become continuous. For hours' one would keep up a drizzle of useless nagging, rising into storms of abuse every few minutes. 'Get me down that saucepan, idiot!' the cook would cry (she was not tall enough to reach the shelves where the saucepans were kept). 'Get it down yourself, you old whore,' I would answer. Such remarks seemed to be generated spontaneously from the air of the kitchen.

We quarrelled over things of inconceivable pettiness. The dustbin, for instance, was an unending source of quarrels — whether it should be put where I wanted it, which was in the cook's way, or where she wanted it, which was between me and the sink. Once she nagged and nagged until at last, in pure spite, I lifted the dustbin up and put it out in the middle of the floor, where she was bound to trip over it.

'Now, you cow,' I said, 'move it yourself.'

Poor old woman, it was too heavy for her to lift, and she sat down,

put her head on the table and burst out crying. And I jeered at her. This is the kind of effect that fatigue has upon one's manners.

After a few days the cook had ceased talking about Tolstoy and her artistic nature, and she and I were not on speaking terms, except for the purposes of work, and Boris and Jules were not on speaking terms, and neither of them was on speaking terms with the cook. Even Boris and I were barely on speaking terms. We had agreed beforehand that the ENGUEULADES of working hours did not count between times; but we had called each other things too bad to be forgotten — and besides, there were no between times. Jules grew lazier and lazier, and he stole food constantly — from a sense of duty, he said. He called the rest of us JAUNE — blackleg — when we would not join with him in stealing. He had a curious, malignant spirit. He told me, as a matter of pride, that he had sometimes wrung a dirty dishcloth into a customer's soup before taking it in, just to be revenged upon a member of the bourgeoisie.

The kitchen grew dirtier and the rats bolder, though we trapped a few of them. Looking round that filthy room, with raw meat lying among refuse on the floor, and cold, clotted saucepans sprawling everywhere, and the sink blocked and coated with grease, I used to wonder whether there could be a restaurant in the world as bad as ours. But the other three all said that they had been in dirtier places. Jules took a positive pleasure in seeings things dirty. In the afternoon, when he had not much to do, he used to stand in the kitchen doorway jeering at us for working too hard:

'Fool! Why do you wash that plate? Wipe it on your trousers. Who cares about the customers? THEY don't know what's going on. What is restaurant work? You are carving a chicken and it falls on the floor. You apologize, you bow, you go out; and in five minutes you come back by another door — with the same chicken. That is restaurant work,' etc.

And, strange to say, in spite of all this filth and incompetence, the Auberge de Jehan Cottard was actually a success. For the first few days all our customers were Russians, friends of the PATRON, and these were followed by Americans and other foreigners — no Frenchmen. Then one night there was tremendous excitement, because our first Frenchman had arrived. For a moment our quarrels

were forgotten and we all united in the effort to serve a good dinner. Boris tiptoed into the kitchen, jerked his thumb over his shoulder and whispered conspiratorially:

'SH! ATTENTION, UN FRANCAIS!'

A moment later the PATRON's wife came and whispered:

'ATTENTION, UN FRANCAIS! See that he gets a double portion of all vegetables.'

While the Frenchman ate, the PATRON'S wife stood behind the grille of the kitchen door and watched the expression of his face. Next night the Frenchman came back with two other Frenchmen. This meant that we were earning a good name; the surest sign of a bad restaurant is to be frequented only by foreigners. Probably part of the reason for our success was that the PATRON, with the sole gleam of sense he had shown in fitting out the restaurant, had bought very sharp table-knives. Sharp knives, of course, are THE secret of a successful restaurant. I am glad that this happened, for it destroyed one of my illusions, namely, the idea that Frenchmen know good food when they see it. Or perhaps we WERE a fairly good restaurant by Paris standards; in which case the bad ones must be past imagining.

In a very few days after I had written to B he replied to say that there was a job he could get for me. It was to look after a congenital imbecile, which sounded a splendid rest cure after the Auberge de Jehan Cottard. I pictured myself loafing in the country lanes, knocking thistle-heads off with my stick, feeding on roast lamb and treacle tart, and sleeping ten hours a night in sheets smelling of lavender. B sent me a fiver to pay my passage and get my clothes out of the pawn, and as soon as the money arrived I gave one day's notice and left the restaurant. My leaving so suddenly embarrassed the PATRON, for as usual he was penniless, and he had to pay my wages thirty francs short. However he stood me a glass of Courvoisier '48 brandy, and I think he felt that this made up the difference. They engaged a Czech, a thoroughly competent PLONGEUR, in my place, and the poor old cook was sacked a few weeks later. Afterwards I heard that, with two first-rate people in the kitchen, the PLONGEUR'S work had been cut down to fifteen hours a day. Below that no one could have cut it, short of modernizing the

kitchen.

CHAPTER 22

For what they are worth I want to give my opinions about the life of a Paris PLONGEUR. When one comes to think of it, it is strange that thousands of people in a great modem city should spend their waking hours swabbing dishes in hot dens underground. The question I am raising is why this life goes on — what purpose it serves, and who wants it to continue, and why I am not taking the merely rebellious, FAINEANT attitude. I am trying to consider the social significance of a PLONGEUR'S life.

I think one should start by saying that a PLONGEUR is one of the slaves of the modem world. Not that there is any need to whine over him, for he is better off than many manual workers, but still, he is no freer than if he were bought and sold. His work is servile and without art; he is paid just enough to keep him alive; his only holiday is the sack. He is cut off from marriage, or, if he marries, his wife must work too. Except by a lucky chance, he has no escape from this life, save into prison. At this moment there are men with university degrees scrubbing dishes in Paris for ten or fifteen hours a day. One cannot say that it is mere idleness on their part, for an idle man cannot be a PLONGEUR; they have simply been trapped by a routine which makes thought impossible. If PLONGEURS thought at all, they would long ago have formed a union and gone on strike for better treatment. But they do not think, because they have no leisure for it; their life has made slaves of them.

The question is, why does this slavery continue? People have a way of taking it for granted that all work is done for a sound purpose. They see somebody else doing a disagreeable job, and think that they have solved things by saying that the job is necessary. Coal-mining, for example, is hard work, but it is necessary — we must have coal. Working in the sewers is unpleasant, but somebody must work in the sewers. And similarly with a PLONGEUR'S work. Some people must feed in restaurants, and so other people must swab dishes for eighty hours a week. It is the work of civilization, therefore unquestionable. This point is worth considering.

Is a PLONGEUR'S work really necessary to civilization? We

have a feeling that it must be 'honest' work, because it is hard and disagreeable, and we have made a sort of fetish of manual work. We see a man cutting down a tree, and we make sure that he is filling a social need, just because he uses his muscles; it does not occur to us that he may only be cutting down a beautiful tree to make room for a hideous statue. I believe it is the same with a PLONGEUR. He earns his bread in the sweat of his brow, but it does not follow that he is doing anything useful; he may be only supplying a luxury which, very often, is not a luxury.

As an example of what I mean by luxuries which are not luxuries, take an extreme case, such as one hardly sees in Europe. Take an Indian rickshaw puller, or a gharry pony. In any Far Eastern town there are rickshaw pullers by the hundred, black wretches weighing eight stone, clad in loin-cloths. Some of them are diseased; some of them are fifty years old. For miles on end they trot in the sun or rain, head down, dragging at the shafts, with the sweat dripping from their grey moustaches. When they go too slowly the passenger calls them BAHINCHUT. They earn thirty or forty rupees a month, and cough their lungs out after a few years. The gharry ponies are gaunt, vicious things that have been sold cheap as having a few years' work left in them. Their master looks on the whip as a substitute for food. Their work expresses itself in a sort of equation — whip plus food equals energy; generally it is about sixty per cent whip and forty per cent food. Sometimes their necks are encircled by one vast sore, so that they drag all day on raw flesh. It is still possible to make them work, however; it is just a question of thrashing them so hard that the pain behind outweighs the pain in front. After a few years even the whip loses its virtue, and the pony goes to the knacker. These are instances of unnecessary work, for there is no real need for gharries and rickshaws; they only exist because Orientals consider it vulgar to walk. They are luxuries, and, as anyone who has ridden in them knows, very poor luxuries. They afford a small amount of convenience, which cannot possibly balance the suffering of the men and animals.

Similarly with the PLONGEUR. He is a king compared with a rickshaw puller or a gharry pony, but his case is analogous. He is the slave of a hotel or a restaurant, and his slavery is more or less

useless. For, after all, where is the REAL need of big hotels and smart restaurants? They are supposed to provide luxury, but in reality they provide only a cheap, shoddy imitation of it. Nearly everyone hates hotels. Some restaurants are better than others, but it is impossible to get as good a meal in a restaurant as one can get, for the same expense, in a private house. No doubt hotels and restaurants must exist, but there is no need that they should enslave hundreds of people. What makes the work in them is not the essentials; it is the shams that are supposed to represent luxury. Smartness, as it is called, means, in effect, merely that the staff work more and the customers pay more; no one benefits except the proprietor, who will presently buy himself a striped villa at Deauville. Essentially, a 'smart' hotel is a place where a hundred people toil like devils in order that two hundred may pay through the nose for things they do not really want. If the nonsense were cut out of hotels and restaurants, and the work done with simple efficiency, PLONGEURS might work six or eight hours a day instead often or fifteen.

Suppose it is granted that a PLONGEUR'S work is more or less useless. Then the question follows, Why does anyone want him to go on working? I am trying to go beyond the immediate economic cause, and to consider what pleasure it can give anyone to think of men swabbing dishes for life. For there is no doubt that people — comfortably situated people — do find a pleasure in such thoughts. A slave, Marcus Gato said, should be working when he is not sleeping. It does not matter whether his work is needed or not, he must work, because work in itself is good — for slaves, at least. This sentiment still survives, and it has piled up mountains of useless drudgery.

I believe that this instinct to perpetuate useless work is, at bottom, simply fear of the mob. The mob (the thought runs) are such low animals that they would be dangerous if they had leisure; it is safer to keep them too busy to think. A rich man who happens to be intellectually honest, if he is questioned about the improvement of working conditions, usually says something like this:

'We know that poverty is unpleasant; in fact, since it is so remote, we rather enjoy harrowing ourselves with the thought of its unpleasantness. But don't expect us to do anything about it. We are sorry for you lower classes, just as we are sorry for a, cat with the

mange, but we will fight like devils against any improvement of your condition. We feel that you are much safer as you are. The present state of affairs suits us, and we are not going to take the risk of setting you free, even by an extra hour a day. So, dear brothers, since evidently you must sweat to pay for our trips to Italy, sweat and be damned to you.'

This is particularly the attitude of intelligent, cultivated people; one can read the substance of it in a hundred essays. Very few cultivated people have less than (say) four hundred pounds a year, and naturally they side with the rich, because they imagine that any liberty conceded to the poor is a threat to their own liberty. Foreseeing some dismal Marxian Utopia as the alternative, the educated man prefers to keep things as they are. Possibly he does not like his fellow-rich very much, but he supposes that even the vulgarest of them are less inimical to his pleasures, more his kind of people, than the poor, and that he had better stand by them. It is this fear of a supposedly dangerous mob that makes nearly all intelligent people conservative in their opinions.

Fear of the mob is a superstitious fear. It is based on the idea that there is some mysterious, fundamental difference between rich and poor, as though they were two different races, like Negroes and white men. But in reality there is no such difference. The mass of the rich and the poor are differentiated by their incomes and nothing else, and the. average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit. Change places, and handy dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? Everyone who has mixed on equal terms with the poor knows this quite well. But the trouble is that intelligent, cultivated people, the very people who might be expected to have liberal opinions, never do mix with the poor. For what do the majority of educated people know about poverty? In my copy of Villon's poems the editor has actually thought it necessary to explain the line 'NE PAIN NE VOYENT QU'AUX FENESTRES' by a footnote; so remote is even hunger from the educated man's experience.

From this ignorance a superstitious fear of the mob results quite naturally. The educated man pictures a horde of submen, wanting only a day's liberty to loot his house, burn his books, and set him to

work minding a machine or sweeping out a lavatory. ‘Anything,’ he thinks, ‘any injustice, sooner than let that mob loose.’ He does not see that since there is no difference between the mass of rich and poor, there is no question of setting the mob loose. The mob is in fact loose now, and — in the shape of rich men — is using its power to set up enormous treadmills of boredom, such as ‘smart’ hotels.

To sum up. A PLONGEUR is a slave, and a wasted slave, doing stupid and largely unnecessary work. He is kept at work, ultimately, because of a vague feeling that he would be dangerous if he had leisure. And educated people, who should be on his side, acquiesce in the process, because they know nothing about him and consequently are afraid of him. I say this of the PLONGEUR because it is his case I have been considering; it would apply equally to numberless other types of worker. These are only my own ideas about the basic facts of a PLONGEUR’S life, made without reference to immediate economic questions, and no doubt largely platitudes. I present them as a sample of the thoughts that are put into one’s head by working in an hotel.

CHAPTER 23

As soon as I left the Auberge de Jehan Cottard I went to bed and slept the clock round, all but one hour. Then I washed my teeth for the first time in a fortnight, bathed and had my hair cut, and got my clothes out of pawn. I had two glorious days of loafing. I even went in my best suit to the Auberge, leant against the bar and spent five francs on a bottle of English beer. It is a curious sensation, being a customer where you have been a slave's slave. Boris was sorry that I had left the restaurant just at the moment when we were LANCES and there was a chance of making money. I have heard from him since, and he tells me that he is making a hundred francs a day and has set up a girl who is TRES SERIEUSE and never smells of garlic.

I spent a day wandering about our quarter, saying good-bye to everyone. It was on this day that Charlie told me about the death of old Roucolle the miser, who had once lived in the quarter. Very likely Charlie was lying as usual, but it was a good story.

Roucolle died, aged seventy-four, a year or two before I went to Paris, but the people in the quarter still talked of him while I was there. He never equalled Daniel Dancer or anyone of that kind, but he was an interesting character. He went to Les Halles every morning to pick up damaged vegetables, and ate cat's meat, and wore newspaper instead of underclothes, and used the wainscoting of his room for firewood, and made himself a pair of trousers out of a sack — all this with half a million francs invested. I should like very much to have known him.

Like many misers, Roucolle came to a bad end through putting his money into a wildcat scheme. One day a Jew appeared in the quarter, an alert, business-like young chap who had a first-rate plan for smuggling cocaine into England. It is easy enough, of course, to buy cocaine in Paris, and the smuggling would be quite simple in itself, only there is always some spy who betrays the plan to the customs or the police. It is said that this is often done by the very people who sell the cocaine, because the smuggling trade is in the hands of a large combine, who do not want competition. The Jew, however, swore that there was no danger. He knew a way of getting cocaine

direct from Vienna, not through the usual channels, and there would be no blackmail to pay. He had got into touch with Roucolle through a young Pole, a student at the Sorbonne, who was going to put four thousand francs into the scheme if Roucolle would put six thousand. For this they could buy ten pounds of cocaine, which would be worth a small fortune in England.

The Pole and the Jew had a tremendous struggle to get the money from between old Roucolle's claws. Six thousand francs was not much — he had more than that sewn into the mattress in his room — but it was agony for him to part with a sou. The Pole and the Jew were at him for weeks on end, explaining, bullying, coaxing, arguing, going down on their knees and imploring him to produce the money. The old man was half frantic between greed and fear. His bowels yearned at the thought of getting, perhaps, fifty thousand francs' profit, and yet he could not bring himself to risk the money. He used to sit in a comer with his head in his hands, groaning and sometimes yelling out in agony, and often he would kneel down (he was very pious) and pray for strength, but still he couldn't do it. But at last, more from exhaustion than anything else, he gave in quite suddenly; he slit open the mattress where his money was concealed and handed over six thousand francs to the Jew.

The Jew delivered the cocaine the same day, and promptly vanished. And meanwhile, as was not surprising after the fuss Roucolle had made, the affair had been noised all over the quarter. The very next morning the hotel was raided and searched by the police.

Roucolle and the Pole were in agonies. The police were downstairs, working their way up and searching every room in turn, and there was the great packet of cocaine on the table, with no place to hide it and no chance of escaping down the stairs. The Pole was for throwing the stuff out of the window, but Roucolle would not hear of it. Charlie told me that he had been present at the scene. He said that when they tried to take the packet from Roucolle he clasped it to his breast and struggled like a madman, although he was seventy-four years old. He was wild with fright, but he would go to prison rather than throw his money away.

At last, when the police were searching only one floor below,

somebody had an idea. A man on Roucolle's floor had a dozen tins of face-powder which he was selling on commission; it was suggested that the cocaine could be put into the tins and passed off as face-powder. The powder was hastily thrown out of the window and the cocaine substituted, and the tins were put openly on Roucolle's table, as though there there were nothing to conceal. A few minutes later the police came to search Roucolle's room. They tapped the walls and looked up the chimney and turned out the drawers and examined the floorboards, and then, just as they were about to give it up, having found nothing, the inspector noticed the tins on the table.

'TIENS,' he said, 'have a look at those tins. I hadn't noticed them. What's in them, eh?'

'Face-powder,' said the Pole as calmly as he could manage. But at the same instant Roucolle let out a loud groaning noise, from alarm, and the police became suspicious immediately. They opened one of the tins and tipped out the contents, and after smelling it, the inspector said that he believed it was cocaine. Roucolle and the Pole began swearing on the names of the saints that it was only face-powder; but it was no use, the more they protested the more suspicious the police became. The two men were arrested and led off to the police station, followed by half the quarter.

At the station, Roucolle and the Pole were interrogated by the Commissaire while a tin of the cocaine was sent away to be analysed. Charlie said that the scene Roucolle made was beyond description. He wept, prayed, made contradictory statements and denounced the Pole all at once, so loud that he could be heard half a street away. The policemen almost burst with laughing at him.

After an hour a policeman came back with the tin of cocaine and a note from the analyst. He was laughing.

'This is not cocaine, MONSIEUR,' he said.

'What, not cocaine?' said the Commissaire. 'MAIS, ALORS — what is it, then?'

'It is face-powder.'

Roucolle and the Pole were released at once, entirely exonerated but very angry. The Jew had double-crossed them. Afterwards, when the excitement was over, it turned out that he had played the same trick on two other people in the quarter.

The Pole was glad enough to escape, even though he had lost his four thousand francs, but poor old Roucolle was utterly broken down. He took to his bed at once, and all that day and half the night they could hear him thrashing about, mumbling, and sometimes yelling out at the top of his voice:

'Six thousand francs! NOM DE JESUS-CHRIST! Six thousand francs!'

Three days later he had some kind of stroke, and in a fortnight he was dead — of a broken heart, Charlie said.

CHAPTER 24

I travelled to England third class via Dunkirk and Tilbury, which is the cheapest and not the worst way of crossing the Channel. You had to pay extra for a cabin, so I slept in the saloon, together with most of the third-class passengers. I find this entry in my diary for that day:

'Sleeping in the saloon, twenty-seven men, sixteen women. Of the women, not a single one has washed her face this morning. The men mostly went to the bathroom; the women merely produced vanity cases and covered the dirt with powder. Q. A secondary sexual difference?'

On the journey I fell in with a couple of Roumanians, mere children, who were going to England on their honeymoon trip. They asked innumerable questions about England, and I told them some startling lies. I was so pleased to be getting home, after being hard up for months in a foreign city, that England seemed to me a sort of Paradise. There are, indeed, many things in England that make you glad to get home; bathrooms, armchairs, mint sauce, new potatoes properly cooked, brown bread, marmalade, beer made with veritable hops — they are all splendid, if you can pay for them. England is a very good country when you are not poor; and, of course, with a tame imbecile to look after, I was not going to be poor. The thought of not being poor made me very patriotic. The more questions the Roumanians asked, the more I praised England; the climate, the scenery, the art, the literature, the laws — everything in England was perfect.

Was the architecture in England good? the Roumanians asked. 'Splendid!' I said. 'And you should just see the London statues! Paris is vulgar — half grandiosity and half slums. But London— '

Then the boat drew alongside Tilbury pier. The first building we saw on the waterside was one of those huge hotels, all stucco and pinnacles, which stare from the English coast like idiots staring over an asylum wall. I saw the Roumanians, too polite to say anything, cocking their eyes at the hotel. 'Built by French architects,' I assured them; and even later, when the train was crawling into London through the eastern slums, I still kept it up about the beauties of

English architecture. Nothing seemed too good to say about England, now that I was coming home and was not hard up any more.

I went to B.'s office, and his first words knocked everything to ruins. 'I'm sorry,' he said; 'your employers have gone abroad, patient and all. However, they'll be back in a month. I suppose you can hang on till then?'

I was outside in the street before it even occurred to me to borrow some more money. There was a month to wait, and I had exactly nineteen and sixpence in hand. The news had taken my breath away. For a long time I could not make up my mind what to do. I loafed the day in the streets, and at night, not having the slightest notion of how to get a cheap bed in London, I went to a 'family' hotel, where the charge was seven and sixpence. After paying the bill I had ten and twopence in hand.

By the morning I had made my plans. Sooner or later I should have to go to B. for more money, but it seemed hardly decent to do so yet, and in the meantime I must exist in some hole-and-corner way. Past experience set me against pawning my best suit. I would leave all my things at the station cloakroom, except my second-best suit, which I could exchange for some cheap clothes and perhaps a pound. If I was going to live a month on thirty shillings I must have bad clothes — indeed, the worse the better. Whether thirty shillings could be made to last a month I had no idea, not knowing London as I knew Paris. Perhaps I could beg, or sell bootlaces, and I remembered articles I had read in the Sunday papers about beggars who have two thousand pounds sewn into their trousers. It was, at any rate, notoriously impossible to starve in London, so there was nothing to be anxious about.

To sell my clothes I went down into Lambeth, where the people are poor and there are a lot of rag shops. At the first shop I tried the proprietor was polite but unhelpful; at the second he was rude; at the third he was stone deaf, or pretended to be so. The fourth shopman was a large blond young man, very pink all over, like a slice of ham. He looked at the clothes I was wearing and felt them disparagingly between thumb and finger.

'Poor stuff,' he said, 'very poor stuff, that is.' (It was quite a good suit.) 'What yer want for 'em?'

I explained that I wanted some older clothes and as much money as he could spare. He thought for a moment, then collected some dirty-looking rags and threw them on to the counter. ‘What about the money?’ I said, hoping for a pound. He pursed Us lips, then produced A SHILLING and laid it beside the clothes. I did not argue — I was going to argue, but as I opened my mouth he reached out as though to take up the shilling again; I saw that I was helpless. He let me change in a small room behind the shop.

The clothes were a coat, once dark brown, a pair of black dungaree trousers, a scarf and a cloth cap; I had kept my own shirt, socks and boots, and I had a comb and razor in my pocket. It gives one a very strange feeling to be wearing such clothes. I had worn bad enough things before, but nothing at all like these; they were not merely dirty and shapeless, they had — how is one to express it? — a gracelessness, a patina of antique filth, quite different from mere shabbiness. They were the sort of clothes you see on a bootlace seller, or a tramp. An hour later, in Lambeth, I saw a hang-dog man, obviously a tramp, coming towards me, and when I looked again it was myself, reflected in a shop window. The dirt was plastering my face already. Dirt is a great respecter of persons; it lets you alone when you are well dressed, but as soon as your collar is gone it flies towards you from all directions.

I stayed in the streets till late at night, keeping on the move all the time. Dressed as I was, I was half afraid that the police might arrest me as a vagabond, and I dared not speak to anyone, imagining that they must notice a disparity between my accent and my clothes. (Later I discovered that this never happened.) My new clothes had put me instantly into a new world. Everyone’s demeanour seemed to have changed abruptly. I helped a hawker pick up a barrow that he had upset. ‘Thanks, mate,’ he said with a grin. No one had called me mate before in my life — it was the clothes that had done it. For the first time I noticed, too, how the attitude of women varies with a man’s clothes. When a badly dressed man passes them they shudder away from him with a quite frank movement of disgust, as though he were a dead cat. Clothes are powerful things. Dressed in a tramp’s clothes it is very difficult, at any rate for the first day, not to feel that you are genuinely degraded. You might feel the same shame,

irrational but very real, your first night in prison.

At about eleven I began looking for a bed. I had read about doss-houses (they are never called doss-houses, by the way), and I supposed that one could get a bed for fourpence or thereabouts. Seeing a man, a navvy or something of the kind, standing on the kerb in the Waterloo Road, I stopped and questioned him. I said that I was stony broke and wanted the cheapest bed I could get.

'Oh,' said he, 'you go to that 'ouse across the street there, with the sign "Good Beds for Single Men". That's a good kip [sleeping place], that is. I bin there myself on and off. You'll find it cheap AND clean.'

It was a tall, battered-looking house, with dim lights in all the windows, some of which were patched with brown paper. I entered a stone passage-way, and a little etiolated boy with sleepy eyes appeared from a door leading to a cellar. Murmurous sounds came from the cellar, and a wave of hot air and cheese. The boy yawned and held out his hand.

'Want a kip? That'll be a 'og, guv'nor.'

I paid the shilling, and the boy led me up a rickety unlighted staircase to a bedroom. It had a sweetish reek of paregoric and foul linen; the windows seemed to be tight shut, and the air was almost suffocating at first. There was a candle burning, and I saw that the room measured fifteen feet square by eight high, and had eight beds in it. Already six lodgers were in bed, queer lumpy shapes with all their own clothes, even their boots, piled on top of them. Someone was coughing in a loathsome manner in one corner.

When I got into the bed I found that it was as hard as a board, and as for the pillow, it was a mere hard cylinder like a block of wood. It was rather worse than sleeping on a table, because the bed was not six feet long, and very narrow, and the mattress was convex, so that one had to hold on to avoid falling out. The sheets stank so horribly of sweat that I could not bear them near my nose. Also, the bedclothes only consisted of the sheets and a cotton counterpane, so that though stuffy it was none too warm. Several noises recurred throughout the night. About once in an hour the man on my left — a sailor, I think — woke up, swore vilely, and lighted a cigarette. Another man, victim of a bladder disease, got up and noisily used his

chamber-pot half a dozen times during the night. The man in the corner had a coughing fit once in every twenty minutes, so regularly that one came to listen for it as one listens for the next yap when a dog is baying the moon. It was an unspeakably repellent sound; a foul bubbling and retching, as though the man's bowels were being churned up within him. Once when he struck a match I saw that he was a very old man, with a grey, sunken face like that of a corpse, and he was wearing his trousers wrapped round his head as a nightcap, a thing which for some reason disgusted me very much. Every time he coughed or the other man swore, a sleepy voice from one of the other beds cried out:

'Shut up! Oh, for Christ's — SAKE shut up!'

I had about an hour's sleep in all. In the morning I was woken by a dim impression of some large brown thing coming towards me. I opened my eyes and saw that it was one of the sailor's feet, sticking out of bed close to my face. It was dark brown, quite dark brown like an Indian's, with dirt. The walls were leprous, and the sheets, three weeks from the wash, were almost raw umber colour. I got up, dressed and went downstairs. In the cellar were a row of basins and two slippery roller towels. I had a piece of soap in my pocket, and I was going to wash, when I noticed that every basin was streaked with grime — solid, sticky filth as black as boot-blacking. I went out unwashed. Altogether, the lodging-house had not come up to its description as cheap and clean. It was however, as I found later, a fairly representative lodging-house.

I crossed the river and walked a long way eastward, finally going into a coffee-shop on Tower Hill. An ordinary London coffee-shop, like a thousand others, it seemed queer. and foreign after Paris. It was a little stuffy room with the high-backed pews that were fashionable in the 'forties, the day's menu written on a mirror with a piece of soap, and a girl of fourteen handling the dishes. Navvies were eating out of newspaper parcels, and drinking tea in vast saucerless mugs like china tumblers. In a corner by himself a Jew, muzzle down in the plate, was guiltily wolfing bacon.

'Could I have some tea and bread and butter?' I said to the girl.

She stared. 'No butter, only marg,' she said, surprised. And she repeated the order in the phrase that is to London what the eternal

COUP DE ROUGE is to Paris: ‘Large tea and two slices!’

On the wall beside my pew there was a notice saying ‘Pocketing the sugar not allowed,’ and beneath it some poetic customer had written:

He that takes away the sugar,
Shall be called a dirty ——

but someone else had been at pains to scratch out the last word. This was England. The tea-and-two-slices cost threepence halfpenny, leaving me with eight and twopence.

CHAPTER 25

The eight shillings lasted three days and four nights. After my bad experience in the Waterloo Road I moved eastward, and spent the next night in a lodging-house in Pennyfields. This was a typical lodging-house, like scores of others in London. It had accommodation for between fifty and a hundred men, and was managed by a 'deputy' — a deputy for the owner, that is, for these lodging-houses are profitable concerns and are owned by rich men. We slept fifteen or twenty in a dormitory; the beds were again cold and hard, but the sheets were not more than a week from the wash, which was an improvement. The charge was ninepence or a shilling (in the shilling dormitory the beds were six feet apart instead of four) and the terms were cash down by seven in the evening or out you went.

[It is a curious but well-known fact that bugs are much commoner in south than north London. For some reason they have not yet crossed the river in any great numbers.]

Downstairs there was a kitchen common to all lodgers, with free firing and a supply of cooking-pots, tea-basins, and toasting-forks. There were two great clinker fires, which were kept burning day and night the year through. The work of tending the fires, sweeping the kitchen and making the beds was done by the lodgers in rotation. One senior lodger, a fine Norman-looking stevedore named Steve, was known as 'head of the house', and was arbiter of disputes and unpaid chucker-out.

I liked the kitchen. It was a low-ceiled cellar deep underground, very hot and drowsy with coke fumes, and lighted only by the fires, which cast black velvet shadows in the comers. Ragged washing hung on strings from the ceiling. Red-lit men, stevedores mostly, moved about the fires with cooking-pots; some of them were quite naked, for they had been laundering and were waiting for their clothes to dry. At night there were games of nap and draughts, and songs— ' I'm a chap what's done wrong by my parents,' was a

favourite, and so was another popular song about a shipwreck. Sometimes late at night men would come in with a pail of winkles they had bought cheap, and share them out. There was a general sharing of food, and it was taken for granted to feed men who were out of work. A little pale, wizened creature, obviously dying, referred to as 'pore Brown, bin under the doctor and cut open three times,' was regularly fed by the others.

Two or three of the lodgers were old-age pensioners. Till meeting them I had never realized that there are people in England who live on nothing but the old-age pension often shillings a week. None of these old men had any other resource whatever. One of them was talkative, and I asked him how he managed to exist. He said:

'Well, there's ninepence a night for yer kip — that's five an' threepence a week. Then there's threepence on Saturday for a shave — that's five an' six. Then say you 'as a 'aircut once a month for sixpence — that's another three'apence a week. So you 'as about four an' four-pence for food an' bacca.'

He could imagine no other expenses. His food was bread and margarine and tea — towards the end of the week dry bread and tea without milk — and perhaps he got his clothes from charity. He seemed contented, valuing his bed and fire more than food. But, with an income of ten shillings a week, to spend money on a shave — it is awe-inspiring.

All day I loafed in the streets, east as far as Wapping, west as far as Whitechapel. It was queer after Paris; everything was so much cleaner and quieter and drearier. One missed the scream of the trams, and the noisy, festering life of the back streets, and the armed men clattering through the squares. The crowds were better dressed and the faces comelier and milder and more alike, without that fierce individuality and malice of the French. There was less drunkenness, and less dirt, and less quarrelling, and more idling. Knots of men stood at all the corners, slightly underfed, but kept going by the tea-and-two-slices which the Londoner swallows every two hours. One seemed to breathe a less feverish air than in Paris. It was the land of the tea urn and the Labour Exchange, as Paris is the land of the BISTRO and the sweatshop.

It was interesting to watch the crowds. The East London women

are pretty (it is the mixture of blood, perhaps), and Limehouse was sprinkled with Orientals — Chinamen, Ghittagonian lascars, Dravidians selling silk scarves, even a few Sikhs, come goodness knows how. Here and there were street meetings. In Whitechapel somebody called The Singing Evangel undertook to save you from hell for the charge of sixpence. In the East India Dock Road the Salvation Army were holding a service. They were singing 'Anybody here like sneaking Judas?' to the tune of 'What's to be done with a drunken sailor?' On Tower Hill two Mormons were trying to address a meeting. Round their platform struggled a mob of men, shouting and interrupting. Someone was denouncing them for polygamists. A lame, bearded man, evidently an atheist, had heard the word God and was heckling angrily. There was a confused uproar of voices.

'My dear friends, if you would only let us finish what we were saying — ! — That's right, give 'em a say. Don't get on the argue! — No, no, you answer me. Can you SHOW me God? You SHOW 'im me, then I'll believe in 'im. — Oh, shut up, don't keep interrupting of 'em! — Interrupt yourself! — polygamists! — Well, there's a lot to be said for polygamy. Take the — women out of industry, anyway. — My dear friends, if you would just — No, no, don't you slip out of it. 'Ave you SEEN God? 'Ave you TOUCHED 'im? 'Ave you shook 'ANDS with 'im? — Oh, don't get on the argue, for Christ's sake don't get on the ARGUE!' etc. etc. I listened for twenty minutes, anxious to learn something about Mormonism, but the meeting never got beyond shouts. It is the general fate of street meetings.

In Middlesex Street, among the crowds at the market, a draggled, down-at-heel woman was hauling a brat of five by the arm. She brandished a tin trumpet in its face. The brat was squalling.

'Enjoy yourself!' yelled the mother. 'What yer think I brought yer out 'ere for an' bought y' a trumpet an' all? D'ya want to go across my knee? You little bastard, you SHALL enjoy yerself!'

Some drops of spittle fell from the trumpet. The mother and the child disappeared, both bawling. It was all very queer after Paris.

The last night that I was in the Pennyfields lodging-house there was a quarrel between two of the lodgers, a vile scene. One of the

old-age pensioners, a man of about seventy, naked to the waist (he had been laundering), was violently abusing a short, thickset stevedore, who stood with his back to the fire. I could see the old man's face in the light of the fire, and he was almost crying with grief and rage. Evidently something very serious had happened.

THE OLD-AGE PENSIONER:'You — !'

THE STEVEDORE: 'Shut yer mouth, you ole — , afore I set about yer!'

THE OLD-AGE PENSIONER: 'Jest you try it on, you — ! I'm thirty year older'n you, but it wouldn't take much to make me give you one as'd knock you into a bucketful of piss!'

THE STEVEDORE: 'Ah, an' then p'raps I wouldn't smash you up after, you ole — !'

Thus for five minutes. The lodgers sat round, unhappy, trying to disregard the quarrel. The stevedore looked, sullen, but the old man was growing more and more furious. He kept making little rushes at the other, sticking out his face and screaming from a few inches distant like a cat on a wall, and spitting. He was trying to nerve himself to strike a blow, and not quite succeeding. Finally he burst out:

'A — , that's what you are, a —— ! Take that in your dirty gob and suck it, you — ! By — , I'll smash you afore I've done with you. A — , that's what you are, a son of a — whore. Lick that, you — ! That's what I think of you, you — , you — , you — you BLACK BASTARD!'

Whereat he suddenly collapsed on a bench, took his face in his hands, and began crying. The other man seeing that public feeling was against him, went out.

Afterwards I heard Steve explaining the cause of the quarrel. It appeared that it was all about a shilling's worth of food. In some way the old man had lost his store of bread and margarine, and so would have nothing to eat for the next three days, except what the others gave him in charity. The stevedore, who was in work and well fed, had taunted him; hence the quarrel.

When my money was down to one and fourpence I went for a night to a lodging-house in Bow, where the charge was only eightpence. One went down an area and through an alley-way into a

deep, stifling cellar, ten feet square. Ten men, navvies mostly, were sitting in the fierce glare of the fire. It was midnight, but the deputy's son, a pale, sticky child of five, was there playing on the navvies' knees. An old Irishman was whistling to a blind bullfinch in a tiny cage. There were other songbirds there — tiny, faded things, that had lived all their lives underground. The lodgers habitually made water in the fire, to save going across a yard to the lavatory. As I sat at the table I felt something stir near my feet, and, looking down, saw a wave of black things moving slowly across the floor; they were black-beetles.

There were six beds in the dormitory, and the sheets, marked in huge letters 'Stolen from No. — Road', smelt loathsome. In the next bed to me lay a very old man, a pavement artist, with some extraordinary curvature of the spine that made him stick right out of bed, with his back a foot or two from my face. It was bare, and marked with curious swirls of dirt, like a marble table-top. During the night a man came in drunk and was sick on the floor, close to my bed. There were bugs too — not so bad as in Paris, but enough to keep one awake. It was a filthy place. Yet the deputy and his wife were friendly people, and ready to make one a cup of tea at any hour of the day or night.

CHAPTER 26

In the morning after paying for the usual tea-and-two-slices and buying half an ounce of tobacco, I had a halfpenny left. I did not care to ask B. for more money yet, so there was nothing for it but to go to a casual ward. I had very little idea how to set about this, but I knew that there was a casual ward at Romton, so I walked out there, arriving at three or four in the afternoon. Leaning against the pigpens in Romton market-place was a wizened old Irishman, obviously a tramp. I went and leaned beside him, and presently offered him my tobacco-box. He opened the box and looked at the tobacco in astonishment:

'By God,' he said, 'dere's sixpennorth o' good baccy here! Where de hell d'you get hold o' dat? YOU ain't been on de road long.'

'What, don't you have tobacco on the road?' I said.

'Oh, we HAS it. Look.'

He produced a rusty tin which had once held Oxo Cubes. In it were twenty or thirty cigarette ends, picked up from the pavement. The Irishman said that he rarely got any other tobacco; he added that, with care, one could collect two ounces of tobacco a day on the London pavements.

'D'you come out o' one o' de London spikes [casual wards], eh?' he asked me.

I said yes, thinking this would make him accept me as a fellow tramp, and asked him what the spike at Romton was like. He said:

'Well, 'tis a cocoa spike. Dere's tay spikes, and cocoa spikes, and skilly spikes. Dey don't give you skilly in Romton, t'ank God — leastways, dey didn't de last time I was here. I been up to York and round Wales since.'

'What is skilly?' I said.

'Skilly? A can o' hot water wid some bloody oatmeal at de bottom; dat's skilly. De skilly spikes is always de worst.'

We stayed talking for an hour or two. The Irishman was a friendly old man, but he smelt very unpleasant, which was not surprising when one learned how many diseases he suffered from. It appeared (he described his symptoms fully) that taking him from top to bottom

he had the following things wrong with him: on his crown, which was bald, he had eczema; he was shortsighted, and had no glasses; he had chronic bronchitis; he had some undiagnosed pain in the back; he had dyspepsia; he had urethritis; he had varicose veins, bunions and flat feet. With this assemblage of diseases he had tramped the roads for fifteen years.

At about five the Irishman said, 'Could you do wid a cup o' tay? De spike don't open till six.'

'I should think I could.'

'Well, dere's a place here where dey gives you a free cup o' tay and a bun. GOOD tay it is. Dey makes you say a lot o' bloody prayers after; but hell! It all passes de time away. You come wid me.'

He led the way to a small tin-roofed shed in a side-street, rather like a village cricket pavilion. About twenty-five other tramps were waiting. A few of them were dirty old habitual vagabonds, the majority decent-looking lads from the north, probably miners or cotton operatives out of work. Presently the door opened and a lady in a blue silk dress, wearing gold spectacles and a crucifix, welcomed us in. Inside were thirty or forty hard chairs, a harmonium, and a very gory lithograph of the Crucifixion.

Uncomfortably we took off our caps and sat down. The lady handed out the tea, and while we ate and drank she moved to and fro, talking benignly. She talked upon religious subjects — about Jesus Christ always having a soft spot for poor rough men like us, and about how quickly the time passed when you were in church, and what a difference it made to a man on the road if he said his prayers regularly. We hated it. We sat against the wall fingering our caps (a tramp feels indecently exposed with his cap off), and turning pink and trying to mumble something when the lady addressed us. There was no doubt that she meant it all kindly. As she came up to one of the north country lads with the plate of buns, she said to him:

'And you, my boy, how long is it since you knelt down and spoke with your Father in Heaven?'

Poor lad, not a word could he utter; but his belly answered for him, with a disgraceful rumbling which it set up at sight of the food. Thereafter he was so overcome with shame that he could scarcely swallow his bun. Only one man managed to answer the lady in her

own style, and he was a spry, red-nosed fellow looking like a corporal who had lost his stripe for drunkenness. He could pronounce the words 'the dear Lord Jesus' with less shame than anyone I ever saw. No doubt he had learned the knack in prison.

Tea ended, and I saw the tramps looking furtively at one another. An unspoken thought was running from man to man — could we possibly make off before the prayers started? Someone stirred in his chair — not getting up actually, but with just a glance at the door, as though half suggesting the idea of departure. The lady quelled him with one look. She said in a more benign tone than ever:

'I don't think you need go QUITE yet. The casual ward doesn't open till six, and we have time to kneel down and say a few words to our Father first. I think we should all feel better after that, shouldn't we?'

The red-nosed man was very helpful, pulling the harmonium into place and handing out the prayerbooks. His back was to the lady as he did this, and it was his idea of a joke to deal the books like a pack of cards, whispering to each man as he did so, 'There y'are, mate, there's a — nap 'and for yer! Four aces and a king!' etc.

Bareheaded, we knelt down among the dirty teacups and began to mumble that we had left undone those things that we ought to have done, and done those things that we ought not to have done, and there was no health in us. The lady prayed very fervently, but her eyes roved over us all the time, making sure that we were attending. When she was not looking we grinned and winked at one another, and whispered bawdy jokes, just to show that we did not care; but it stuck in our throats a little. No one except the red-nosed man was self-possessed enough to speak the responses above a whisper. We got on better with the singing, except that one old tramp knew no tune but 'Onward, Christian soldiers', and reverted to it sometimes, spoiling the harmony.

The prayers lasted half an hour, and then, after a handshake at the door, we made off. 'Well,' said somebody as soon as we were out of hearing, 'the trouble's over. I thought them — prayers was never goin' to end.'

'You 'ad your bun,' said another; 'you got to pay for it.'

'Pray for it, you mean. Ah, you don't get much for nothing. They

can’t even give you a twopenny cup of tea without you go down on you — knees for it.’

There were murmurs of agreement. Evidently the tramps were not grateful for their tea. And yet it was excellent tea, as different from coffee-shop tea as good Bordeaux is from the muck called colonial claret, and we were all glad of it. I am sure too that it was given in a good spirit, without any intention of humiliating us; so in fairness we ought to have been grateful — still, we were not.

CHAPTER 27

At about a quarter to six the Irishman led me to the spike. It was a grim, smoky yellow cube of brick, standing in a corner of the workhouse grounds. With its rows of tiny, barred windows, and a high wall and iron gates separating it from the road, it looked much like a prison. Already a long queue of ragged men had formed up, waiting for the gates to open. They were of all kinds and ages, the youngest a fresh-faced boy of sixteen, the oldest a doubled-up, toothless mummy of seventy-five. Some were hardened tramps, recognizable by their sticks and billies and dust-darkened faces; some were factory hands out of work, some agricultural labourers, one a clerk in collar and tie, two certainly imbeciles. Seen in the mass, lounging there, they were a disgusting sight; nothing villainous or dangerous, but a graceless, mangy crew, nearly all ragged and palpably underfed. They were friendly, however, and asked no questions. Many offered me tobacco — cigarette ends, that is.

We leaned against the wall, smoking, and the tramps began to talk about the spikes they had been in recently. It appeared from what they said that all spikes are different, each with its peculiar merits and demerits, and it is important to know these when you are on the road. An old hand will tell you the peculiarities of every spike in England, as: at A you are allowed to smoke but there are bugs in the cells; at B the beds are comfortable but the porter is a bully; at C they let you out early in the morning but the tea is undrinkable; at D the officials steal your money if you have any — and so on interminably. There are regular beaten tracks where the spikes are within a day's march of one another. I was told that the Barnet-St Albans route is the best, and they warned me to steer clear of Billericay and Chelmsford, also Ide Hill in Kent. Chelsea was said to be the most luxurious spike in England; someone, praising it, said that the blankets there were more like prison than the spike. Tramps go far afield in summer, and in winter they circle as much as possible round the large towns, where it is warmer and there is more charity. But they have to keep moving, for you may not enter any one spike, or any two London spikes, more than once in a month, on pain of being

confined for a week.

Some time after six the gates opened and we began to file in one at a time. In the yard was an office where an official entered in a ledger our names and trades and ages, also the places we were coming from and going to — this last is intended to keep a check on the movements of tramps. I gave my trade as 'painter'; I had painted water-colours — who has not? The official also asked us whether we had any money, and every man said no. It is against the law to enter the spike with more than eightpence, and any sum less than this one is supposed to hand over at the gate. But as a rule the tramps prefer to smuggle their money in, tying it tight in a piece of cloth so that it will not chink. Generally they put it in the bag of tea and sugar that every tramp carries, or among their 'papers'. The 'papers' are considered sacred and are never searched.

After registering at the office we were led into the spike by an official known as the Tramp Major (his job is to supervise casuals, and he is generally a workhouse pauper) and a great bawling ruffian of a porter in a blue uniform, who treated us like cattle. The spike consisted simply of a bathroom and lavatory, and, for the rest, long double rows of stone cells, perhaps a hundred cells in all. It was a bare, gloomy place of stone and whitewash, unwillingly clean, with a smell which, somehow, I had foreseen from its appearance; a smell of soft soap, Jeyes' fluid and latrines — a cold, discouraging, prisonish smell.

The porter herded us all into the passage, and then told us to come into the bathroom six at a time, to be searched before bathing. The search was for money and tobacco, Romton being one of those spikes where you can smoke once you have smuggled your tobacco in, but it will be confiscated if it is found on you. The old hands had told us that the porter never searched below the knee, so before going in we had all hidden our tobacco in the ankles of our boots. Afterwards, while undressing, we slipped it into our coats, which we were allowed to keep, to serve as pillows.

The scene in the bathroom was extraordinarily repulsive. Fifty dirty, stark-naked men elbowing each other in a room twenty feet square, with only two bathtubs and two slimy roller towels between them all. I shall never forget the reek of dirty feet. Less than half the

tramps actually bathed (I heard them saying that hot water is 'weakening' to the system), but they all washed their faces and feet, and the horrid greasy little clouts known as toe-rags which they bind round their toes. Fresh water was only allowed for men who were having a complete bath, so many men had to bathe in water where others had washed their feet. The porter shoved us to and fro, giving the rough side of his tongue when anyone wasted time. When my turn came for the bath, I asked if I might swill out the tub, which was streaked with dirt, before using it. He answered simply, 'Shut yer — mouth and get on with yer bath!' That set the social tone of the place, and I did not speak again.

When we had finished bathing, the porter tied our clothes in bundles and gave us workhouse shirts — grey cotton things of doubtful cleanliness, like abbreviated nightgowns. We were sent along to the cells at once, and presently the porter and the Tramp Major brought our supper across from the workhouse. Each man's ration was a half-pound wedge of bread smeared with margarine, and a pint of bitter sugarless cocoa in a tin billy. Sitting on the floor we wolfed this in five minutes, and at about seven o'clock the cell doors were locked on the outside, to remain locked till eight in the morning.

Each man was allowed to sleep with his mate, the cells being intended to hold two men apiece. I had no mate, and was put in with another solitary man, a thin scrubby-faced fellow with a slight squint. The cell measured eight feet by five by eight high, was made of stone, and had a tiny barred window high up in the wall and a spyhole in the door, just like a cell in a prison. In it were six blankets, a chamber-pot, a hot water pipe, and nothing else whatever. I looked round the cell with a vague feeling that there was something missing. Then, with a shock of surprise, I realized what it was, and exclaimed:

'But I say, damn it, where are the beds?'

'BEDS?' said the other man, surprised. 'There aren't no beds! What yer expect? This is one of them spikes where you sleeps on the floor. Christ! Ain't you got used to that yet?'

It appeared that no beds was quite a normal condition in the spike. We rolled up our coats and put them against the hot-water pipe, and made ourselves as comfortable as we could. It grew foully stufiy, but

it was not warm enough to allow of our putting all the blankets underneath, so that we could only use one to soften the floor. We lay a foot apart, breathing into one another's face, with our naked limbs constantly touching, and rolling against one another whenever we fell asleep. One fidgeted from side to side, but it did not do much good; whichever way one turned there would be first a dull numb feeling, then a sharp ache as the hardness of the floor wore through the blanket. One could sleep, but not for more than ten minutes on end.

About midnight the other man began making homosexual attempts upon me — a nasty experience in a locked, pitch-dark cell. He was a feeble creature and I could manage him easily, but of course it was impossible to go to sleep again. For the rest of the night we stayed awake, smoking and talking. The man told me the story of his life — he was a fitter, out of work for three years. He said that his wife had promptly deserted him when he lost his job, and he had been so long away from women that he had almost forgotten what they were like. Homosexuality is general among tramps of long standing, he said.

At eight the porter came along the passage unlocking the doors and shouting 'All out!' The doors opened, letting out a stale, fetid stink. At once the passage was full of squallid, grey-shirted figures, each chamber-pot in hand, scrambling for the bathroom. It appeared that in the morning only one tub of water was allowed for the lot of us, and when I arrived twenty tramps had already washed their faces; I took one glance at the black scum floating on the water, and went unwashed. After this we were given a breakfast identical with the previous night's supper, our clothes were returned to us, and we were ordered out into the yard to work. The work was peeling potatoes for the pauper's dinner, but it was a mere formality, to keep us occupied until the doctor came to inspect us. Most of the tramps frankly idled. The doctor turned up at about ten o'clock and we were told to go back to our cells, strip and wait in the passage for the inspection.

Naked, and shivering, we lined up in the passage. You cannot conceive what ruinous, degenerate curs we looked, standing there in the merciless morning light. A tramp's clothes are bad, but they conceal far worse things; to see him as he really is, unmitigated, you

must see him naked. Flat feet, pot bellies, hollow chests, sagging muscles — every kind of physical rottenness was there. Nearly everyone was under-nourished, and some clearly diseased; two men were wearing trusses, and as for the old mummy-like creature of seventy-five, one wondered how he could possibly make his daily march. Looking at our faces, unshaven and creased from the sleepless night, you would have thought that all of us were recovering from a week on the drink.

The inspection was designed merely to detect smallpox, and took no notice of our general condition. A young medical student, smoking a cigarette, walked rapidly along the line glancing us up and down, and not inquiring whether any man was well or ill. When my cell companion stripped I saw that his chest was covered with a red rash, and, having spent the night a few inches away from him, I fell into a panic about smallpox. The doctor, however, examined the rash and said that it was due merely to under-nourishment.

After the inspection we dressed and were sent into the yard, where the porter called our names over, gave us back any possessions we had left at the office, and distributed meal tickets. These were worth sixpence each, and were directed to coffee-shops on the route we had named the night before. It was interesting to see that quite a number of the tramps could not read, and had to apply to myself and other 'scholards' to decipher their tickets.

The gates were opened, and we dispersed immediately. How sweet the air does smell — even the air of a back street in the suburbs — after the shut-in, subfaecal stench of the spike! I had a mate now, for while we were peeling potatoes I had made friends with an Irish tramp named Paddy Jaques, a melancholy pale man who seemed clean and decent. He was going to Edbury spike, and suggested that we should go together. We set out, getting there at three in the afternoon. It was a twelve-mile walk, but we made it fourteen by getting lost among the desolate north London slums. Our meal tickets were directed to a coffee-shop in Ilford. When we got there, the little chit of a serving-maid, having seen our tickets and grasped that we were tramps, tossed her head in contempt and for a long time would not serve us. Finally she slapped on the table two 'large teas' and four slices of bread and dripping — that is,

eightpenny-worth of food. It appeared that the shop habitually cheated the tramps of twopence or so on each ticket; having tickets instead of money, the tramps could not protest or go elsewhere.

CHAPTER 28

Paddy was my mate for about the next fortnight, and, as he was the first tramp I had known at all well, I want to give an account of him. I believe that he was a typical tramp and there are tens of thousands in England like him.

He was a tallish man, aged about thirty-five, with fair hair going grizzled and watery blue eyes. His features were good, but his cheeks had lanked and had that greyish, dirty in the grain look that comes of a bread and margarine diet. He was dressed, rather better than most tramps, in a tweed shooting-jacket and a pair of old evening trousers with the braid still on them. Evidently the braid figured in his mind as a lingering scrap of respectability, and he took care to sew it on again when it came loose. He was careful of his appearance altogether, and carried a razor and bootbrush that he would not sell, though he had sold his 'papers' and even his pocket-knife long since. Nevertheless, one would have known him for a tramp a hundred yards away. There was something in his drifting style of walk, and the way he had of hunching his shoulders forward, essentially abject. Seeing him walk, you felt instinctively that he would sooner take a blow than give one.

He had been brought up in Ireland, served two years in the war, and then worked in a metal polish factory, where he had lost his job two years earlier. He was horribly ashamed of being a tramp, but he had picked up all a tramp's ways. He browsed the pavements unceasingly, never missing a cigarette end, or even an empty cigarette packet, as he used the tissue paper for rolling cigarettes. On our way into Edbury he saw a newspaper parcel on the pavement, pounced on it, and found that it contained two mutton sandwiches — rather frayed at the edges; these he insisted on my sharing. He never passed an automatic machine without giving a tug at the handle, for he said that sometimes they are out of order and will eject pennies if you tug at them. He had no stomach for crime, however. When we were in the outskirts of Romton, Paddy noticed a bottle of milk on a doorstep, evidently left there by mistake. He stopped, eyeing the bottle hungrily.

‘Christ!’ he said, ‘dere’s good food goin’ to waste. Somebody could knock dat bottle off, eh? Knock it off easy.’

I saw that he was thinking of ‘knocking it off’ himself. He looked up and down the street; it was a quiet residential street and there was nobody in sight. Paddy’s sickly, chap-fallen face yearned over the milk. Then he turned away, saying gloomily:

‘Best leave it. It don’t do a man no good to steal. T’ank God, I ain’t never stolen nothin’ yet.’

It was funk, bred of hunger, that kept him virtuous. With only two or three sound meals in his belly, he would have found courage to steal the milk.

He had two subjects of conversation, the shame and come-down of being a tramp, and the best way of getting a free meal. As we drifted through the streets he would keep up a monologue in this style, in a whimpering, self-pitying Irish voice:

‘It’s hell bein’ on de road, eh? It breaks yer heart goin’ into dem bloody spikes. But what’s a man to do else, eh? I ain’t had a good meat meal for about two months, an’ me boots is getting bad, an’ — Christ! How’d it be if we was to try for a cup o’ tay at one o’ dem convents on de way to Edbury? Most times dey’re good for a cup o’ tay. Ah, what’d a man do widout religion, eh? I’ve took cups o’ tay from de convents, an’ de Baptists, an’ de Church of England, an’ all sorts. I’m a Catholic meself. Dat’s to say, I ain’t been to confession for about seventeen year, but still I got me religious feelin’s, y’understand. An’ dem convents is always good for a cup o’ tay . . . ‘ etc. etc. He would keep this up all day, almost without stopping.

His ignorance was limitless and appalling. He once asked me, for instance, whether Napoleon lived before Jesus Christ or after. Another time, when I was looking into a bookshop window, he grew very perturbed because one of the books was called OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST. He took this for blasphemy. ‘What de hell do dey want to go imitatin’ of HIM for?’ he demanded angrily. He could read, but he had a kind of loathing for books. On our way from Romton to Edbury I went into a public library, and, though Paddy did not want to read, I suggested that he should come in and rest his legs. But he preferred to wait on the pavement. ‘No,’ he said, ‘de sight of all dat bloody print makes me sick.’

Like most tramps, he was passionately mean about matches. He had a box of matches when I met him, but I never saw him strike one, and he used to lecture me for extravagance when I struck mine. His method was to cadge a light from strangers, sometimes going without a smoke for half an hour rather than strike a match.

Self-pity was the clue to his character. The thought of his bad luck never seemed to leave him for an instant. He would break long silences to exclaim, apropos of nothing, 'It's hell when yer clo'es begin to go up de spout, eh?' or 'Dat tay in de spike ain't tay, it's piss,' as though there was nothing else in the world to think about. And he had a low, worm-like envy of anyone who was better off — not of the rich, for they were beyond his social horizon, but of men in work. He pined for work as an artist pines to be famous. If he saw an old man working he would say bitterly, 'Look at dat old — keepin' able-bodied men out o' work'; or if it was a boy, 'It's dem young devils what's takin' de bread out of our mouths.' And all foreigners to him were 'dem bloody dagoes' — for, according to his theory, foreigners were responsible for unemployment.

He looked at women with a mixture of longing and hatred. Young, pretty women were too much above him to enter into his ideas, but his mouth watered at prostitutes. A couple of scarlet-lipped old creatures would go past; Paddy's face would flush pale pink, and he would turn and stare hungrily after the women. 'Tarts!' he would murmur, like a boy at a sweetshop window. He told me once that he had not had to do with a woman for two years — since he had lost his job, that is — and he had forgotten that one could aim higher than prostitutes. He had the regular character of a tramp — abject, envious, a jackal's character.

Nevertheless, he was a good fellow, generous by nature and capable of sharing his last crust with a friend; indeed he did literally share his last crust with me more than once. He was probably capable of work too, if he had been well fed for a few months. But two years of bread and margarine had lowered his standards hopelessly. He had lived on this filthy imitation of food till his own mind and body were compounded of inferior stuff. It was malnutrition and not any native vice that had destroyed his manhood.

CHAPTER 29

On the way to Edbury I told Paddy that I had a friend from whom I could be sure of getting money, and suggested going straight into London rather than face another night in the spike. But Paddy had not been in Edbury spike recently, and, tramp-like, he would not waste a night's free lodging. We arranged to go into London the next morning. I had only a halfpenny, but Paddy had two shillings, which would get us a bed each and a few cups of tea.

The Edbury spike did not differ much from the one at Romton. The worst feature was that all tobacco was confiscated at the gate, and we were warned that any man caught smoking would be turned out at once. Under the Vagrancy Act tramps can be prosecuted for smoking in the spike — in fact, they can be prosecuted for almost anything; but the authorities generally save the trouble of a prosecution by turning disobedient men out of doors. There was no work to do, and the cells were fairly comfortable. We slept two in a cell, 'one up, one down' — that is, one on a wooden shelf and one on the floor, with straw palliasses and plenty of blankets, dirty but not verminous. The food was the same as at Romton, except that we had tea instead of cocoa. One could get extra tea in the morning, as the Tramp Major was selling it at a halfpenny a mug, illicitly no doubt. We were each given a hunk of bread and cheese to take away for our midday meal.

When we got into London we had eight hours to kill before the lodging-houses opened. It is curious how one does not notice things. I had been in London innumerable times, and yet till that day I had never noticed one of the worst things about London — the fact that it costs money even to sit down. In Paris, if you had no money and could not find a public bench, you would sit on the pavement. Heaven knows what sitting on the pavement would lead to in London — prison, probably. By four we had stood five hours, and our feet seemed red-hot from the hardness of the stones. We were hungry, having eaten our ration as soon as we left the spike, and I was out of tobacco — it mattered less to Paddy, who picked up cigarette ends. We tried two churches and found them locked. Then we tried a

public library, but there were no seats in it. As a last hope Paddy suggested trying a Rowton House; by the rules they would not let us in before seven, but we might slip in unnoticed. We walked up to the magnificent doorway (the Rowton Houses really are magnificent) and very casually, trying to look like regular lodgers, began to stroll in. Instantly a man lounging in the doorway, a sharp-faced fellow, evidently in some position of authority, barred the way.

'You men sleep 'ere last night?'

'No.'

'Then — off.'

We obeyed, and stood two more hours on the street corner. It was unpleasant, but it taught me not to use the expression 'street corner loafer', so I gained something from it.

At six we went to a Salvation Army shelter. We could not book beds till eight and it was not certain that there would be any vacant, but an official, who called us 'Brother', let us in on the condition that we paid for two cups of tea. The main hall of the shelter was a great white-washed barn of a place, oppressively clean and bare, with no fires. Two hundred decentish, rather subdued-looking people were sitting packed on long wooden benches. One or two officers in uniform prowled up and down. On the wall were pictures of General Booth, and notices prohibiting cooking, drinking, spitting, swearing, quarrelling, and gambling. As a specimen of these notices, here is one that I copied word for word:

Any man found gambling or playing cards will be expelled and will not be admitted under any circumstances.

A reward will be given for information leading to the discovery of such persons.

The officers in charge appeal to all lodgers to assist them in keeping this hostel free from the DETESTABLE EVIL OF GAMBLING.

'Gambling or playing cards' is a delightful phrase. To my eye these Salvation Army shelters, though clean, are far drearier than the worst of the common lodging-houses. There is such a hopelessness about some of the people there — decent, broken-down types who have pawned their collars but are still trying for office jobs. Coming to a Salvation Army shelter, where it is at least clean, is their last

clutch at respectability. At the next table to me were two foreigners, dressed in rags but manifestly gentlemen. They were playing chess verbally, not even writing down the moves. One of them was blind, and I heard them say that they had been saving up for a long time to buy a board, price half a crown, but could never manage it. Here and there were clerks out of work, pallid and moody. Among a group of them a tall, thin, deadly pale young man was talking excitedly. He thumped his fist on the table and boasted in a strange, feverish style. When the officers were out of hearing he broke out into startling blasphemies:

'I tell you what, boys, I'm going to get that job tomorrow. I'm not one of your bloody down-on-the-knee brigade; I can look after myself. Look at that — notice there! "The Lord will provide!" A bloody lot He's ever provided me with. You don't catch me trusting to the — Lord. You leave it to me, boys. I'M GOING TO GET THAT JOB,' etc. etc.

I watched him, struck by the wild, agitated way in which he talked; he seemed hysterical, or perhaps a little drunk. An hour later I went into a small room, apart from the main hall, which was intended for reading. It had no books or papers in it, so few of the lodgers went there. As I opened the door I saw the young clerk in there all alone; he was on his knees, PRAYING. Before I shut the door again I had time to see his face, and it looked agonized. Quite suddenly I realized, from the expression of his face, that he was starving.

The charge for beds was eightpence. Paddy and I had fivepence left, and we spent it at the 'bar', where food was cheap, though not so cheap as in some common lodging-houses. The tea appeared to be made with tea DUST, which I fancy had been given to the Salvation Army in charity, though they sold it at threehalfpence a cup. It was foul stuff. At ten o'clock an officer marched round the hall blowing a whistle. Immediately everyone stood up.

'What's this for?' I said to Paddy, astonished.

'Dat means you has to go off to bed. An' you has to look sharp about it, too.'

Obediently as sheep, the whole two hundred men trooped off to bed, under the command of the officers.

The dormitory was a great attic like a barrack room, with sixty or

seventy beds in it. They were clean and tolerably comfortable, but very narrow and very close together, so that one breathed straight into one's neighbour's face. Two officers slept in the room, to see that there was no smoking and no talking after lights-out. Paddy and I had scarcely a wink of sleep, for there was a man near us who had some nervous trouble, shellshock perhaps, which made him cry out 'Pip!' at irregular intervals. It was a loud, startling noise, something like the toot of a small motor-horn. You never knew when it was coming, and it was a sure preventer of sleep. It appeared that Pip, as the others called him, slept regularly in the shelter, and he must have kept ten or twenty people awake every night. He was an example of the kind of thing that prevents one from ever getting enough sleep when men are herded as they are in these lodging-houses.

At seven another whistle blew, and the officers went round shaking those who did not get up at once. Since then I have slept in a number of Salvation Army shelters, and found that, though the different houses vary a little, this semi-military discipline is the same in all of them. They are certainly cheap, but they are too like workhouses for my taste. In some of them there is even a compulsory religious service once or twice a week, which the lodgers must attend or leave the house. The fact is that the Salvation Army are so in the habit of thinking themselves a charitable body that they cannot even run a lodging-house without making it stink of charity.

At ten I went to B.'s office and asked him to lend me a pound. He gave me two pounds and told me to come again when necessary, so that Paddy and I were free of money troubles for a week at least. We loitered the day in Trafalgar Square, looking for a friend of Paddy's who never turned up, and at night went to a lodging-house in a back alley near the Strand. The charge was elevenpence, but it was a dark, evil-smelling place, and a notorious haunt of the 'nancy boys'. Downstairs, in the murky kitchen, three ambiguous-looking youths in smartish blue suits were sitting on a bench apart, ignored by the other lodgers. I suppose they were 'nancy boys'. They looked the same type as the apache boys one sees in Paris, except that they wore no side-whiskers. In front of the fire a fully dressed man and a stark-naked man were bargaining. They were newspaper sellers. The dressed man was selling his clothes to the naked man. He said:

‘‘Ere y’are, the best rig-out you ever ‘ad. A tosheroon [half a crown] for the coat, two ‘ogs for the trousers, one and a tanner for the boots, and a ‘og for the cap and scarf. That’s seven bob.’

‘You got a ‘ope! I’ll give yer one and a tanner for the coat, a ‘og for the trousers, and two ‘ogs for the rest. That’s four and a tanner.’

‘Take the ‘ole lot for five and a tanner, chum.’

‘Right y’are, off with ‘em. I got to get out to sell my late edition.’

The clothed man stripped, and in three minutes their positions were reversed; the naked man dressed, and the other kilted with a sheet of the Daily Mail.

The dormitory was dark and close, with fifteen beds in it. There was a horrible hot reek of urine, so beastly that at first one tried to breathe in small, shallow puffs, not filling one’s lungs to the bottom. As I lay down in bed a man loomed out of the darkness, leant over me and began babbling in an educated, half-drunken voice:

‘An old public schoolboy, what? [He had heard me say something to Paddy.] Don’t meet many of the old school here. I am an old Etonian. You know — twenty years hence this weather and all that.’ He began to quaver out the Eton boating-song, not untunefully:

Jolly boating weather,
And a hay harvest —

‘Stop that — noise!’ shouted several lodgers.

‘Low types,’ said the old Etonian, ‘very low types. Funny sort of place for you and me, eh? Do you know what my friends say to me? They say, “M — , you are past redemption.” Quite true, I AM past redemption. I’ve come down in the world; not like these — s here, who couldn’t come down if they tried. We chaps who have come down ought to hang together a bit. Youth will be still in our faces — you know. May I offer you a drink?’

He produced a bottle of cherry brandy, and at the same moment lost his balance and fell heavily across my legs. Paddy, who was undressing, pulled him upright.

‘Get back to yer bed, you silly ole — !’

The old Etonian walked unsteadily to his bed and crawled under

the sheets with all his clothes on, even his boots. Several times in the night I heard him murmuring, 'M — , you are past redemption,' as though the phrase appealed to him. In the morning he was lying asleep fully dressed, with the bottle clasped in his arms. He was a man of about fifty, with a refined, worn face, and, curiously enough, quite fashionably dressed. It was queer to see his good patent-leather shoes sticking out of that filthy bed. It occurred to me, too, that the cherry brandy must have cost the equivalent of a fortnight's lodging, so he could not have been seriously hard up. Perhaps he frequented common lodging-houses in search of the 'nancy boys'.

The beds were not more than two feet apart. About midnight I woke up to find that the man next to me was trying to steal the money from beneath my pillow. He was pretending to be asleep while he did it, sliding his hand under the pillow as gently as a rat. In the morning I saw that he was a hunchback, with long, apelike arms. I told Paddy about the attempted theft. He laughed and said:

'Christ! You got to get used to dat. Desc lodgin' houses is full o' thieves. In some houses dere's nothin' safe but to sleep wid all yer clo'es on. I seen 'em steal a wooden leg off a cripple before now. Once I see a man — fourteen-stone man he was — come into a lodgin'-house wid four pound ten. He puts it under his mattress. "Now," he says, "any — dat touches dat money does it over my body," he says. But dey done him all de same. In de mornin' he woke up on de floor. Four fellers had took his mattress by de corners an' lifted him off as light as a feather. He never saw his four pound ten again.'

CHAPTER 30

The next morning we began looking once more for Paddy's friend, who was called Bozo, and was a screever — that is, a pavement artist. Addresses did not exist in Paddy's world, but he had a vague idea that Bozo might be found in Lambeth, and in the end we ran across him on the Embankment, where he had established himself not far from Waterloo Bridge. He was kneeling on the pavement with a box of chalks, copying a sketch of Winston Churchill from a penny note-book. The likeness was not at all bad. Bozo was a small, dark, hook-nosed man, with curly hair growing low on his head. His right leg was dreadfully deformed, the foot being twisted heel forward in a way horrible to see. From his appearance one could have taken him for a Jew, but he used to deny this vigorously. He spoke of his hooknose as 'Roman', and was proud of his resemblance to some Roman Emperor — it was Vespasian, I think.

Bozo had a strange way of talking, Cockneyfied and yet very lucid and expressive. It was as though he had read good books but had never troubled to correct Us grammar. For a while Paddy and I stayed on the Embankment, talking, and Bozo gave us an account of the screeving trade. I repeat what he said more or less in his own words.

'I'm what they call a serious screever. I don't draw in blackboard chalks like these others, I use proper colours the same as what painters use; bloody expensive they are, especially the reds. I use five bobs' worth of colours in a long day, and never less than two bobs' worth. Cartoons is my line — you know, politics and cricket and that. Look here' — he showed me his notebook— 'here's likenesses of all the political blokes, what I've copied from the papers. I have a different cartoon every day. For instance, when the Budget was on I had one of Winston trying to push an elephant marked "Debt", and underneath I wrote, "Will he budge it?" See? You can have cartoons about any of the parties, but you mustn't put anything in favour of Socialism, because the police won't stand it. Once I did a cartoon of a boa constrictor marked Capital swallowing a rabbit marked Labour. The copper came along and saw it, and he says, "You rub that out,

and look sharp about it," he says. I had to rub it out. The copper's got the right to move you on for loitering, and it's no good giving them a back answer.'

[* Pavement artists buy their colours in the form of powder, and work them into cakes in condensed milk]

I asked Bozo what one could earn at screeving. He said:

'This time of year, when it don't rain, I take about three quid between Friday and Sunday — people get their wages Fridays, you see. I can't work when it rains; the colours get washed off straight away. Take the year round, I make about a pound a week, because you can't do much in the winter. Boat Race day, and Cup Final day, I've took as much as four pounds. But you have to CUT it out of them, you know; you don't take a bob if you just sit and look at them. A halfpenny's the usual drop [gift], and you don't get even that unless you give them a bit of backchat. Once they've answered you they feel ashamed not to give you a drop. The best thing's to keep changing your picture, because when they see you drawing they'll stop and watch you. The trouble is, the beggars scatter as soon as you turn round with the hat. You really want a nobber [assistant] at this game. You keep at work and get a crowd watching you, and the nobber comes casual-like round the back of them. They don't know he's the nobber. Then suddenly he pulls his cap off, and you got them between two fires like. You'll never get a drop off real toffs. It's shabby sort of blokes you get most off, and foreigners. I've had even sixpences off Japs, and blackies, and that. They're not so bloody mean as what an Englishman is. Another thing to remember is to keep your money covered up, except perhaps a penny in the hat. People won't give you anything if they see you got a bob or two already.'

Bozo had the deepest contempt for the other screevers on the Embankment. He called them 'the salmon platers'. At that time there was a screever almost every twenty-five yards along the Embankment — twenty-five yards being the recognized minimum between pitches. Bozo contemptuously pointed out an old white-bearded screever fifty yards away.

'You see that silly old fool? He's bin doing the same picture every day for ten years. "A faithful friend" he calls it. It's of a dog pulling a

child out of the water. The silly old bastard can't draw any better than a child of ten. He's learned just that one picture by rule of thumb, like you learn to put a puzzle together. There's a lot of that sort about here. They come pinching my ideas sometimes; but I don't care; the silly — s can't think of anything for themselves, so I'm always ahead of them. The whole thing with cartoons is being up to date. Once a child got its head stuck in the railings of Chelsea Bridge. Well, I heard about it, and my cartoon was on the pavement before they'd got the child's head out of the railings. Prompt, I am.'

Bozo seemed an interesting man, and I was anxious to see more of him. That evening I went down to the Embankment to meet him, as he had arranged to take Paddy and myself to a lodging-house south of the river. Bozo washed his pictures off the pavement and counted his takings — it was about sixteen shillings, of which he said twelve or thirteen would be profit. We walked down into Lambeth. Bozo limped slowly, with a queer crablike gait, half sideways, dragging his smashed foot behind him. He carried a stick in each hand and slung his box of colours over his shoulder. As we were crossing the bridge he stopped in one of the alcoves to rest. He fell silent for a minute or two, and to my surprise I saw that he was looking at the stars. He touched my arm and pointed to the sky with his stick.

'Say, will you look at Aldebaran! Look at the colour. Like a — great blood orange!'

From the way he spoke he might have been an art critic in a picture gallery. I was astonished. I confessed that I did not know which Aldebaran was — indeed, I had never even noticed that the stars were of different colours. Bozo began to give me some elementary hints on astronomy, pointing out-the chief constellations. He seemed concerned at my ignorance. I said to him, surprised:

'You seem to know a lot about stars.'

'Not a great lot. I know a bit, though. I got two letters from the Astronomer Royal thanking me for writing about meteors. Now and again I go out at night and watch for meteors. The stars are a free show; it don't cost anything to use your eyes.'

'What a good idea! I should never have thought of it.'

'Well, you got to take an interest in something. It don't follow that because a man's on the road he can't think of anything but tea-

and-two-slices.'

'But isn't it very hard to take an interest in things — things like stars — living this life?'

'Screeving, you mean? Not necessarily. It don't need turn you into a bloody rabbit — that is, not if you set your mind to it.'

'It seems to have that effect on most people.'

'Of course. Look at Paddy — a tea-swilling old moocher, only fit to scrounge for fag-ends. That's the way most of them go. I despise them. But you don't NEED to get like that. If you've got any education, it don't matter to you if you're on the road for the rest of your life.'

'Well, I've found just the contrary,' I said. 'It seems to me that when you take a man's money away he's fit for nothing from that moment.'

'No, not necessarily. If you set yourself to it, you can live the same life, rich or poor. You can still keep on with your books and your ideas. You just got to say to yourself, "I'm a free man in HERE"' — he tapped his forehead— 'and you're all right.'

Bozo talked further in the same strain, and I listened with attention. He seemed a very unusual screever, and he was, moreover, the first person I had heard maintain that poverty did not matter. I saw a good deal of him during the next few days, for several times it rained and he could not work. He told me the history of his life, and it was a curious one.

The son of a bankrupt bookseller, he had gone to work as a house-painter at eighteen, and then served three years in France and India during the war. After the war he had found a house-painting job in Paris, and had stayed there several years. France suited him better than England (he despised the English), and he had been doing well in Paris, saving money, and engaged to a French girl. One day the girl was crushed to death under the wheels of an omnibus. Bozo went on the drink for a week, and then returned to work, rather shaky; the same morning he fell from a stage on which he was working, forty feet on to the pavement, and smashed his right foot to pulp. For some reason he received only sixty pounds compensation. He returned to England, spent his money in looking for jobs, tried hawking books in Middlesex Street market, then tried selling toys from a tray, and

finally settled down as a screever. He had lived hand to mouth ever since, half starved throughout the winter, and often sleeping in the spike or on the Embankment.

When I knew him he owned nothing but the clothes he stood up in, and his drawing materials and a few books. The clothes were the usual beggar's rags, but he wore a collar and tie, of which he was rather proud. The collar, a year or more old, was constantly 'going' round the neck, and Bozo used to patch it with bits cut from the tail of his shirt so that the shirt had scarcely any tail left. His damaged leg was getting worse and would probably have to be amputated, and his knees, from kneeling on the stones, had pads of skin on them as thick as boot-soles. There was, clearly, no future for him but beggary and a death in the workhouse.

With all this, he had neither fear, nor regret, nor shame, nor self-pity. He had faced his position, and made a philosophy for himself. Being a beggar, he said, was not his fault, and he refused either to have any compunction about it or to let it trouble him. He was the enemy of society, and quite ready to take to crime if he saw a good opportunity. He refused on principle to be thrifty. In the summer he saved nothing, spending his surplus earnings on drink, as he did not care about women. If he was penniless when winter came on, then society must look after him. He was ready to extract every penny he could from charity, provided that he was not expected to say thank you for it. He avoided religious charities, however, for he said it stuck in his throat to sing hymns for buns. He had various other points of honour; for instance, it was his boast that never in his life, even when starving, had he picked up a cigarette end. He considered himself in a class above the ordinary run of beggars, who, he said, were an abject lot, without even the decency to be ungrateful.

He spoke French passably, and had read some of Zola's novels, all Shakespeare's plays, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, and a number of essays. He could describe his adventures in words that one remembered. For instance, speaking of funerals, he said to me:

'Have you-ever seen a corpse burned? I have, in India. They put the old chap on the fire, and the next moment I almost jumped out of my skin, because he'd started kicking. It was only his muscles contracting in the heat — still, it give me a turn. Well, he wriggled

about for a bit like a kipper on hot coals, and then his belly blew up and went off with a bang you could have heard fifty yards away. It fair put me against cremation.'

Or, again, apropos of his accident:

'The doctor says to me, "You fell on one foot, my man. And bloody lucky for you you didn't fall on both feet," he says. "Because if you had of fallen on both feet you'd have shut up like a bloody concertina, and your thigh bones'd be sticking out of your ears!"'

Clearly the phrase was not the doctor's but Bozo's own. He had a gift for phrases. He had managed to keep his brain intact and alert, and so nothing could make him succumb to poverty. He might be ragged and cold, or even starving, but so long as he could read, think, and watch for meteors, he was, as he said, free in his own mind.

He was an embittered atheist (the sort of atheist who does not so much disbelieve in God as personally dislike Him), and took a sort of pleasure in thinking that human affairs would never improve. Sometimes, he said, when sleeping on the Embankment, it had consoled him to look up at Mars or Jupiter and think that there were probably Embankment sleepers there. He had a curious theory about this. Life on earth, he said, is harsh because the planet is poor in the necessities of existence. Mars, with its cold climate and scanty water, must be far poorer, and life correspondingly harsher. Whereas on earth you are merely imprisoned for stealing sixpence, on Mars you are probably boiled alive. This thought cheered Bozo, I do not know why. He was a very exceptional man.

CHAPTER 31

The charge at Bozo's lodging-house was ninepence a night. It was a large, crowded place, with accommodation for five hundred men, and a well-known rendezvous of tramps, beggars, and petty criminals. All races, even black and white, mixed in it on terms of equality. There were Indians there, and when I spoke to one of them in bad Urdu he addressed me as 'turn' — a thing to make one shudder, if it had been in India. We had got below the range of colour prejudice. One had glimpses of curious lives. Old 'Grandpa', a tramp of seventy who made his living, or a great part of it, by collecting cigarette ends and selling the tobacco at threepence an ounce. 'The Doctor' — he was a real doctor, who had been struck off the register for some offence, and besides selling newspapers gave medical advice at a few pence a time. A little Chittagonian lascar, barefoot and starving, who had deserted his ship and wandered for days through London, so vague and helpless that he did not even know the name of the city he was in — he thought it was Liverpool, until I told him. A begging-letter writer, a friend of Bozo's, who wrote pathetic appeals for aid to pay for his wife's funeral, and, when a letter had taken effect, blew himself out with huge solitary gorges of bread and margarine. He was a nasty, hyena-like creature. I talked to him and found that, like most swindlers, he believed a great part of his own lies. The lodging-house was an Alsatia for types like these.

While I was with Bozo he taught me something about the technique of London begging. There is more in it than one might suppose. Beggars vary greatly, and there is a sharp social line between those who merely cadge and those who attempt to give some value for money. The amounts that one can earn by the different 'gags' also vary. The stories in the Sunday papers about beggars who die with two thousand pounds sewn into their trousers are, of course, lies; but the better-class beggars do have runs of luck, when they earn a living wage for weeks at a time. The most prosperous beggars are street acrobats and street photographers. On a good pitch — a theatre queue, for instance — a street acrobat will often earn five pounds a week. Street photographers can earn about

the same, but they are dependent on fine weather. They have a cunning dodge to stimulate trade. When they see a likely victim approaching one of them runs behind the camera and pretends to take a photograph. Then as the victim reaches them, they exclaim:

'There y'are, sir, took yer photo lovely. That'll be a bob.'

'But I never asked you to take it,' protests the victim.

'What, you didn't want it took? Why, we thought you signalled with your 'and. Well, there's a plate wasted! That's cost us sixpence, that 'as.'

At this the victim usually takes pity and says he will have the photo after all. The photographers examine the plate and say that it is spoiled, and that they will take a fresh one free of charge. Of course, they have not really taken the first photo; and so, if the victim refuses, they waste nothing.

Organ-grinders, like acrobats, are considered artists rather than beggars. An organ-grinder named Shorty, a friend of Bozo's, told me all about his trade. He and his mate 'worked' the coffee-shops and public-houses round Whitechapel and the Commercial Road. It is a mistake to think that organ-grinders earn their living in the street; nine-tenths of their money is taken in coffee-shops and pubs — only the cheap pubs, for they are not allowed into the good-class ones. Shorty's procedure was to stop outside a pub and play one tune, after which his mate, who had a wooden leg and could excite compassion, went in and passed round the hat. It was a point of honour with Shorty always to play another tune after receiving the 'drop' — an encore, as it were; the idea being that he was a genuine entertainer and not merely paid to go away. He and his mate took two or three pounds a week between them, but, as they had to pay fifteen shillings a week for the hire of the organ, they only averaged a pound a week each. They were on the streets from eight in the morning till ten at night, and later on Saturdays.

Screevers can sometimes be called artists, sometimes not. Bozo introduced me to one who was a 'real' artist — that is, he had studied art in Paris and submitted pictures to the Salon in his day. His line was copies of Old Masters, which he did marvellously, considering that he was drawing on stone. He told me how he began as a screever:

‘My wife and kids Were starving. I was walking home late at night, with a lot of drawings I’d been taking round the dealers, and wondering how the devil to raise a bob or two. Then, in the Strand, I saw a fellow kneeling on the pavement drawing, and people giving him pennies. As I came past he got up and went into a pub. “Damn it,” I thought, “if he can make money at that, so can I.” So on the impulse I knelt down and began drawing with his chalks. Heaven knows how I came to do it; I must have been lightheaded with hunger. The curious thing was that I’d never used pastels before; I had to learn the technique as I went along. Well, people began to stop and say that my drawing wasn’t bad, arid they gave me ninepence between them. At this moment the other fellow came out of the pub. “What in — are you doing on my pitch?” he said. I explained that I was hungry and had to earn something. “Oh,” said he, “come and have a pint with me.” So I had a pint, and since that day I’ve been a screever. I make a pound a week. You can’t keep six kids on a pound a week, but luckily my wife earns a bit taking in sewing.

‘The worst thing in this life is the cold, and the next worst is the interference you have to put up with. At first, not knowing any better, I used sometimes to copy a nude on the pavement. The first I did was outside St Martin’s-in-the-Fields church. A fellow in black — I suppose he was a churchwarden or something — came out in a tearing rage. “Do you think we can have that obscenity outside God’s holy house?” he cried. So I had to wash it out. It was a copy of Botticelli’s Venus. Another time I copied the same picture on the Embankment. A policeman passing looked at it, and then, without a word, walked on to it and rubbed it out with his great flat feet.’

Bozo told the same tale of police interference. At the time when I was with him there had been a case of ‘immoral conduct’ in Hyde Park, in which the police had behaved rather badly. Bozo produced a cartoon of Hyde Park with policemen concealed in the trees, and the legend, ‘Puzzle, find the policemen.’ I pointed out to him how much more telling it would be to put, ‘Puzzle, find the immoral conduct,’ but Bozo would not hear of it. He said that any policeman who saw it would move him on, and he would lose his pitch for good.

Below screevers come the people who sing hymns, or sell matches, or bootlaces, or envelopes containing a few grains of

lavender — called, euphemistically, perfume. All these people are frankly beggars, exploiting an appearance of misery, and none of them takes on an average more than half a crown a day. The reason why they have to pretend to sell matches and so forth instead of begging outright is that this is demanded by the absurd English laws about begging. As the law now stands, if you approach a stranger and ask him for twopence, he can call a policeman and get you seven days for begging. But if you make the air hideous by droning 'Nearer, my God, to Thee,' or scrawl some chalk daubs on the pavement, or stand about with a tray of matches — in short, if you make a nuisance of yourself — you are held to be following a legitimate trade and not begging. Match-selling and street-singing are simply legalized crimes. Not profitable crimes, however; there is not a singer or match-seller in London who can be sure of 50 pounds a year — a poor return for standing eighty-four hours a week on the kerb, with the cars grazing your backside.

It is worth saying something about the social position of beggars, for when one has consorted with them, and found that they are ordinary human beings, one cannot help being struck by the curious attitude that society takes towards them. People seem to feel that there is some essential difference between beggars and ordinary 'working' men. They are a race apart — outcasts, like criminals and prostitutes. Working men 'work', beggars do not 'work'; they are parasites, worthless in their very nature. It is taken for granted that a beggar does not 'earn' his living, as a bricklayer or a literary critic 'earns' his. He is a mere social excrescence, tolerated because we live in a humane age, but essentially despicable.

Yet if one looks closely one sees that there is no ESSENTIAL difference between a beggar's livelihood and that of numberless respectable people. Beggars do not work, it is said; but, then, what is WORK? A navvy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless, of course — but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless. And as a social type a beggar compares well with scores of others. He is honest compared with the sellers of most patent medicines, high-minded compared with a

Sunday newspaper proprietor, amiable compared with a hire-purchase tout — in short, a parasite, but a fairly harmless parasite. He seldom extracts more than a bare living from the community, and, what should justify him according to our ethical ideas, he pays for it over and over in suffering. I do not think there is anything about a beggar that sets him in a different class from other people, or gives most modern men the right to despise him.

Then the question arises, Why are beggars despised? — for they are despised, universally. I believe it is for the simple reason that they fail to earn a decent living. In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that it shall be profitable. In all the modem talk about energy, efficiency, social service and the rest of it, what meaning is there except 'Get money, get it legally, and get a lot of it'? Money has become the grand test of virtue. By this test beggars fail, and for this they are despised. If one could earn even ten pounds a week at begging, it would become a respectable profession immediately. A beggar, looked at realistically, is simply a businessman, getting his living, like other businessmen, in the way that comes to hand. He has not, more than most modem people, sold his honour; he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich.

CHAPTER 32

I want to put in some notes, as short as possible, on London slang and swearing. These (omitting the ones that everyone knows) are some of the cant words now used in London:

A gagger — beggar or street performer of any kind. A moocher — one who begs outright, without pretence of doing a trade. A nobbier — one who collects pennies for a beggar. A chanter — a street singer. A clodhopper — a street dancer. A mugfaker — a street photographer. A glimmer — one who watches vacant motor-cars. A gee (or jee — it is pronounced jee) — the accomplice of a cheapjack, who stimulates trade by pretending to buy something. A split — a detective. A flattie — a policeman. A dideki — a gypsy. A toby — a tramp.

A drop — money given to a beggar. Fuhkum — lavender or other perfume sold in envelopes. A boozer — a public-house. A slang — a hawker's licence. A kip — a place to sleep in, or a night's lodging. Smoke — London. A judy — a woman. The spike — the casual ward. The lump — the casual ward. A tosheroon — a half-crown. A deaner — a shilling. A hog — a shilling. A sprowsie — a sixpence. Clods — coppers. A drum — a billy can. Shackles — soup. A chat — a louse. Hard-up — tobacco made from cigarette ends. A stick or cane — a burglar's jemmy. A peter — a safe. A bly — a burglar's oxy-acetylene blow-lamp.

To bawl — to suck or swallow. To knock off — to steal. To skipper — to sleep in the open.

About half of these words are in the larger dictionaries. It is interesting to guess at the derivation of some of them, though one or two — for instance, 'funkum' and 'tosheroon' — are beyond guessing. 'Deaner' presumably comes from. 'denier'. 'Glimmer' (with the verb 'to glim') may have something to do with the old word 'glim', meaning a light, or another old word 'glim', meaning a glimpse; but it is an instance of the formation of new words, for in its present sense it can hardly be older than motor-cars. 'Gee' is a curious word; conceivably it has arisen out of 'gee', meaning horse, in the sense of stalking horse. The derivation of 'screever' is

mysterious. It must come ultimately from scribo, but there has been no similar word in English for the past hundred and fifty years; nor can it have come directly from the French, for pavement artists are unknown in France. 'Judy' and 'bawl' are East End words, not found west of Tower Bridge. 'Smoke' is a word used only by tramps. 'Kip' is Danish. Till quite recently the word 'doss' was used in this sense, but it is now quite obsolete.

London slang and dialect seem to change very rapidly. The old London accent described by Dickens and Surtees, with v for w and w for v and so forth, has now vanished utterly. The Cockney accent as we know it seems to have come up in the 'forties (it is first mentioned in an American book, Herman Melville's WHITE JACKET), and Cockney is already changing; there are few people now who say 'fice' for 'face', 'nawce' for 'nice' and so forth as consistently as they did twenty years ago. The slang changes together with the accent. Twenty-five or thirty years ago, for instance, the 'rhyming slang' was all the rage in London. In the 'rhyming slang' everything was named by something rhyming with it — a 'hit or miss' for a kiss, 'plates of meat' for feet, etc. It was so common that it was even reproduced in novels; now it is almost extinct. Perhaps all the words I have mentioned above will have vanished in another twenty years.

[* It survives in certain abbreviations, such as 'use your twopenny' or 'use your head.' 'Twopenny' is arrived at like this: head — loaf of bread — twopenny loaf — twopenny]

The swear words also change — or, at any rate, they are subject to fashions. For example, twenty years ago the London working classes habitually used the word 'bloody'. Now they have abandoned it utterly, though novelists still represent them as using it. No born Londoner (it is different with people of Scotch or Irish origin) now says 'bloody', unless he is a man of some education. The word has, in fact, moved up in the social scale and ceased to be a swear word for the purposes of the working classes. The current London adjective, now tacked on to every noun, is —— . No doubt in time —— , like 'bloody', will find its way into the drawing-room and be replaced by some other word.

The whole business of swearing, especially English swearing, is

mysterious. Of its very nature swearing is as irrational as magic — indeed, it is a species of magic. But there is also a paradox about it, namely this: Our intention in swearing is to shock and wound, which we do by mentioning something that should be kept secret — usually something to do with the sexual functions. But the strange thing is that when a word is well established as a swear word, it seems to lose its original meaning; that is, it loses the thing that made it into a swear word. A word becomes an oath because it means a certain thing, and, because it has become an oath, it ceases to mean that thing. For example — . The Londoners do not now use, or very seldom use, this word in its original meaning; it is on their lips from morning till night, but it is a mere expletive and means nothing. Similarly with — , which is rapidly losing its original sense. One can think of similar instances in French — for example — , which is now a quite meaningless expletive.

The word — , also, is still used occasionally in Paris, but the people who use it, or most of them, have no idea of what it once meant. The rule seems to be that words accepted as swear words have some magical character, which sets them apart and makes them useless for ordinary conversation.

Words used as insults seem to be governed by the same paradox as swear words. A word becomes an insult, one would suppose, because it means something bad; but m practice its insult-value has little to do with its actual meaning. For example, the most bitter insult one can offer to a Londoner is ‘bastard’ — which, taken for what it means, is hardly an insult at all. And the worst insult to a woman, either in London or Paris, is ‘cow’; a name which might even be a compliment, for cows are among the most likeable of animals. Evidently a word is an insult simply because it is meant as an insult, without reference to its dictionary meaning; words, especially swear words, being what public opinion chooses to make them. In this connexion it is interesting to see how a swear word can change character by crossing a frontier. In England you can print ‘JE M’EN FOILS’ without protest from anybody. In France you have to print it ‘JE M’EN F— ‘. Or, as another example, take the word ‘barnshoot’ — a corruption of the Hindustani word BAHINCHUT. A vile and unforgivable insult in India, this word is a piece of gentle

badinage in England. I have even seen it in a school text-book; it was in one of Aristophanes' plays, and the annotator suggested it as a rendering of some gibberish spoken by a Persian ambassador. Presumably the annotator knew what BAHINCHUT meant. But, because it was a foreign word, it had lost its magical swear-word quality and could be printed.

One other thing is noticeable about swearing in London, and that is that the men do not usually swear in front of the women. In Paris it is quite different. A Parisian workman may prefer to suppress an oath in front of a woman, but he is not at all scrupulous about it, and the women themselves swear freely. The Londoners are more polite, or more squeamish, in this matter.

These are a few notes that I have set down more or less at random. It is a pity that someone capable of dealing with the subject does not keep a year-book of London slang and swearing, registering the changes accurately. It might throw useful light upon the formation, development, and obsolescence of words.

CHAPTER 33

The two pounds that B. had given me lasted about ten days. That it lasted so long was due to Paddy, who had learned parsimony on the road and considered even one sound meal a day a wild extravagance. Food, to him, had come to mean simply bread and margarine — the eternal tea-and-two-slices, which will cheat hunger for an hour or two. He taught me how to live, food, bed, tobacco, and all, at the rate of half a crown a day. And he managed to earn a few extra shillings by 'glimming' in the evenings. It was a precarious job, because illegal, but it brought in a little and eked out our money.

One morning we tried for a job as sandwich men. We went at five to an alley-way behind some offices, but there was already a queue of thirty or forty men waiting, and after two hours we were told that there was no work for us. We had not missed much, for sandwich men have an unenviable job. They are paid about three shillings a day for ten hours' work — it is hard work, especially in windy weather, and there is no skulking, for an inspector comes round frequently to see that the men are on their beat. To add to their troubles, they are only engaged by the day, or sometimes for three days, never weekly, so that they have to wait hours for their job every morning. The number of unemployed men who are ready to do the work makes them powerless to fight for better treatment. The job all sandwich men covet is distributing handbills, which is paid for at the same rate. When you see a man distributing handbills you can do him a good turn by taking one, for he goes off duty when he has distributed all his bills.

Meanwhile we went on with the lodging-house life — a squalid, eventless life of crushing boredom. For days together there was nothing to do but sit in the underground kitchen, reading yesterday's newspaper, or, when one could get hold of it, a back number of the UNION JACK. It rained a great deal at this time, and everyone who came in Steamed, so that the kitchen stank horribly. One's only excitement was the periodical tea-and-two-slices. I do not know how many men are living this life in London — it must be thousands at the least. As to Paddy, it was actually the best life he had known for

two years past. His interludes from tramping, the times when he had somehow laid hands on a few shillings, had all been like this; the tramping itself had been slightly worse. Listening to his whimpering voice — he was always whimpering when he was not eating — one realized what torture unemployment must be to him. People are wrong when they think that an unemployed man only worries about losing his wages; on the contrary, an illiterate man, with the work habit in his bones, needs work even more than he needs money. An educated man can put up with enforced idleness, which is one of the worst evils of poverty. But a man like Paddy, with no means of filling up time, is as miserable out of work as a dog on the chain. That is why it is such nonsense to pretend that those who have 'come down in the world' are to be pitied above all others. The man who really merits pity is the man who has been down from the start, and faces poverty with a blank, resourceless mind.

It was a dull rime, and little of it stays in my mind, except for talks with Bozo. Once the lodging-house was invaded by a slumming-party. Paddy and I had been out, and, coming back in the afternoon, we heard sounds of music downstairs. We went down to find three gentle-people, sleekly dressed, holding a religious service in our kitchen. They Were a grave and reverend seignior in a frock coat, a lady sitting at a portable harmonium, and a chinless youth toying with a crucifix. It appeared that they had marched in and started to hold the service, without any kind of invitation whatever.

It was a pleasure to see how the lodgers met this intrusion. They did not offer the smallest rudeness to the slummers; they just ignored them. By common consent everyone in the kitchen — a hundred men, perhaps — behaved as though the slummers had not existed. There they stood patiently singing and exhorting, and no more notice was taken of them than if they had been earwigs. The gentleman in the frock coat preached a sermon, but not a word of it was audible; it was drowned in the usual din of songs, oaths, and the clattering of pans. Men sat at their meals and card games three feet away from the harmonium, peaceably ignoring it. Presently the slummers gave it up and cleared out, not insulted in any way, but merely disregarded. No doubt they consoled themselves by thinking how brave they had been, 'freely venturing into the lowest dens,' etc. etc.

Bozo said that these people came to the lodging-house several times a month. They had influence with the police, and the 'deputy' could not exclude them. It is curious how people take it for granted that they have a right to preach at you and pray over you as soon as your income falls below a certain level.

After nine days B.'s two pounds was reduced to one and ninepence. Paddy and I set aside eighteenpence for our beds, and spent threepence on the usual tea-and-two-slices, which we shared — an appetizer rather than a meal. By the afternoon we were damnably hungry and Paddy remembered a church near King's Cross Station where a free tea was given once a week to tramps. This was the day, and we decided to go there. Bozo, though it was rainy weather and he was almost penniless, would not come, saying that churches were not his style.

Outside the church quite a hundred men were waiting, dirty types who had gathered from far and wide at the news of a free tea, like kites round a dead buffalo. Presently the doors opened and a clergyman and some girls shepherded us into a gallery at the top of the church. It was an evangelical church, gaunt and wilfully ugly, with texts about blood and fire blazoned on the walls, and a hymn-book containing twelve hundred and fifty-one hymns; reading some of the hymns, I concluded that the book would do as it stood for an anthology of bad verse. There was to be a service after the tea, and the regular congregation were sitting in the well of the church below. It was a week-day, and there were only a few dozen of them, mostly stringy old women who reminded one of boiling-fowls. We ranged ourselves in the gallery pews and were given our tea; it was a one-pound jam-jar of tea each, with six slices of bread and margarine. As soon as tea was over, a dozen tramps who had stationed themselves near the door bolted to avoid the service; the rest stayed, less from gratitude than lacking the cheek to go.

The organ let out a few preliminary hoots and the service began. And instantly, as though at a signal, the tramps began to misbehave in the most outrageous way. One would not have thought such scenes possible in a church. All round the gallery men lolled in their pews, laughed, chattered, leaned over and flicked pellets of bread among the congregation; I had to restrain the man next to me, more or less

by force, from lighting a cigarette. The tramps treated the service as a purely comic spectacle. It was, indeed, a sufficiently ludicrous service — the kind where there are sudden yells of 'Hallelujah!' and endless extempore prayers — but their behaviour passed all bounds. There was one old fellow in the congregation — Brother Bootle or some such name — who was often called on to lead us in prayer, and whenever he stood up the tramps would begin stamping as though in a theatre; they said that on a previous occasion he had kept up an extempore prayer for twenty-five minutes, until the minister had interrupted him. Once when Brother Bootle stood up a tramp called out, 'Two to one 'e don't beat seven minutes!' so loud that the whole church must hear. It was not long before we were making far more noise than the minister. Sometimes somebody below would send up an indignant 'Hush!' but it made no impression. We had set ourselves to guy the service, and there was no stopping us.

It was a queer, rather disgusting scene. Below were the handful of simple, well-meaning people, trying hard to worship; and above were the hundred men whom they had fed, deliberately making worship impossible. A ring of dirty, hairy faces grinned down from the gallery, openly jeering. What could a few women and old men do against a hundred hostile tramps? They were afraid of us, and we were frankly bullying them. It was our revenge upon them for having humiliated us by feeding us.

The minister was a brave man. He thundered steadily through a long sermon on Joshua, and managed almost to ignore the sniggers and chattering from above. But in the end, perhaps goaded beyond endurance, he announced loudly:

'I shall address the last five minutes of my sermon to the UNSAVED sinners!'

Having said which, he turned his face to the gallery and kept it so for five minutes, lest there should be any doubt about who were saved and who unsaved. But much we cared! Even while the minister was threatening hell fire, we were rolling cigarettes, and at the last amen we clattered down the stairs with a yell, many agreeing to come back for another free tea next week.

The scene had interested me. It was so different from the ordinary demeanour of tramps — from the abject worm-like gratitude with

which they normally accept charity. The explanation, of course, was that we outnumbered the congregation and so were not afraid of them. A man receiving charity practically always hates his benefactor — it is a fixed characteristic of human nature; and, when he has fifty or a hundred others to back him, he will show it.

In the evening, after the free tea, Paddy unexpectedly earned another eighteenpence at 'glimming'. It was exactly enough for another night's lodging, and we put it aside and went hungry till nine the next evening. Bozo, who might have given us some food, was away all day. The pavements were wet, and he had gone to the Elephant and Castle, where he knew of a pitch under shelter. Luckily I still had some tobacco, so that the day might have been worse.

At half past eight Paddy took me to the Embankment, where a clergyman was known to distribute meal tickets once a week. Under Charing Cross Bridge fifty men were waiting, mirrored in the shivering puddles. Some of them were truly appalling specimens — they were Embankment sleepers, and the Embankment dredges up worse types than the spike. One of them, I remember, was dressed in an overcoat without buttons, laced up with rope, a pair of ragged trousers, and boots exposing his toes — not a rag else. He was bearded like a fakir, and he had managed to streak his chest and shoulders with some horrible black filth resembling train oil. What one could see of his face under the dirt and hair was bleached white as paper by some malignant disease. I heard him speak, and he had a goodish accent, as of a clerk or shopwalker.

Presently the clergyman appeared and the men ranged themselves in a queue in the order in which they had arrived. The clergyman was a nice, chubby, youngish man, and, curiously enough, very like Charlie, my friend in Paris. He was shy and embarrassed, and did not speak except for a brief good evening; he simply hurried down the line of men, thrusting a ticket upon each, and not waiting to be thanked. The consequence was that, for once, there was genuine gratitude, and everyone said that the clergyman was a — good feller. Someone (in his hearing, I believe) called out: 'Well, HE'LL never be a — bishop!' — this, of course, intended as a warm compliment.

The tickets were worth sixpence each, and were directed to an eating-house not far away. When we got there we found that the

proprietor, knowing that the tramps could not go elsewhere, was cheating by only giving four pennyworth of food for each ticket. Paddy and I pooled our tickets, and received food which we could have got for sevenpence or eightpence at most coffee-shops. The clergyman had distributed well over a pound in tickets, so that the proprietor was evidently swindling the tramps to the tune of seven shillings or more a week. This kind of victimization is a regular part of a tramp's life, and it will go on as long as people continue to give meal tickets instead of money.

Paddy and I went back to the lodging-house and, still hungry, loafed in the kitchen, making the warmth of the fire a substitute for food. At half-past ten Bozo arrived, tired out and haggard, for his mangled leg made walking an agony. He had not earned a penny at screeving, all the pitches under shelter being taken, and for several hours he had begged outright, with one eye on the policemen. He had amassed eightpence — a penny short of his kip. It was long past the hour for paying, and he had only managed to slip indoors when the deputy was not looking; at any moment he might be caught and turned out, to sleep on the Embankment. Bozo took the things out of his pockets and looked them over, debating what to sell. He decided on his razor, took it round the kitchen, and in a few minutes he had sold it for threepence — enough to pay his kip, buy a basin of tea, and leave a half-penny over.

Bozo got his basin of tea and sat down by the fire to dry his clothes. As he drank the tea I saw that he was laughing to himself, as though at some good joke. Surprised, I asked him what he had to laugh at.

'It's bloody funny!' he said. 'It's funny enough for PUNCH. What do you think I been and done?'

'What?'

'Sold my razor without having a shave first: Of all the — fools!'

He had not eaten since the morning, had walked several miles with a twisted leg, his clothes were drenched, and he had a halfpenny between himself and starvation. With all this, he could laugh over the loss of his razor. One could not help admiring him.

CHAPTER 34

The next morning, our money being at an end, Paddy and I set out for the spike. We went southward by the Old Kent Road, making for Cromley; we could not go to a London spike, for Paddy had been in one recently and did not care to risk going again. It was a sixteen-mile walk over asphalt, blistering to the heels, and we were acutely hungry. Paddy browsed the pavement, laying up a store of cigarette ends against his time in the spike. In the end his perseverance was rewarded, for he picked up a penny. We bought a large piece of stale bread, and devoured it as we walked.

When we got to Cromley, it was too early to go to the spike, and we walked several miles farther, to a plantation beside a meadow, where one could sit down. It was a regular caravanserai of tramps — one could tell it by the worn grass and the sodden newspaper and rusty cans that they had left behind. Other tramps were arriving by ones and twos. It was jolly autumn weather. Near by, a deep bed of tansies was growing; it seems to me that even now I can smell the sharp reek of those tansies, warring with the reek of tramps. In the meadow two carthorse colts, raw sienna colour with white manes and tails, were nibbling at a gate. We. sprawled about on the ground, sweaty and exhausted. Someone managed to find dry sticks and get a fire going, and we all had milkless tea out of a tin 'drum' which was passed round.

Some of the tramps began telling stories. One of them, Bill, was an interesting type, a genuine sturdy beggar of the old breed, strong as Hercules and a frank foe of work. He boasted that with his great strength he could get a nawying job any time he liked, but as soon as he drew his first week's wages he went on a terrific drunk and was sacked. Between whiles he 'mooched', chiefly from shopkeepers. He talked like this:

'I ain't goin' far in — Kent. Kent's a tight county, Kent is. There's too many bin' moochin' about 'ere. The — bakers get so as they'll throw their bread away sooner'n give it you. Now Oxford, that's the place for moochin', Oxford is. When I was in Oxford I mooched bread, and I mooched bacon, and I mooched beef, and

every night I mooched tanners for my kip off of the students. The last night I was twopence short of my kip, so I goes up to a parson and mooches 'im for threepence. He give me threepence, and the next moment he turns round and gives me in charge for beggin'. "You bin beggin'," the copper says. "No I ain't," I says, "I was askin' the gentleman the time," I says. The copper starts feelin' inside my coat, and he pulls out a pound of meat and two loaves of bread. "Well, what's all this, then?" he says. "You better come 'long to the station," he says. The beak give me seven days. I don't mooch from no more — parsons. But Christ! what do I care for a lay-up of seven days?' etc. etc.

It seemed that his whole life was this — a round of mooching, drunks, and lay-ups. He laughed as he talked of it, taking it all for a tremendous joke. He looked as though he made a poor thing out of begging, for he wore only a corduroy suit, scarf, and cap — no socks or linen. Still, he was fat and jolly, and he even smelt of beer, a most unusual smell in a tramp nowadays.

Two of the tramps had been in Cromley spike recently, and they told a ghost story connected with it. Years earlier, they said, there had been a suicide there. A tramp had managed to smuggle a razor into his cell, and there cut his throat. In the morning, when the Tramp Major came round, the body was jammed against the door, and to open it they had to break the dead man's arm. In revenge for this, the dead man haunted his cell, and anyone who slept there was certain to die within the year; there were copious instances, of course. If a cell door stuck when you tried to open it, you should avoid that cell like the plague, for it was the haunted one.

Two tramps, ex-sailors, told another grisly story. A man (they swore they had known him) had planned to stow away on a boat bound for Chile. It was laden with manufactured goods packed in big wooden crates, and with the help of a docker the stowaway had managed to hide himself in one of these. But the docker had made a mistake about the order in which the crates were to be loaded. The crane gripped the stowaway, swung him aloft, and deposited him — at the very bottom of the hold, beneath hundreds of crates. No one discovered what had happened until the end of the voyage, when they found the stowaway rotting, dead of suffocation.

Another tramp told the story of Gilderoy, the Scottish robber. Gilderoy was the man who was condemned to be hanged, escaped, captured the judge who had sentenced him, and (splendid fellow!) hanged him. The tramps liked the story, of course, but the interesting thing was to see that they had got it all wrong. Their version was that Gilderoy escaped to America, whereas in reality he was recaptured and put to death. The story had been amended, no doubt deliberately; just as children amend the stories of Samson and Robin Hood, giving them happy endings which are quite imaginary.

This set the tramps talking about history, and a very old man declared that the 'one bite law' was a survival from days when the nobles hunted men instead of deer. Some of the others laughed at him, but he had the idea firm in his head. He had heard, too, of the Corn Laws, and the JUS PRIMAE NOCTIS (he believed it had really existed); also of the Great Rebellion, which he thought was a rebellion of poor against rich — perhaps he had got it mixed up with the peasant rebellions. I doubt whether the old man could read, and certainly he was not repeating newspaper articles. His scraps of history had been passed from generation to generation of tramps, perhaps for centuries in some cases. It was oral tradition lingering on, like a faint echo from the Middle Ages.

Paddy and I went to the spike at six in the evening, getting out at ten in the morning. It was much like Romton and Edbury, and we saw nothing of the ghost. Among the casuals were two young men named William and Fred, ex-fishermen from Norfolk, a lively pair and fond of singing. They had a song called 'Unhappy Bella' that is worth writing down. I heard them sing it half a dozen times during the next two days, and I managed to get it by heart, except a line or two which I have guessed. It ran:

Bella was young and Bella was fair With bright blue eyes and golden hair, O unhappy Bella! Her step was light and her heart was gay, But she had no sense, and one fine day She got herself put in the family way By a wicked, heartless, cruel deceiver.

Poor Bella was young, she didn't believe That the world is hard and men deceive, O unhappy Bella! She said, 'My man will do what's just, He'll marry me now, because he must'; Her heart was full of loving trust In a wicked, heartless, cruel deceiver.

She went to his house; that dirty skunk Had packed his bags and done a bunk, O unhappy Bella! Her landlady said, 'Get out, you whore, I won't have your sort a-darkening my door.' Poor Bella was put to affliction sore By a wicked, heartless, cruel deceiver.

All night she tramped the cruel snows, What she must have suffered nobody knows, O unhappy Bella! And when the morning dawned so red, Alas, alas, poor Bella was dead, Sent so young to her lonely bed By a wicked, heartless, cruel deceiver.

So thus, you see, do what you will, The fruits of sin are suffering still, O unhappy Bella! As into the grave they laid her low, The men said, 'Alas, but life is so,' But the women chanted, sweet and low, 'It's all the men, the dirty bastards!'

Written by a woman, perhaps.

William and Fred, the singers of this song, were thorough scallywags, the sort of men who get tramps a bad name. They happened to know that the Tramp Major at Cromley had a stock of old clothes, which were to be given at need to casuals. Before going in William and Fred took off their boots, ripped the seams and cut pieces off the soles, more or less ruining them. Then they applied for two pairs of boots, and the Tramp Major, seeing how bad their boots were, gave them almost new pairs. William and Fred were scarcely outside the spike in the morning before they had sold these boots for one and ninepence. It seemed to them quite worth while, for one and ninepence, to make their own boots practically unwearable.

Leaving the spike, we all started southward, a long slouching procession, for Lower Binfield and Ide Hill. On the way there was a fight between two of the tramps. They had quarrelled overnight (there was some silly CASUS BELLI about one saying to the other, 'Bull shit', which was taken for Bolshevik — a deadly insult), and they fought it out in a field. A dozen of us stayed to watch them. The scene sticks in my mind for one thing — the man who was beaten going down, and his cap falling off and showing that his hair was quite white. After that some of us intervened and stopped the fight. Paddy had meanwhile been making inquiries, and found that the real cause of the quarrel was, as usual, a few pennyworth of food.

We got to Lower Binfield quite early, and Paddy filled in the time by asking for work at back doors. At one house he was given some

boxes to chop up for firewood, and, saying he had a mate outside, he brought me in and we did the work together. When it was done the householder told the maid to take us out a cup of tea. I remember the terrified way in which she brought it out, and then, losing her courage, set the cups down on the path and bolted back to the house, shutting herself in the kitchen. So dreadful is the name of 'tramp'. They paid us sixpence each, and we bought a threepenny loaf and half an ounce of tobacco, leaving fivepence.

Paddy thought it wiser to bury our fivepence, for the Tramp Major at Lower Binfield was renowned as a tyrant and might refuse to admit us if we had any money at all. It is quite a common practice of tramps to bury their money. If they intend to smuggle at all a large sum into the spike they generally sew it into their clothes, which may mean prison if they are caught, of course. Paddy and Bozo used to tell a good story about this. An Irishman (Bozo said it was an Irishman; Paddy said an Englishman), not a tramp, and in possession of thirty pounds, was stranded in a small village where he could not get a bed. He consulted a tramp, who advised him to go to the workhouse. It is quite a regular proceeding, if one cannot get a bed elsewhere, to get one at the workhouse, paying a reasonable sum for it. The Irishman, however, thought he would be clever and get a bed for nothing, so he presented himself at the workhouse as an ordinary casual. He had sewn the thirty pounds into his clothes. Meanwhile the tramp who had advised him had seen his chance, and that night he privately asked the Tramp Major for permission to leave the spike early in the morning, as he had to see about a job. At six in the morning he was released and went out — in the Irishman's clothes. The Irishman complained of the theft, and was given thirty days for going into a casual ward under false pretences.

CHAPTER 35

Arrived at Lower Binfield, we sprawled for a long time on the green, watched by cottagers from their front gates. A clergyman and his daughter came and stared silently at us for a while, as though we had been aquarium fishes, and then went away again. There were several dozen of us waiting. William and Fred were there, still singing, and the men who had fought, and Bill the moocher. He had been mooching from bakers, and had quantities of stale bread tucked away between his coat and his bare body. He shared it out, and we were all glad of it. There was a woman among us, the first woman tramp I had ever seen. She was a fattish, battered, very dirty woman of sixty, in a long, trailing black skirt. She put on great airs of dignity, and if anyone sat down near her she sniffed and moved farther off.

'Where you bound for, missis?' one of the tramps called to her.

The woman sniffed and looked into the distance.

'Come on, missis,' he said, 'cheer up. Be chummy. We're all in the same boat 'ere.'

'Thank you,' said the woman bitterly, 'when I want to get mixed up with a set of TRAMPS, I'll let you know.'

I enjoyed the way she said TRAMPS. It seemed to show you in a flash the whole other soul; a small, blinkered, feminine soul, that had learned absolutely nothing from years on the road. She was, no doubt, a respectable widow woman, become a tramp through some grotesque accident.

The spike opened at six. This was Saturday, and we were to be confined over the week-end, which is the usual practice; why, I do not know, unless it is from a vague feeling that Sunday merits something disagreeable. When we registered I gave my trade as 'journalist'. It was truer than 'painter', for I had sometimes earned money from newspaper articles, but it was a silly thing to say, being bound to lead to questions. As soon as we were inside the spike and had been lined up for the search, the Tramp Major called my name. He was a stiff, soldierly man of forty, not looking the bully he had been represented, but with an old soldier's gruffness. He said sharply:

‘Which of you is Blank?’ (I forget what name I had given.)

‘Me, sir.’

‘So you are a journalist?’

‘Yes, sir,’ I said, quaking. A few questions would betray the fact that I had been lying, which might mean prison. But the Tramp Major only looked me up and down and said:

‘Then you are a gentleman?’

‘I suppose so.’

He gave me another long look. ‘Well, that’s bloody bad luck, guv’nor,’ he said; ‘bloody bad luck that is.’ And thereafter he treated me with unfair favouritism, and even with a kind of deference. He did not search me, and in the bathroom he actually gave me a clean towel to myself — an unheard-of luxury. So powerful is the word ‘gentleman’ in an old soldier’s ear.

By seven we had wolfed our bread and tea and were in our cells. We slept one in a cell, and there were bedsteads and straw palliasses, so that one ought to have had a good night’s sleep. But no spike is perfect, and the peculiar shortcoming at Lower Binfield was the cold. The hot pipes were not working, and the two blankets we had been given were thin cotton things and almost useless. It was only autumn, but the cold was bitter. One spent the long twelve-hour night in turning from side to side, falling asleep for a few minutes and waking up shivering. We could not smoke, for our tobacco, which we had managed to smuggle in, was in our clothes and we should not get these back till the morning. All down the passage one could hear groaning noises, and sometimes a shouted oath. No one, I imagine, got more than an hour or two of sleep.

In the morning, after breakfast and the doctor’s inspection, the Tramp Major herded us all into the dining-room and locked the door upon us. It was a limewashed, stone-floored room, unutterably dreary, with its furniture of deal boards and benches, and its prison smell. The barred windows were too high to look out of, and there were no ornaments save a clock and a copy of the workhouse rules. Packed elbow to elbow on the benches, we were bored already, though it was barely eight in the morning. There was nothing to do, nothing to talk about, not even room to move. The sole consolation was that one could smoke, for smoking was connived at so long as

one was not caught in the act. Scotty, a little hairy tramp with a bastard accent sired by Cockney out of Glasgow, was tobaccoless, his tin of cigarette ends having fallen out of his boot during the search and been impounded. I stood him the makings of a cigarette. We smoked furtively, thrusting our cigarettes into our pockets, like schoolboys, when we heard the Tramp Major coming.

Most of the tramps spent ten continuous hours in this comfortless, soulless room. Heaven knows how they put up with it. I was luckier than the others, for at ten o'clock the Tramp Major told off a few men for odd jobs, and he picked me out to help in the workhouse kitchen, the most coveted job of all. This, like the clean towel, was a charm worked by the word 'gentleman'.

There was no work to do in the kitchen, and I sneaked off into a small shed used for storing potatoes, where some workhouse paupers were skulking to avoid the Sunday morning service. There were comfortable packing-cases to sit on, and some back numbers of the FAMILY HERALD, and even a copy of RAFFLES from the workhouse library. The paupers talked interestingly about workhouse life. They told me, among other things, that the thing really hated in the workhouse, as a stigma of charity, is the uniform; if the men could wear their own clothes, or even their own caps and scarves, they would not mind being paupers. I had my dinner from the workhouse table, and it was a meal fit for a boa-constrictor — the largest meal I had eaten since my first day at the Hotel X. The paupers said that they habitually gorged to the bursting-point on Sunday and were underfed the rest of the week. After dinner the cook set me to do the washing up, and told me to throw away the food that remained. The wastage was astonishing and, in the circumstances, appalling. Half-eateh joints of meat, and bucketfuls of broken bread and vegetables, were pitched away like so much rubbish and then defiled with tea-leaves. I filled five dustbins to overflowing with quite eatable food. And while I did so fifty tramps were sitting in the spike with their bellies half filled by the spike dinner of bread and cheese, and perhaps two cold boiled potatoes each in honour of Sunday. According to the paupers, the food was thrown away from deliberate policy, rather than that it should be given to the tramps.

At three I went back to the spike. The tramps had been sitting

there since eight, with hardly room to move an elbow, and they were now half mad with boredom. Even smoking was at an end, for a tramp's tobacco is picked-up cigarette ends, and he starves if he is more than a few hours away from the pavement. Most of the men were too bored even to talk; they just sat packed on the benches, staring at nothing, their scrubby faces split in two by enormous yawns. The room stank of ENNUI.

Paddy, his backside aching from the hard bench, was in a whimpering mood, and to pass the time away I talked with a rather superior tramp, a young carpenter who wore a collar and tie and was on the road, he said, for lack of a set of tools. He kept a little aloof from the other tramps, and held himself more like a free man than a casual. He had literary tastes, too, and carried a copy of QUENTIN DURWARD in his pocket. He told me that he never went into a spike unless driven there by hunger, sleeping under hedges and behind ricks in preference. Along the south coast he had begged by day and slept in bathing-huts for weeks at a time.

We talked of life on the road. He criticized the system that makes a tramp spend fourteen hours a day in the spike, and the other ten in walking and dodging the police. He spoke of his own case — six months at the public charge for want of a few pounds' worth of tools. It was idiotic, he said.

Then I told him about the wastage of food in the workhouse kitchen, and what I thought of it. And at that he changed his tone instantly. I saw that I had awakened the pew-renter who sleeps in every English workman. Though he had been famished along with the others, he at once saw reasons why the food should have been thrown away rather that given to the tramps. He admonished me quite severely.

'They have to do it,' he said. 'If they made these places too comfortable, you'd have all the scum of the country flocking into them. It's only the bad food as keeps all that scum away. These here tramps are too lazy to work, that's all that's wrong with them. You don't want to go encouraging of them. They're scum.'

I produced arguments to prove him wrong, but he would not listen. He kept repeating:

'You don't want to have any pity on these here tramps — scum,

they are. You don't want to judge them by the same standards as men like you and me. They're scum, just scum.'

It was interesting to see the subtle way in which he disassociated himself from 'these here tramps'. He had been on the road six months, but in the sight of God, he seemed to imply, he was not a tramp. I imagine there are quite a lot of tramps who thank God they are not tramps. They are like the trippers who say such cutting things about trippers.

Three hours dragged by. At six supper arrived, and turned out to be quite uneatable; the bread, tough enough in the morning (it had been cut into slices on Saturday night), was now as hard as ship's biscuit. Luckily it was spread with dripping, and we scraped the dripping off and ate that alone, which was better than nothing. At a quarter past six we were sent to bed. New tramps were arriving, and in order not to mix the tramps of different days (for fear of infectious diseases) the new men were put in the cells and we in dormitories. Our dormitory was a barn-like room with thirty beds close together, and a tub to serve as a common chamber-pot. It stank abominably, and the older men coughed and got up all night. But being so many together kept the room warm, and we had some sleep.

We dispersed at ten in the morning, after a fresh medical inspection, with a hunk of bread and cheese for our midday dinner. William and Fred, strong in the possession of a shilling, impaled their bread on the spike railings — as a protest, they said. This was the second spike in Kent that they had made too hot to hold them, and they thought it a great joke. They were cheerful souls, for tramps. The imbecile (there is an imbecile in every collection of tramps) said that he was too tired to walk and clung to the railings, until the Tramp Major had to dislodge him and start him with a kick. Paddy and I turned north, for London. Most of the others were going on to Ide Hill, said to be about the worst spike in England.

[* I have been in it since, and it is not so bad]

Once again it was jolly autumn weather, and the road was quiet, with few cars passing. The air was like sweet-briar after the spike's mingled stenches of sweat, soap, and drains. We two seemed the only tramps on the road. Then I heard a hurried step behind us, and someone calling. It was little Scotty, the Glasgow tramp, who had

run after us panting. He produced a rusty tin from his pocket. He wore a friendly smile, like someone repaying an obligation.

'Here y'are, mate,' he said cordially. 'I owe you some fag ends. You stood me a smoke yesterday. The Tramp Major give me back my box of fag ends when we come out this morning. One good turn deserves another — here y'are.'

And he put four sodden, debauched, loathly cigarette ends into my hand.

CHAPTER 36

I want to set down some general remarks about tramps. When one comes to think of it, tramps are a queer product and worth thinking over. It is queer that a tribe of men, tens of thousands in number, should be marching up and down England like so many Wandering Jews. But though the case obviously wants considering, one cannot even start to consider it until one has got rid of certain prejudices. These prejudices are rooted in the idea that every tramp, IPSO FACTO, is a blackguard. In childhood we have been taught that tramps are blackguards, and consequently there exists in our minds a sort of ideal or typical tramp — a repulsive, rather dangerous creature, who would die rather than work or wash, and wants nothing but to beg, drink, and rob hen-houses. This tramp-monster is no truer to life than the sinister Chinaman of the magazine stories, but he is very hard to get rid of. The very word 'tramp' evokes his image. And the belief in him obscures the real questions of vagrancy.

To take a fundamental question about vagrancy: Why do tramps exist at all? It is a curious thing, but very few people know what makes a tramp take to the road. And, because of the belief in the tramp-monster, the most fantastic reasons are suggested. It is said, for instance, that tramps tramp to avoid work, to beg more easily, to seek opportunities for crime, even — least probable of reasons — because they like tramping. I have even read in a book of criminology that the tramp is an atavism, a throw-back to the nomadic stage of humanity. And meanwhile the quite obvious cause of vagrancy is staring one in the face. Of course a tramp is not a nomadic atavism — one might as well say that a commercial traveller is an atavism. A tramp tramps, not because he likes it, but for the same reason as a car keeps to the left; because there happens to be a law compelling him to do so. A destitute man, if he is not supported by the parish, can only get relief at the casual wards, and as each casual ward will only admit him for one night, he is automatically kept moving. He is a vagrant because, in the state of the law, it is that or starve. But people have been brought up to believe in the tramp-monster, and so they prefer to think that there

must be some more or less villainous motive for tramping.

As a matter of fact, very little of the tramp-monster will survive inquiry. Take the generally accepted idea that tramps are dangerous characters. Quite apart from experience, one can say A PRIORI that very few tramps are dangerous, because if they were dangerous they would be treated accordingly. A casual ward will often admit a hundred tramps in one night, and these are handled by a staff of at most three porters. A hundred ruffians could not be controlled by three unarmed men. Indeed, when one sees how tramps let themselves be bullied by the workhouse officials, it is obvious that they are the most docile, broken-spirited creatures imaginable. Or take the idea that all tramps are drunkards — an idea ridiculous on the face of it. No doubt many tramps would drink if they got the chance, but in the nature of things they cannot get the chance. At this moment a pale watery stuff called beer is sevenpence a pint in England. To be drunk on it would cost at least half a crown, and a man who can command half a crown at all often is not a tramp. The idea that tramps are impudent social parasites ('sturdy beggars') is not absolutely unfounded, but it is only true in a few per cent of the cases. Deliberate, cynical parasitism, such as one reads of in Jack London's books on American tramping, is not in the English character. The English are a conscience-ridden race, with a strong sense of the sinfulness of poverty. One cannot imagine the average Englishman deliberately turning parasite, and this national character does not necessarily change because a man is thrown out of work. Indeed, if one remembers that a tramp is only an Englishman out of work, forced by law to live as a vagabond, then the tramp-monster vanishes. I am not saying, of course, that most tramps are ideal characters; I am only saying that they are ordinary human beings, and that if they are worse than other people it is the result and not the cause of their way of life.

It follows that the 'Serve them damned well right' attitude that is normally taken towards tramps is no fairer than it would be towards cripples or invalids. When one has realized that, one begins to put oneself in a tramp's place and understand what his life is like. It is an extraordinarily futile, acutely unpleasant life. I have described the casual ward — the routine of a tramp's day — but there are three

especial evils that need insisting upon. The first is hunger, which is the almost general fate of tramps. The casual ward gives them a ration which is probably not even meant to be sufficient, and anything beyond this must be got by begging — that is, by breaking the law. The result is that nearly every tramp is rotted by malnutrition; for proof of which one need only look at the men lining up outside any casual ward. The second great evil of a tramp's life — it seems much smaller at first sight, but it is a good second — is that he is entirely cut off from contact with women. This point needs elaborating.

Tramps are cut off from women, in the first place, because there are very few women at their level of society. One might imagine that among destitute people the sexes would be as equally balanced as elsewhere. But it is not so; in fact, one can almost say that below a certain level society is entirely male. The following figures, published by the L.C.C. from a night census taken on February 13th, 1931, will show the relative numbers of destitute men and destitute women:

Spending the night in the streets, 60 men, 18 women. In shelters and homes not licensed as common lodging-houses, 1,057 men, 137 women. In the crypt of St Martin's-in-the-Fields Church, 88 men, 12 women. In L.C.C. casual wards and hostels, 674 men, 15 women.

[* This must be an underestimate. Still, the proportions probably hold good.]

It will be seen from these figures that at the charity level men outnumber women by something like ten to one. The cause is presumably that unemployment affects women less than men; also that any presentable woman can, in the last resort, attach herself to some man. The result, for a tramp, is that he is condemned to perpetual celibacy. For of course it goes without saying that if a tramp finds no women at his own level, those above — even a very little above — are as far out of his reach as the moon. The reasons are not worth discussing, but there is no doubt that women never, or hardly ever, condescend to men who are much poorer than themselves. A tramp, therefore, is a celibate from the moment when he takes to the road. He is absolutely without hope of getting a wife, a mistress, or any kind of woman except — very rarely, when he can

raise a few shillings — a prostitute.

It is obvious what the results of this must be: homosexuality, for instance, and occasional rape cases. But deeper than these there is the degradation worked in a man who knows that he is not even considered fit for marriage. The sexual impulse, not to put it any higher, is a fundamental impulse, and starvation of it can be almost as demoralizing as physical hunger. The evil of poverty is not so much that it makes a man suffer as that it rots him physically and spiritually. And there can be no doubt that sexual starvation contributes to this rotting process. Cut off from the whole race of women, a tramp feels himself degraded to the rank of a cripple or a lunatic. No humiliation could do more damage to a man's self-respect.

The other great evil of a tramp's life is enforced idleness. By our vagrancy laws things are so arranged that when he is not walking the road he is sitting in a cell; or, in the intervals, lying on the ground waiting for the casual ward to open. It is obvious that this is a dismal, demoralizing way of life, especially for an uneducated man.

Besides these one could enumerate scores of minor evils — to name only one, discomfort, which is inseparable from life on the road; it is worth remembering that the average tramp has no clothes but what he stands up in, wears boots that are ill-fitting, and does not sit in a chair for months together. But the important point is that a tramp's sufferings are entirely useless. He lives a fantastically disagreeable life, and lives it to no purpose whatever. One could not, in fact, invent a more futile routine than walking from prison to prison, spending perhaps eighteen hours a day in the cell and on the road. There must be at the least several tens of thousands of tramps in England. Each day they expend innumerable foot-pounds of energy — enough to plough thousands of acres, build miles of road, put up dozens of houses — in mere, useless walking. Each day they waste between them possibly ten years of time in staring at cell walls. They cost the country at least a pound a week a man, and give nothing in return for it. They go round and round, on an endless boring game of general post, which is of no use, and is not even meant to be of any use to any person whatever. The law keeps this process going, and we have got so accustomed to it that We are not

surprised. But it is very silly.

Granting the futility of a tramp's life, the question is whether anything could be done to improve it. Obviously it would be possible, for instance, to make the casual wards a little more habitable, and this is actually being done in some cases. During the last year some of the casual wards have been improved — beyond recognition, if the accounts are true — and there is talk of doing the same to all of them. But this does not go to the heart of the problem. The problem is how to turn the tramp from a bored, half alive vagrant into a self-respecting human being. A mere increase of comfort cannot do this. Even if the casual wards became positively luxurious (they never will)* a tramp's life would still be wasted. He would still be a pauper, cut off from marriage and home life, and a dead loss to the community. What is needed is to depauperize him, and this can only be done by finding him work — not work for the sake of working, but work of which he can enjoy the benefit. At present, in the great majority of casual wards, tramps do no work whatever. At one time they were made to break stones for their food, but this was stopped when they had broken enough stone for years ahead and put the stone-breakers out of work. Nowadays they are kept idle, because there is seemingly nothing for them to do. Yet there is a fairly obvious way of making them useful, namely this: Each workhouse could run a small farm, or at least a kitchen garden, and every able-bodied tramp who presented himself could be made to do a sound day's work. The produce of the farm or garden could be used for feeding the tramps, and at the worst it would be better than the filthy diet of bread and margarine and tea. Of course, the casual wards could never be quite self-supporting, but they could go a long way towards it, and the rates would probably benefit in the long run. It must be remembered that under the present system tramps are as dead a loss to the country as they could possibly be, for they do not only do no work, but they live on a diet that is bound to undermine their health; the system, therefore, loses lives as well as money. A scheme which fed them decently, and made them produce at least a part of their own food, would be worth trying.

[* In fairness, it must be added that a few of the casual wards have been improved recently, at least from the point of view of sleeping

accommodation. But most of them are the same as ever, and there has been no real improvement in the food.]

It may be objected that a farm or even a garden could not be run with casual labour. But there is no real reason why tramps should only stay a day at each casual ward; they might stay a month or even a year, if there were work for them to do. The constant circulation of tramps is something quite artificial. At present a tramp is an expense to the rates, and the object of each workhouse is therefore to push him on to the next; hence the rule that he can stay only one night. If he returns within a month he is penalized by being confined for a week, and, as this is much the same as being in prison, naturally he keeps moving. But if he represented labour to the workhouse, and the workhouse represented sound food to him, it would be another matter. The workhouses would develop into partially self-supporting institutions, and the tramps, settling down here or there according as they were needed, would cease to be tramps. They would be doing something comparatively useful, getting decent food, and living a settled life. By degrees, if the scheme worked well, they might even cease to be regarded as paupers, and be able to marry and take a respectable place in society.

This is only a rough idea, and there are some obvious objections to it. Nevertheless, it does suggest a way of improving the status of tramps without piling new burdens on the rates. And the solution must, in any case, be something of this kind. For the question is, what to do with men who are underfed and idle; and the answer — to make them grow their own food — imposes itself automatically.

CHAPTER 37

A word about the sleeping accommodation open to a homeless person in London. At present it is impossible to get a BED in any non-charitable institution in London for less than sevenpence a night. If you cannot afford seven-pence for a bed, you must put up with one of the following substitutes:

1. The Embankment. Here is the account that Paddy gave me of sleeping on the Embankment:

'De whole t'ing wid de Embankment is gettin' to sleep early. You got to be on your bench by eight o'clock, because dere ain't too many benches and sometimes dey're all taken. And you got to try to get to sleep at once. 'Tis too cold to sleep much after twelve o'clock, an' de police turns you off at four in de mornin'. It ain't easy to sleep, dough, wid dem bloody trams flyin' past your head all de time, an' dem sky-signs across de river flickin' on an' off in your eyes. De cold's cruel. Dem as sleeps dere generally wraps demselves up in newspaper, but it don't do much good. You'd be bloody lucky if you got t'ree hours' sleep.'

I have slept on the Embankment and found that it corresponded to Paddy's description. It is, however, much better than not sleeping at all, which is the alternative if you spend the night in the streets, elsewhere than on the Embankment. According to the law in London, you may sit down for the night, but the police must move you on if they see you asleep; the Embankment and one or two odd corners (there is one behind the Lyceum Theatre) are special exceptions. This law is evidently a piece of wilful offensive-ness. Its object, so it is said, is to prevent people from dying of exposure; but clearly if a man has no home and is going to die of exposure, die he will, asleep or awake. In Paris there is no such law. There, people sleep by the score under the Seine bridges, and in doorways, and on benches in the squares, and round the ventilating shafts of the Metro, and even inside the Metro stations. It does no apparent harm. No one will spend a night in the street if he can possibly help it, and if he is going to stay out of doors he might as well be allowed to sleep, if he can.

2. The Twopenny Hangover. This comes a little higher than the

Embankment. At the Twopenny Hangover, the lodgers sit in a row on a bench; there is a rope in front of them, and they lean on this as though leaning over a fence. A man, humorously called the valet, cuts the rope at five in the morning. I have never been there myself, but Bozo had been there often. I asked him whether anyone could possibly sleep in such an attitude, and he said that it was more comfortable than it sounded — at any rate, better than bare floor. There are similar shelters in Paris, but the charge there is only twenty-five centimes (a halfpenny) instead of twopence.

3. The Coffin, at fourpence a night. At the Coffin you sleep in a wooden box, with a tarpaulin for covering. It is cold, and the worst thing about it are the bugs, which, being enclosed in a box, you cannot escape.

Above this come the common lodging-houses, with charges varying between sevenpence and one and a penny a night. The best are the Rowton Houses, where the charge is a shilling, for which you get a cubicle to yourself, and the use of excellent bathrooms. You can also pay half a crown for a 'special', which is practically hotel accommodation. The Rowton Houses are splendid buildings, and the only objection to them is the strict discipline, with rules against cooking, card-playing, etc. Perhaps the best advertisement for the Rowton Houses is the fact that they are always full to overflowing. The Bruce Houses, at one and a penny, are also excellent.

Next best, in point of cleanliness, are the Salvation Army hostels, at sevenpence or eightpence. They vary (I have been in one or two that were not very unlike common lodging-houses), but most of them are clean, and they have good bathrooms; you have to pay extra for a bath, however. You can get a cubicle for a shilling. In the eightpenny dormitories the beds are comfortable, but there are so many of them (as a rule at least forty to a room), and so close together, that it is impossible to get a quiet night. The numerous restrictions stink of prison and charity. The Salvation Army hostels would only appeal to people who put cleanliness before anything else.

Beyond this there are the ordinary common lodging-houses. Whether you pay sevenpence or a shilling, they are all stuffy and noisy, and the beds are uniformly dirty and uncomfortable. What redeems them are their LAISSEZ-FAIRE atmosphere and the warm

home-like kitchens where one can lounge at all hours of the day or night. They are squalid dens, but some kind of social life is possible in them. The women's lodging-houses are said to be generally worse than the men's, and there are very few houses with accommodation for married couples. In fact, it is nothing out of the common for a homeless man to sleep in one lodging-house and his wife in another.

At this moment at least fifteen thousand people in London are living in common lodging-houses. For an unattached man earning two pounds a week, or less, a lodging-house is a great convenience. He could hardly get a furnished room so cheaply, and the lodging-house gives him free firing, a bathroom of sorts, and plenty of society. As for the dirt, it is a minor evil. The really bad fault of lodging-houses is that they are places in which one pays to sleep, and in which sound sleep is impossible. All one gets for one's money is a bed measuring five feet six by two feet six, with a hard convex mattress and a pillow like a block of wood, covered by one cotton counterpane and two grey, stinking sheets. In winter there are blankets, but never enough. And this bed is in a room where there are never less than five, and sometimes fifty or sixty beds, a yard or two apart. Of course, no one can sleep soundly in such circumstances. The only other places where people are herded like this are barracks and hospitals. In the public wards of a hospital no one even hopes to sleep well. In barracks the soldiers are crowded, but they have good beds, and they are healthy; in a common lodging-house nearly all the lodgers have chronic coughs, and a large number have bladder diseases which make them get up at all the hours of the night. The result is a perpetual racket, making sleep impossible. So far as my observation goes, no one in a lodging-house sleeps more than five hours a night — a damnable swindle when one has paid sevenpence or more.

Here legislation could accomplish something. At present there is all manner of legislation by the L.C.C. about lodging-houses, but it is not done in the interests of the lodgers. The L.C.C. only exert themselves to forbid drinking, gambling, fighting, etc. etc. There is no law to say that the beds in a lodging-house must be comfortable. This would be quite an easy thing to enforce — much easier, for instance, than restrictions upon gambling. The lodging-house keepers

should be compelled to provide adequate bedclothes and better mattresses, and above all to divide their dormitories into cubicles. It does not matter how small a cubicle is, the important thing is that a man should be alone when he sleeps. These few changes, strictly enforced, would make an enormous difference. It is not impossible to make a lodging-house reasonably comfortable at the usual rates of payment. In the Groydon municipal lodging-house, where the charge is only ninepence, there are cubicles, good beds, chairs (a very rare luxury in lodging-houses), and kitchens above ground instead of in a cellar. There is no reason why every ninepenny lodging-house should not come up to this standard.

Of course, the owners of lodging-houses would be opposed EN BLOC to any improvement, for their present business is an immensely profitable one. The average house takes five or ten pounds a night, with no bad debts (credit being strictly forbidden), and except for rent the expenses are small. Any improvement would mean less crowding, and hence less profit. Still, the excellent municipal lodging-house at Croydon shows how well one CAN be served for ninepence. A few well-directed laws could make these conditions general. If the authorities are going to concern themselves with lodging-houses at all, they ought to start by making them more comfortable, not by silly restrictions that would never be tolerated in a hotel.

CHAPTER 38

After we left the spike at Lower Binfield, Paddy and I earned half a crown at weeding and sweeping in somebodys garden, stayed the night at Cromley, and walked back to London. I parted from Paddy a day or two later. B. lent me a final two pounds, and, as I had only another eight days to hold out, that was the end of my troubles. My tame imbecile turned out worse than I had expected, but not bad enough to make me wish myself back in the spike or the Auberge de Jehan Cottard.

Paddy set out for Portsmouth, where he had a. friend who might conceivably find work for him, and I have never seen him since. A short time ago I was told that he had been run over and killed, but perhaps my informant was mixing him up with someone else. I had news of Bozo only three days ago. He is in Wandsworth — fourteen days for begging. I do not suppose prison worries him very much.

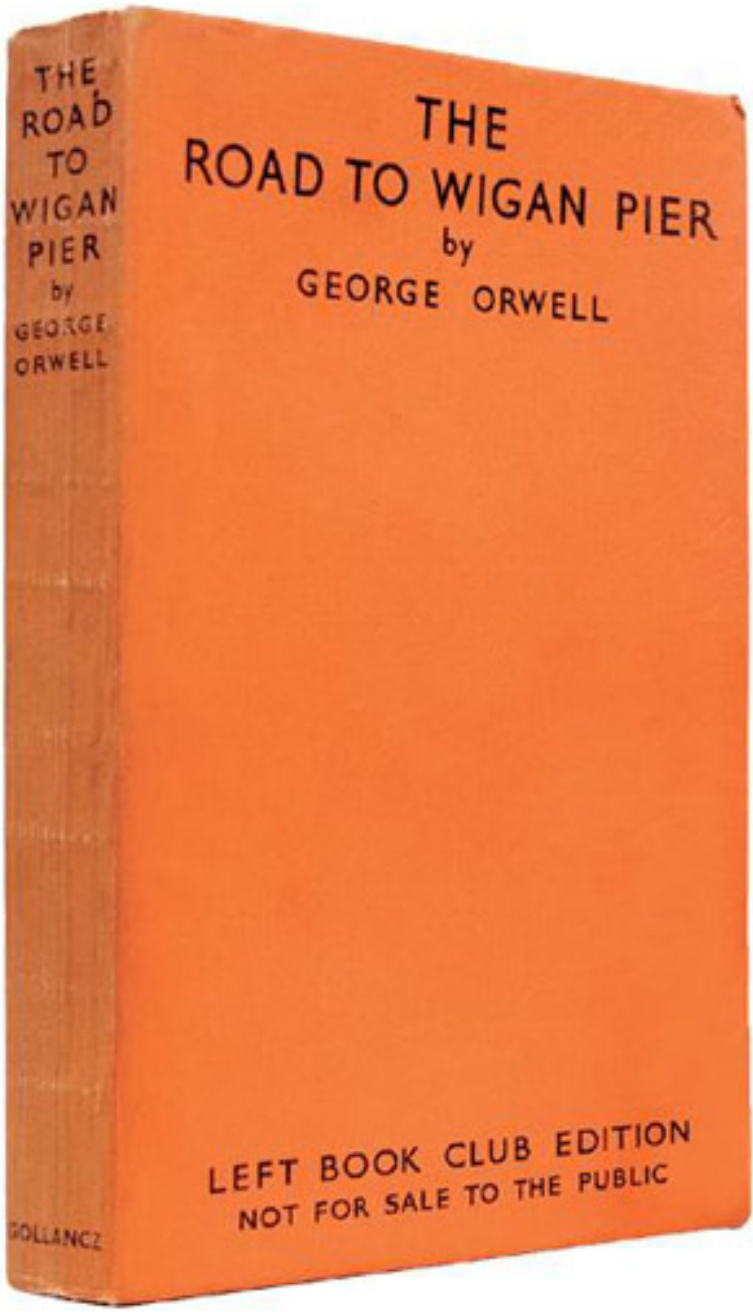
My story ends here. It is a fairly trivial story, and I can only hope that it has been interesting in the same way as a travel diary is interesting. I can at least say, Here is the world that awaits you if you are ever penniless. Some days I want to explore that world more thoroughly. I should like to know people like Mario and Paddy and Bill the moocher, not from casual encounters, but intimately; I should like to understand what really goes on in the souls of PLONGEURS and tramps and Embankment sleepers. At present I do not feel that I have seen more than the fringe of poverty.

Still I can point to one or two things I have definitely learned by being hard up. I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels, nor expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy, nor subscribe to the Salvation Army, nor pawn my clothes, nor refuse a handbill, nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant. That is a beginning.

THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER

The Road to Wigan Pier was first published as a Left Book Club selection on the 8th of March 1937 by Victor Gollancz. It is a work of non- fiction which divides into two sections: the first detailing the lives and living conditions of the Northern working class and the second part is an essay in which Orwell questions why socialism is not more popular in Britain. He pays particular attention to the fact that many people, predominately the working class, who would most benefit from socialism, are often hostile to it and argues this needs to be addressed. Gollancz was reluctant to publish the second section of the book because he feared it would offend his mostly middle-class leftist readers. He finally agreed to include both parts, but insisted on him writing an introduction for the book to clarify Orwell's words.

The first half of the work reports Orwell's time observing the industrial areas of the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire. While he included other details, such as the housing problem and unemployment, Orwell spent a substantial amount of the first section detailing the life and struggles of coal miners. He gives vivid descriptions of the coal mines and the horrific working conditions of the miners and their tough financial situations. He writes of the malnutrition of the workers and their families and the physical toll taken on those in the mining community. The second, and more controversial section explores why the working class do not embrace socialism when it is the best means for improving living conditions. He argues that middle class socialists alienate the working class by denying that prejudice of class exists and that certain types of people give socialism a negative image to the more conventional voter. He maintains that the fundamental issue to confer to people about socialism is its fairness and not the far drier ideas of dialectical materialism or political theory.


THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER by GEORGE ORWELL
GOLLANCZ
THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER
by
GEORGE ORWELL
LEFT BOOK CLUB EDITION
NOT FOR SALE TO THE PUBLIC

The first edition

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Coal miners working

Part One

1

The first sound in the mornings was the clumping of the mill-girls' clogs down the cobbled street. Earlier than that, I suppose, there were factory whistles which I was never awake to hear.

My bed was in the right-hand corner on the side nearest the door. There was another bed across the foot of it and jammed hard against it (it had to be in that position to allow the door to open) so that I had to sleep with my legs doubled up; if I straightened them out I kicked the occupant of the other bed in the small of the back. He was an elderly man named Mr Reilly, a mechanic of sorts and employed 'on top' at one of the coal pits. Luckily he had to go to work at five in the morning, so I could uncoil my legs and have a couple of hours' proper sleep after he was gone. In the bed opposite there was a Scotch miner who had been injured in a pit accident (a huge chunk of stone pinned him to the ground and it was a couple of hours before they could lever it off), and had received five hundred pounds compensation. He was a big handsome man of forty, with grizzled hair and a clipped moustache, more like a sergeant-major than a miner, and he would lie in bed till late in the day, smoking a short pipe. The other bed was occupied by a succession of commercial travellers, newspaper-canvassers, and hire-purchase touts who generally stayed for a couple of nights. It was a double bed and much the best in the room. I had slept in it myself my first night there, but had been manoeuvred out of it to make room for another lodger. I believe all newcomers spent their first night in the double bed, which was used, so to speak, as bait. All the windows were kept tight shut, with a red sandbag jammed in the bottom, and in the morning the room stank like a ferret's cage. You did not notice it when you got up, but if you went out of the room and came back, the smell hit you in the face with a smack.

I never discovered how many bedrooms the house contained, but strange to say there was a bathroom, dating from before the Brookers' time. Downstairs there was the usual kitchen living-room with its huge open range burning night and day. It was lighted only by a skylight, for on one side of it was the shop and on the other the

larder, which opened into some dark subterranean place where the tripe was stored. Partly blocking the door of the larder there was a shapeless sofa upon which Mrs Brooker, our landlady, lay permanently ill, festooned in grimy blankets. She had a big, pale yellow, anxious face. No one knew for certain what was the matter with her; I suspect that her only real trouble was over-eating. In front of the fire there was almost always a line of damp washing, and in the middle of the room was the big kitchen table at which the family and all the lodgers ate. I never saw this table completely uncovered, but I saw its various wrappings at different times. At the bottom there was a layer of old newspaper stained by Worcester Sauce; above that a sheet of sticky white oil-cloth; above that a green serge cloth; above that a coarse linen cloth, never changed and seldom taken off. Generally the crumbs from breakfast were still on the table at supper. I used to get to know individual crumbs by sight and watch their progress up and down the table from day to day.

The shop was a narrow, cold sort of room. On the. outside of the window a few white letters, relics of ancient chocolate advertisements, were scattered like stars. Inside there was a slab upon which lay the great white folds of tripe, and the grey flocculent stuff known as ‘black tripe’, and the ghostly translucent feet of pigs, ready boiled. It was the ordinary ‘tripe and pea’ shop, and not much else was stocked except bread, cigarettes, and tinned stuff. ‘Teas’ were advertised in the window, but if a customer demanded a cup of tea he was usually put off with excuses. Mr Brooker, though out of work for two years, was a miner by trade, but he and his wife had been keeping shops of various kinds as a side-line all their lives. At one time they had had a pub, but they had lost their licence for allowing gambling on the premises. I doubt whether any of their businesses had ever paid; they were the kind of people who run a business chiefly in order to have something to grumble about. Mr Brooker was a dark, small-boned, sour, Irish-looking man, and astonishingly dirty. I don’t think I ever once saw his hands clean. As Mrs Brooker was now an invalid he prepared most of the food, and like all people with permanently dirty hands he had a peculiarly intimate, lingering manner of handling things. If he gave you a slice of bread-and-butter there was always a black thumb-print on it. Even

in the early morning when he descended into the mysterious den behind Mrs Brooker's sofa and fished out the tripe, his hands were already black. I heard dreadful stories from the other lodgers about the place where the tripe was kept. Blackbeetles were said to swarm there. I do not know how often fresh consignments of tripe were ordered, but it was at long intervals, for Mrs Brooker used to date events by it. 'Let me see now, I've had in three lots of froze (frozen tripe) since that happened,' etc. We lodgers were never given tripe to eat. At the time I imagined that this was because tripe was too expensive; I have since thought that it was merely because we knew too much about it. The Brookers never ate tripe themselves, I noticed.

The only permanent lodgers were the Scotch miner, Mr Reilly, two old-age pensioners, and an unemployed man on the P.A.C. named Joe — he was the kind of person who has no surname. The Scotch miner was a bore when you got to know him. Like so many unemployed men he spent too much time reading newspapers, and if you did not head him off he would discourse for hours about such things as the Yellow Peril, trunk murders, astrology, and the conflict between religion and science. The old-age pensioners had, as usual, been driven from their homes by the Means Test. They handed their weekly ten shillings over to the Brookers and in return got the kind of accommodation you would expect for ten shillings; that is, a bed in the attic and meals chiefly of bread-and-butter. One of them was of'superior' type and was dying of some malignant disease — cancer, I believe. He only got out of bed on the days when he went to draw his pension. The other, called by everyone Old Jack, was an ex-miner aged seventy-eight who had worked well over fifty years in the pits. He was alert and intelligent, but curiously enough he seemed only to remember his boyhood experiences and to have forgotten all about the modem mining machinery and improvements. He used to tell me tales of fights with savage horses in the narrow galleries underground. When he heard that I was arranging to go down several coal mines he was contemptuous and declared that a man of my size (six feet two and a half) would never manage the 'travelling'; it was no use telling him that the 'travelling' was better than it used to be. But he was friendly to everyone and used to give us all a fine shout

of ‘Good night, boys!’ as he crawled up the stairs to his bed somewhere under the rafters. What I most admired about Old Jack was that he never cadged; he was generally out-of tobacco towards the end of the week, but he always refused to smoke anyone else’s. The Brookers had insured the lives of both old-age pensioners with one of the tanner-a-week companies. It was said that they were overheard anxiously asking the insurance-tout ‘how long people lives when they’ve got cancer’.

Joe, like the Scotchman, was a great reader of newspapers and spent almost his entire day in the public library. He was the typical unmarried unemployed man, a derelict-looking, frankly ragged creature with a round, almost childish face on which there was a naively naughty expression. He looked more like a neglected little boy than a grown-up man. I suppose it is the complete lack of responsibility that makes so many of these men look younger than their ages. From Joe’s appearance I took him to be about twenty-eight, and was amazed to learn that he was forty-three. He had a love of resounding phrases and was very proud of the astuteness with which he had avoided getting married. He often said to me, ‘Matrimonial chains is a big item,’ evidently feeling this to be a very subtle and portentous remark. His total income was fifteen shillings a week, and he paid out six or seven to the Brookers for his bed. I sometimes used to see him making himself a cup of tea over the kitchen fire, but for the rest he got his meals somewhere out of doors; it was mostly slices of bread-and-marg and packets of fish and chips, I suppose.

Besides these there was a floating clientele of commercial travellers of the poorer sort, travelling actors — always common in the North because most of the larger pubs hire variety artists at the week-ends — and newspaper-canvassers. The newspaper-canvassers were a type I had never met before. Their job seemed to me so hopeless, so appalling that I wondered how anyone could put up with such a thing when prison was a possible alternative. They were employed mostly by weekly or Sunday papers, and they were sent from town to town, provided with maps and given a list of streets which they had to ‘work’ each day. If they failed to secure a minimum of twenty orders a day, they got the sack. So long as they

kept up their twenty orders a day they received a small salary — two pounds a week, I think; on any order over the twenty they drew a tiny commission. The thing is not so impossible as it sounds, because in working-class districts every family takes in a twopenny weekly paper and changes it every few weeks; but I doubt whether anyone keeps a job of that kind long. The newspapers engage poor desperate wretches, out-of-work clerks and commercial travellers and the like, who for a while make frantic efforts and keep their sales up to the minimum; then as the deadly work wears them down they are sacked and fresh men are taken on. I got to know two who were employed by one of the more notorious weeklies. Both of them were middle-aged men with families to support, and one of them was a grandfather. They were on their feet ten hours a day, 'working' their appointed streets, and then busy late into the night filling in blank forms for some swindle their paper was running — one of those schemes by which you are 'given' a set of crockery if you take out a six weeks' subscription and send a two-shilling postal order as well. The fat one, the grandfather, used to fall asleep with his head on a pile of forms. Neither of them could afford the pound a week which the Brookers charged for full board. They used to pay a small sum for their beds and make shamefaced meals in a corner of the kitchen off bacon and bread-and-margarine which they stored in their suit-cases.

The Brookers had large numbers of sons and daughters, most of whom had long since fled from home. Some were in Canada 'at Canada', as Mrs Brooker used to put it. There was only one son living near by, a large pig-like young man employed in a garage, who frequently came to the house for his meals. His wife was there all day with the two children, and most of the cooking and laundering was done by her and by Emmie, the fiancee of another son who was in London. Emmie was a fair-haired, sharp-nosed, unhappy-looking girl who worked at one of the mills for some starvation wage, but nevertheless spent all her evenings in bondage at the Brookers' house. I gathered that the marriage was constantly being postponed and would probably never take place, but Mrs Brooker had already appropriated Emmie as a daughter-in-law, and nagged her in that peculiar watchful, loving way that invalids have.

The rest of the housework was done, or not done, by Mr Brooker. Mrs Brooker seldom rose from her sofa in the kitchen (she spent the night there as well as the day) and was too ill to do anything except eat stupendous meals. It was Mr Brooker who attended to the shop, gave the lodgers their food, and 'did out' the bedrooms. He was always moving with incredible slowness from one hated job to another. Often the beds were still unmade at six in the evening, and at any hour of the day you were liable to meet Mr Brooker on the stairs, carrying a full chamber-pot which he gripped with his thumb well over the rim. In the mornings he sat by the fire with a tub of filthy water, peeling potatoes at the speed of a slow-motion picture. I never saw anyone who could peel potatoes with quite such an air of brooding resentment. You could see the hatred of this 'bloody woman's work', as he called it, fermenting inside him, a kind of bitter juice. He was one of those people who can chew their grievances like a cud.

Of course, as I was indoors a good deal, I heard all about the Brookers' woes, and how everyone swindled them and was ungrateful to them, and how the shop did not pay and the lodging-house hardly paid. By local standards they were not so badly off, for, in some way I did not understand, Mr Brooker was dodging the Means Test and drawing an allowance from the P.A.C., but their chief pleasure was talking about their grievances to anyone who would listen. Mrs Brooker used to lament by the hour, lying on her sofa, a soft mound of fat and self-pity, saying the same things over and over again.' We don't seem to get no customers nowadays. I don't know 'ow it is. The tripe's just a-laying there day after day — such beautiful tripe it is, too! It does seem 'ard, don't it now?' etc., etc., etc. All Mrs Brookers' laments ended with' It does seem 'ard, don't it now?' like the refrain of a ballade. Certainly it was true that the shop did not pay. The whole place had the unmistakable dusty, flyblown air of a business that is going down. But it would have been quite useless to explain to them why nobody came to the shop, even if one had had the face to do it; neither was capable of understanding that last year's dead bluebottles supine in the shop window are not good for trade.

But the thing that really tormented them was the thought of those

two old-age pensioners living in their house, usurping floor-space, devouring food, and paying only ten shillings a week. I doubt whether they were really losing money over the old-age pensioners, though certainly the profit on ten shillings a week must have been very small. But in their eyes the two old men were a kind of dreadful parasite who had fastened on them and were living on their charity. Old Jack they could just tolerate, because he kept out-of-doors most of the day, but they really hated the bedridden one, Hooker by name. Mr Brooker had a queer way of pronouncing his name, without the H and with a long U— 'Uker'. What tales I heard about old Hooker and his fractiousness, the nuisance of making his bed, the way he 'wouldn't eat' this and 'wouldn't eat' that, his endless ingratitude and, above all, the selfish obstinacy with which he refused to die! The Brookers were quite openly pining for him to die. When that happened they could at least draw the insurance money. They seemed to feel him there, eating their substance day after day, as though he had been a living worm in their bowels. Sometimes Mr Brooker would look up from his potato-peeling, catch my eye, and jerk his head with a look of inexpressible bitterness towards the ceiling, towards old Hooker's room. 'It's a b-, ain't it?' he would say. There was no need to say more; I had heard all about old Hooker's ways already. But the Brookers had grievances of one kind and another against all their lodgers, myself included, no doubt. Joe, being on the P.A.C., was practically in the same category as the old-age pensioners. The Scotchman paid a pound a week, but he was indoors most of the day and they 'didn't like him always hanging round the place', as they put it. The newspaper-canvassers were out all day, but the Brookers bore them a grudge for bringing in their own food, and even Mr Reilly, their best lodger, was in disgrace because Mrs Brooker said that he woke her up when he came downstairs in the mornings. They couldn't, they complained perpetually, get the kind of lodgers they wanted — good-class 'commercial gentlemen' who paid full board and were out all day. Their ideal lodger would have been somebody who paid thirty shillings a week and never came indoors except to sleep. I have noticed that people who let lodgings nearly always hate their lodgers. They want their money but they look on them as intruders and have a

curiously watchful, jealous attitude which at bottom is a determination not to let the lodger make himself too much at home. It is an inevitable result of the bad system by which the lodger has to live in somebody else's house without being one of the family.

The meals at the Brookers' house were uniformly disgusting. For breakfast you got two rashers of bacon and a pale fried egg, and bread-and-butter which had often been cut overnight and always had thumb-marks on it. However tactfully I tried, I could never induce Mr Brooker to let me cut my own bread-and-butter; he would hand it to me slice by slice, each slice gripped firmly under that broad black thumbs For dinner there were generally those threepenny steak puddings which are sold ready-made in tins — these were part of the stock of the shop, I think — and boiled potatoes and rice pudding. For tea there was more bread-and-butter and frayed-looking sweet cakes which were probably bought as 'stales' from the baker. For supper there was the pale flabby Lancashire cheese and biscuits. The Brookers never called these biscuits biscuits. They always referred to them reverently as 'cream crackers'— 'Have another cream cracker, Mr Reilly. You'll like a cream cracker with your cheese' — thus glozing over the fact that there was only cheese for supper. Several bottles of Worcester Sauce and a half-full jar of marmalade lived permanently on the table. It was usual to souse everything, even a piece of cheese, with Worcester Sauce, but I never saw anyone brave the marmalade jar, which was an unspeakable mass of stickiness and dust. Mrs Brooker had her meals separately but also took snacks from any meal that happened to be going, and manoeuvred with great skill for what she called 'the bottom of the pot', meaning the strongest cup of tea. She had a habit of constantly wiping her mouth on one of her blankets. Towards the end of my stay she took to tearing off strips of newspaper for this purpose, and in the morning the floor was often littered with crumpled-up balls of slimy paper which lay there for hours. The smell of the kitchen was dreadful, but, as with that of the bedroom, you ceased to notice it after a while.

It struck me that this place must be fairly normal as lodging-houses in the industrial areas go, for on the whole the lodgers did not complain. The only one who ever did so to my knowledge was a little black-haired, sharp-nosed Cockney, a traveller for a cigarette

firm. He had never been in the North before, and I think that till recently he had been in better employ and was used to staying in commercial hotels. This was his first glimpse of really low-class lodgings, the kind of place in which the poor tribe of touts and canvassers have to shelter upon their endless journeys. In the morning as we were dressing (he had slept in the double bed, of course) I saw him look round the desolate room with a sort of wondering aversion. He caught my eye and suddenly divined that I was a fellow-Southerner. 'The filthy bloody bastards!' he said feelingly. After that he packed his suit-case, went downstairs and, with great strength of mind, told the Brookers that this was not the kind of house he was accustomed to and that he was leaving immediately. The Brookers could never understand why. They were astonished and hurt. The ingratitude of it! Leaving them like that for no reason after a single night! Afterwards they discussed it over and over again, in all its bearings. It was added to their store of grievances.

On the day when there was a full chamber-pot under the breakfast table I decided to leave. The place was beginning to depress me. It was not only the dirt, the smells, and the vile food, but the feeling of stagnant meaningless decay, of having got down into some subterranean place where people go creeping round and round, just like blackbeetles, in an endless muddle of slovened jobs and mean grievances. The most dreadful thing about people like the Brookers is the way they say the same things over and over again. It gives you the feeling that they are not real people at all, but a kind of ghost for ever rehearsing the same futile rigmarole. In the end Mrs Brooker's self-pitying talk — always the same complaints, over and over, and always ending with the tremulous whine of 'It does seem 'ard, don't it now?' — revolted me even more than her habit of wiping her mouth with bits of newspaper. But it is no use saying that people like the Brookers are just disgusting and trying to put them out of mind. For they exist in tens and hundreds of thousands; they are one of the characteristic by-products of the modern world. You cannot disregard them if you accept the civilization that produced them. For this is part at least of what industrialism has done for us. Columbus sailed the Atlantic, the first steam engines tottered into motion, the

British squares stood firm under the French guns at Waterloo, the one-eyed scoundrels of the nineteenth century praised God and filled their pockets; and this is where it all led — to labyrinthine slums and dark back kitchens with sickly, ageing people creeping round and round them like blackbeetles. It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you should forget that they exist; though perhaps it is better not to stay there too long.

The train bore me away, through the monstrous scenery of slag-heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron, foul canals, paths of cindery mud criss-crossed by the prints of clogs. This was March, but the weather had been horribly cold and everywhere there were mounds of blackened snow. As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town we passed row after row of little grey slum houses running at right angles to the-embankment. At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside and which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her — her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever-seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that' It isn't the same for them as it would be for us,' and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her — understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe.

But quite soon the train drew away into open country, and that seemed strange, almost unnatural, as though the open country had been a kind of park; for in the industrial areas one always feels that the smoke and filth must go on for ever and that no part of the earth's surface can escape them. In a crowded, dirty little country like ours one takes defilement almost for granted. Slag-heaps and chimneys

seem a more normal, probable landscape than grass and trees, and even in the depths of the country when you drive your fork into the ground you half expect to lever up a broken bottle or a rusty can. But out here the snow was untrodden and lay so deep that only the tops of the stone boundary-walls were showing, winding over the hills like black paths. I remembered that D. H. Lawrence, writing of this same landscape or another near by, said that the snow-covered hills rippled away into the distance 'like muscle'. It was not the simile that would have occurred to me. To my eye the snow and the black walls were more like a white dress with black piping running across it.

Although the snow was hardly broken the sun was shining brightly, and behind the shut windows of the carriage it seemed warm. According to the almanac this was spring, and a few of the birds seemed to believe it. For the first time in my life, in a bare patch beside the line, I saw rooks treading. They did it on the ground and not, as I should have expected, in a tree. The manner of courtship was curious. The female stood with her beak open and the male walked round her and appeared to be feeding her. I had hardly been in the train half an hour, but it seemed a very long way from the Brookers' back-kitchen to the empty slopes of snow, the bright sunshine, and the big gleaming birds.

The whole of the industrial districts are really one enormous town, of about the same population as Greater London but, fortunately, of much larger area; so that even in the middle of them there is still room for patches of cleanness and decency. That is an encouraging thought. In spite of hard trying, man has not yet succeeded in doing his dirt everywhere. The earth is so vast and still so empty that even in the filthy heart of civilization you find fields where the grass is green instead of grey; perhaps if you looked for them you might even find streams with live fish in them instead of salmon tins. For quite a long time, perhaps another twenty minutes, the train was rolling through open country before the villa-civilization began to close in upon us again, and then the outer slums, and then the slag-heaps, belching chimneys, blast-furnaces, canals, and gaso-meters of another industrial town.

2

Our civilization, pace Chesterton, is founded on coal, more completely than one realizes until one stops to think about it. The machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent upon coal. In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is not grimy is supported. For this reason the actual process by which coal is extracted is well worth watching, if you get the chance and are willing to take the trouble.

When you go down a coal-mine it is important to try and get to the coal face when the 'fillers' are at work. This is not easy, because when the mine is working visitors are a nuisance and are not encouraged, but if you go at any other time, it is possible to come away with a totally wrong impression. On a Sunday, for instance, a mine seems almost peaceful. The time to go there is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal dust, and when you can actually see what the miners have to do. At those times the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are if there — heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust.

When you have finally got there — and getting there is a feat in itself: I will explain that in a moment — you crawl through the last line of pit props and see opposite you a shiny black wall three or four feet high. This is the coal face. Overhead is the smooth ceiling made by the rock from which the coal has been cut; underneath is the rock again, so that the gallery you are in is only as high as the ledge of coal itself, probably not much more than a yard. The first impression of all, overmastering everything else for a while, is the frightful, deafening din from the conveyor belt which carries the coal away. You cannot see very far, because the fog of coal dust throws back the beam of your lamp, but you can see on either side of you the line of

half-naked kneeling men, one to every four or five yards, driving their shovels under the fallen coal and flinging it swiftly over their left shoulders. They are feeding it on to the conveyor belt, a moving rubber, belt a couple of feet wide which runs a yard or two behind them. Down this belt a glittering river of coal races constantly. In a big mine it is carrying away several tons of coal every minute. It bears it off to some place in the main roads where it is shot into tubs holding half a tun, and thence dragged to the cages and hoisted to the outer air.

It is impossible to watch the 'fillers' at work without feelling a pang of envy for their toughness. It is a dreadful job that they do, an almost superhuman job by the standard of an ordinary person. For they are not only shifting monstrous quantities of coal, they are also doing, it in a position that doubles or trebles the work. They have got to remain kneeling all the while — they could hardly rise from their knees without hitting the ceiling — and you can easily see by trying it what a tremendous effort this means. Shovelling is comparatively easy when you are standing up, because you can use your knee and thigh to drive the shovel along; kneeling down, the whole of the strain is thrown upon your arm and belly muscles. And the other conditions do not exactly make things easier. There is the heat — it varies, but in some mines it is suffocating — and the coal dust that stuffs up your throat and nostrils and collects along your eyelids, and the unending rattle of the conveyor belt, which in that confined space is rather like the rattle of a machine gun. But the fillers look and work as though they were made of iron. They really do look like iron hammered iron statues — under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realize what splendid men, they are. Most of them are small (big men are at a disadvantage in that job) but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere. In the hotter mines they wear only a pair of thin drawers, clogs and knee-pads; in the hottest mines of all, only the clogs and knee-pads. You can hardly tell by the look of them whether they are young or old. They may be any age up to sixty or even sixty-five, but

when they are black and naked they all look alike. No one could do their work who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for a guardsman at that, just a few pounds of extra flesh on the waist-line, and the constant bending would be impossible. You can never forget that spectacle once you have seen it — the line of bowed, kneeling figures, sooty black all over, driving their, huge shovels under the coal with stupendous force and speed. They are on the job for seven and a half hours, theoretically without a break, for there is no time 'off'. Actually they, snatch a quarter of an hour or so at some time during the shift to eat the food they have brought with them, usually a hunk of bread and dripping and a bottle of cold tea. The first time I was watching the 'fillers' at work I put my hand upon some dreadful slimy thing among the coal dust. It was a chewed quid of tobacco. Nearly all the miners chew tobacco, which is said to be good against thirst.

Probably you have to go down several coal-mines before you can get much grasp of the processes that are going on round you. This is chiefly because the mere effort of getting from place to place; makes it difficult to notice anything else, In some ways it is even disappointing, or at least is unlike what you have, expected. You get into the cage, which is a steel box about as wide as a telephone box and two or three times as long. It holds ten men, but they pack it like pilchards in a tin, and a tall man cannot stand upright in it. The steel door shuts upon you, and somebody working the winding gear above drops you into the void. You have the usual momentary qualm in your belly and a bursting sensation in the cars, but not much sensation of movement till you get near the bottom, when the cage slows down so abruptly that you could swear it is going upwards again. In the middle of the run the cage probably touches sixty miles an hour; in some of the deeper mines it touches even more. When you crawl out at the bottom you are perhaps four hundred yards underground. That is to say you have a tolerable-sized mountain on top of you; hundreds of yards of solid rock, bones of extinct beasts, subsoil, flints, roots of growing things, green grass and cows grazing on it — all this suspended over your head and held back only by wooden props as thick as the calf of your leg. But because of the speed at which the cage has brought you down, and the complete

blackness through which you have travelled, you hardly feel yourself deeper down than you would at the bottom of the Piccadilly tube.

What is surprising, on the other hand, is the immense horizontal distances that have to be travelled underground. Before I had been down a mine I had vaguely imagined the miner stepping out of the cage and getting to work on a ledge of coal a few yards away. I had not realized that before he even gets to work he may have had to creep along passages as long as from London Bridge to Oxford Circus. In the beginning, of course, a mine shaft is sunk somewhere near a seam of coal; But as that seam is worked out and fresh seams are followed up, the workings get further and further from the pit bottom. If it is a mile from the pit bottom to the coal face, that is probably an average distance; three miles is a fairly normal one; there are even said to be a few mines where it is as much as five miles. But these distances bear no relation to distances above ground. For in all that mile or three miles as it may be, there is hardly anywhere outside the main road, and not many places even there, where a man can stand upright.

You do not notice the effect of this till you have gone a few hundred yards. You start off, stooping slightly, down the dim-lit gallery, eight or ten feet wide and about five high, with the walls built up with slabs of shale, like the stone walls in Derbyshire. Every yard or two there are wooden props holding up the beams and girders; some of the girders have buckled into fantastic curves under which you have to duck. Usually it is bad going underfoot — thick dust or jagged chunks of shale, and in some mines where there is water it is as mucky as a farm-yard. Also there is the track for the coal tubs, like a miniature railway track with sleepers a foot or two apart, which is tiresome to walk on. Everything is grey with shale dust; there is a dusty fiery smell which seems to be the same in all mines. You see mysterious machines of which you never learn the purpose, and bundles of tools slung together on wires, and sometimes mice darting away from the beam of the lamps. They are surprisingly common, especially in mines where there are or have been horses. It would be interesting to know how they got there in the first place; possibly by falling down the shaft — for they say a mouse can fall any distance uninjured, owing to its surface area being so large

relative to its weight. You press yourself against the wall to make way for lines of tubs jolting slowly towards the shaft, drawn by an endless steel cable operated from the surface. You creep through sacking curtains and thick wooden doors which, when they are opened, let out fierce blasts of air. These doors are an important part of the ventilation system. The exhausted air is sucked out of one shaft by means of fans, and the fresh air enters the other of its own accord. But if left to itself the air will take the shortest way round, leaving the deeper workings unventilated; so all the short cuts have to be partitioned off.

At the start to walk stooping is rather a joke, but it is a joke that soon wears off. I am handicapped by being exceptionally tall, but when the roof falls to four feet or less it is a tough job for anybody except a dwarf or a child. You not only have to bend double, you have also got to keep your head up all the while so as to see the beams and girders and dodge them when they come. You have, thehefore, a constant crick in the neck, but this is nothing to the pain in your knees and thighs. After half a mile it becomes (I am not exaggerating) an unbearable agony. You begin to wonder whether you will ever get to the end — still more, how on earth you are going to get back. Your pace grows slower and slower. You come to a stretch of a couple of hundred yards where it is all exceptionally low and you have to work yourself along in a squatting position. Then suddenly the roof opens out to a mysterious height — scene of and old fall of rock, probably — and for twenty whole yards you can stand upright. The relief is overwhelming. But after this there is another low stretch of a hundred yards and then a succession of beams which you have to crawl under. You go down on all fours; even this is a relief after the squatting business. But when you come to the end of the beams and try to get up again, you find that your knees have temporarily struck work and refuse to lift you. You call a halt, ignominiously, and say that you would like to rest for a minute or two. Your guide (a miner) is sympathetic. He knows that your muscles are not the same as his. ‘Only another four hundred yards,’ he says encouragingly; you feel that he might as well say another four hundred miles. But finally you do somehow creep as far as the coal face. You have gone a mile and taken the best part of an hour; a

miner would do it in not much more than twenty minutes. Having got there, you have to sprawl in the coal dust and get your strength back for several minutes before you can even watch the work in progress with any kind of intelligence.

Coming back is worse than going, not only because you are already tired out but because the journey back to the shaft is slightly uphill. You get through the low places at the speed of a tortoise, and you have no shame now about calling a halt when your knees give way. Even the lamp you are carrying becomes a nuisance and probably when you stumble you drop it; whereupon, if it is a Davy lamp, it goes out. Ducking the beams becomes more and more of an effort, and sometimes you forget to duck. You try walking head down as the miners do, and then you bang your backbone. Even the miners bang their backbones fairly often. This is the reason why in very hot mines, where it is necessary to go about half naked, most of the miners have what they call 'buttons down the back' — that is, a permanent scab on each vertebra. When the track is down hill the miners sometimes fit their clogs, which are hollow under-neath, on to the trolley rails and slide down. In mines where the 'travelling' is very bad all the miners carry sticks about two and a half feet long, hollowed out below the handle. In normal places you keep your hand on top of the stick and in the low places you slide your hand down into the hollow. These sticks are a great help, and the wooden crash-helmets — a comparatively recent invention — are a godsend. They look like a French or Italian steel helmet, but they are made of some kind of pith and very light, and so strong, that you can take a violent blow on the head without feeling it. When finally you get back to the surface you have been perhaps three hours underground and travelled two miles, and you, are more exhausted than you would be by a twenty-five-mile walk above ground. For a week afterwards your thighs are so stiff that coming downstairs is quite a difficult feat; you have to work your way down in a peculiar sidelong manner, without bending the knees. Your miner friends notice the stiffness of your walk and chaff you about it. ('How'd ta like to work down pit, eh?' etc.) Yet even a miner who has been long away front work — from illness, for instance — when he comes back to the pit, suffers badly for the first few days.

It may seem that I am exaggerating, though no one who has been down an old-fashioned pit (most of the pits in England are old-fashioned) and actually gone as far as the coal face, is likely to say so. But what I want to emphasize is this. Here is this frightful business of crawling to and fro, which to any normal person is a hard day's work in itself; and it is not part of the miner's work at all, it is merely an extra, like the City man's daily ride in the Tube. The miner does that journey to and fro, and sandwiched in between there are seven and a half hours of savage work. I have never travelled much more than a mile to the coal face; but often it is three miles, in which case I and most people other than coal-miners would never get there at all. This is the kind of point that one is always liable to miss. When you think of the coal-mine you think of depth, heat, darkness, blackened figures hacking at walls of coal; you don't think, necessarily, of those miles of creeping to and fro. There is the question of time, also. A miner's working shift of seven and a half hours does not sound very long, but one has got to add on to it at least an hour a day for 'travelling', more often two hours and sometimes three. Of course, the 'travelling' is not technically work and the miner is not paid for it; but it is as like work as makes no difference. It is easy to say that miners don't mind all this. Certainly, it is not the same for them as it would be for you or me. They have done it since childhood, they have the right muscles hardened, and they can move to and fro underground with a startling and rather horrible agility. A miner puts his head down and runs, with a long swinging stride, through places where I can only stagger. At the workings you see them on all fours, skipping round the pit props almost like dogs. But it is quite a mistake to think that they enjoy it. I have talked about this to scores of miners and they all admit that the 'travelling' is hard work; in any case when you hear them discussing a pit among themselves the 'travelling' is always one of the things they discuss. It is said that a shift always returns from work faster than it goes; nevertheless the miners all say that it is the coming away after a hard day's work, that is especially irksome. It is part of their work and they are equal to it, but certainly it is an effort. It is comparable, perhaps, to climbing a smallish mountain before and after your day's work.

When you have been down in two or three pits you begin to get some grasp of the processes that are going on underground. (I ought to say, by the way, that I know nothing whatever about the technical side of mining: I am merely describing what I have seen.) Coal lies in thin seams between enormous layers of rock, so that essentially the process of getting it out is like scooping the central layer from a Neapolitan ice. In the old days the miners used to cut straight into the coal with pick and crowbar — a very slow job because coal, when lying in its virgin state, is almost as hard as rock. Nowadays the preliminary work is done by an electrically-driven coal-cutter, which in principle is an immensely tough and powerful band-saw, running horizontally instead of vertically, with teeth a couple of inches long and half an inch or an inch thick. It can move backwards or forwards on its own power, and the men operating it can rotate it this way or that. Incidentally it makes one of the most awful noises I have ever heard, and sends forth clouds of coal dust which make it impossible to see more than two to three feet and almost impossible to breathe. The machine travels along the coal face cutting into the base of the coal and undermining it to the depth of five feet or five feet and a half; after this it is comparatively easy to extract the coal to the depth to which it has been undermined. Where it is 'difficult getting', however, it has also to be loosened with explosives. A man with an electric drill, like a rather small version of the drills used in street-mending, bores holes at intervals in the coal, inserts blasting powder, plugs it with clay, goes round the corner if there is one handy (he is supposed to retire to twenty-five yards distance) and touches off the charge with an electric current. This is not intended to bring the coal out, only to loosen it. Occasionally, of course, the charge is too powerful, and then it not only brings the coal out but brings the roof down as well.

After the blasting has been done the 'fillers' can tumble the coal out, break it up and shovel it on to the conveyor belt. It comes out first in monstrous boulders which may weigh anything up to twenty tons. The conveyor belt shoots it on to tubs, and the tubs are shoved into the main road and hitched on to an endlessly revolving steel cable which drags them to the cage. Then they are hoisted, and at the surface the coal is sorted by being run over screens, and if necessary

is washed as well. As far as possible the 'dirt' — the shale, that is — is used for making the roads below. All what cannot be used is sent to the surface and dumped; hence the monstrous 'dirt-heaps', like hideous grey mountains, which are the characteristic scenery of the coal areas. When the coal has been extracted to the depth to which the machine has cut, the coal face has advanced by five feet. Fresh props are put in to hold up the newly exposed roof, and during the next shift the conveyor belt is taken to pieces, moved five feet forward and re-assembled. As far as possible the three operations of cutting, blasting and extraction are done in three separate shifts, the cutting in the afternoon, the blasting at night (there is a law, not always kept, that forbids its being done when other men are working near by), and the 'filling' in the morning shift, which lasts from six in the morning until half past one.

Even when you watch the process of coal-extraction you probably only watch it for a short time, and it is not until you begin making a few calculations that you realize what a stupendous task the 'fillers' are performing. Normally each man has to clear a space four or five yards wide. The cutter has undermined the coal to the depth of five feet, so that if the seam of coal is three or four feet high, each man has to cut out, break up and load on to the belt something between seven and twelve cubic yards of coal. This is to say, taking a cubic yard as weighing twenty-seven hundred-weight, that each man is shifting coal at a speed approaching two tons an hour. I have just enough experience of pick and shovel work to be able to grasp what this means. When I am digging trenches in my garden, if I shift two tons of earth during the afternoon, I feel that I have earned my tea. But earth is tractable stuff compared with coal, and I don't have to work kneeling down, a thousand feet underground, in suffocating heat and swallowing coal dust with every breath I take; nor do I have to walk a mile bent double before I begin. The miner's job would be as much beyond my power as it would be to perform on a flying trapeze or to win the Grand National. I am not a manual labourer and please God I never shall be one, but there are some kinds of manual work that I could do if I had to. At a pitch I could be a tolerable road-sweeper or an inefficient gardener or even a tenth-rate farm hand. But by no conceivable amount of effort or training could I become a coal-

miner, the work would kill me in a few weeks.

Watching coal-miners at work, you realize momentarily what different universes people inhabit. Down there where coal is dug is a sort of world apart which one can quite easily go through life without ever hearing about. Probably majority of people would even prefer not to hear about it. Yet it is the absolutely necessary counterpart of our world above. Practically everything we do, from eating an ice to crossing the Atlantic, and from baking a loaf to writing a novel, involves the use of coal, directly or indirectly. For all the arts of peace coal is needed; if war breaks out it is needed all the more. In time of revolution the miner must go on working or the revolution must stop, for revolution as much as reaction needs coal. Whatever may be happening on the surface, the hacking and shovelling have got to continue without a pause, or at any rate without pausing for more than a few weeks at the most. In order that Hitler may march the goose-step, that the Pope may denounce Bolshevism, that the cricket crowds may assemble at Lords, that the poets may scratch one another's backs, coal has got to be forthcoming. But on the whole we are not aware of it; we all know that we 'must have coal', but we seldom or never remember what coal-getting involves. Here am I sitting writing in front of my comfortable coal fire. It is April but I still need a fire. Once a fortnight the coal cart drives up to the door and men in leather jerkins carry the coal indoors in stout sacks smelling of tar and shoot it clanking into the coal-hole under the stairs. It is only very rarely, when I make a definite mental-effort, that I connect this coal with that far-off labour in the mines. It is just 'coal' — something that I have got to have; black stuff that arrives mysteriously from nowhere in particular, like manna except that you have to pay for it. You could quite easily drive a car right across the north of England and never once remember that hundreds of feet below the road you are on the miners are hacking at the coal. Yet in a sense it is the miners who are driving your car forward. Their lamp-lit world down there is as necessary to the daylight world above as the root is to the flower.

It is not long since conditions in the mines were worse than they are now. There are still living a few very old women who in their youth have worked underground, with the harness round their waists,

and a chain that passed between their legs, crawling on all fours and dragging tubs of coal. They used to go on doing this even when they were pregnant. And even now, if coal could not be produced without pregnant women dragging it to and fro, I fancy we should let them do it rather than deprive ourselves of coal. But-most of the time, of course, we should prefer to forget that they were doing it. It is so with all types of manual work; it keeps us alive, and we are oblivious of its existence. More than anyone else, perhaps, the miner can stand as the type of the manual worker, not only because his work is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so vitally necessary and yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as it were, that we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins. In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal-miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an 'intellectual' and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the Times Lit. Supp., and the poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants — all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.

3

When the miner comes up from the pit his face is so pale that it is noticeable even through the mask of coal dust. This is due to the foul air that he has been breathing, and will wear off presently. To a Southerner, new to the mining districts, the spectacle of a shift of several hundred miners streaming out of the pit is strange and slightly sinister. The exhausted faces, with the grime clinging in all the hollows, have a fierce, wild look. At other times, when their faces are clean, there is not much to distinguish them from the rest of the population. They have a very upright square-shouldered walk, a reaction from the constant bending underground, but most of them are shortish men and their thick ill-fitting clothes hide the splendour of their bodies. The most definitely distinctive thing about them is the blue scars on their noses. Every miner has blue scars on his nose and forehead, and will carry them to his death. The coal dust of which the air underground is full enters every cut, and then the skin grows over it and forms a blue stain like tattooing, which in fact it is. Some of the older men have their foreheads veined like Roquefort cheeses from this cause.

As soon as the miner comes above ground he gargles a little water to get the worst of the coal dust out of his throat and nostrils, and then goes home and either washes or does not wash according to his temperament. From what I have seen I should say that a majority of miners prefer to eat their meal first and wash afterwards, as I should do in their circumstances. It is the normal thing to see a miner sitting down to his tea with a Christy-minstrel face, completely black except for very red lips which become clean by eating. After his meal he takes a largish basin of water and washes very methodically, first his hands, then his chest, neck, and armpits, then his forearms, then his face and scalp (it is on the scalp that the grime clings thickest), and then his wife takes the flannel and washes his back. He has only washed the top half of his body and probably his navel is still a nest of coal dust, but even so it takes some skill to get pass-ably clean in a single basin of water. For my own part I found I needed two complete baths after going down a coal-mine. Getting the dirt out of

one's eyelids is a ten minutes' job in itself.

At some of the larger and better appointed collieries there are pithead baths. This is an enormous advantage, for not only can the miner wash himself all over every day, in comfort and even luxury, but at the baths he has two lockers where he can keep his pit clothes separate from his day clothes, so that within twenty minutes of emerging as black as a Negro he can be riding off to a football match dressed up to the nines. But it is only comparatively seldom because a seam of coal does not last for ever, so that it is not necessarily worth building a bath every time a shaft is sunk. I can-not get hold of exact figures, but it seems likely that rather less than one miner in three has access to a pithead bath. Probably a large majority of miners are completely black from the waist down for at least six days a week. It is almost impossible for them to wash all over in their own homes. Every drop of water has got to be heated up, and in a tiny living-room which contains, apart from the kitchen range and a quantity of furniture, a wife, some children, and probably a dog, there is simply not room to have a proper bath. Even with a basin one is bound to splash the furniture. Middle-class people are fond of saying that the miners would not wash themselves properly even if they could, but this is nonsense, as is shown by the fact that where pithead baths exist practically all the men use them. Only among the very old men does the belief still linger that washing one's legs 'causes lumbago'. Moreover the pithead baths, where they exist, are paid for wholly or partly by the miners themselves, out of the Miners' Welfare Fund. Sometimes the colliery company subscribes, some-times the Fund bears the whole cost. But doubtless even at this late date the old ladies in Brighton boarding-houses are saying that 'if you give those miners baths they only use them to keep coal in'.

As a matter of fact it is surprising that miners wash as regularly as they do, seeing how little time they have between work and sleep. It is a great mistake to think of a miner's working day as being only seven and a half hours. Seven and a half hours is the time spent actually on the job, but, as I have already explained, one has got to add on to this time taken up in 'travelling', which is seldom less than an hour and may often be three hours. In addition most miners have to spend a considerable time in getting to and from the pit.

Throughout the industrial districts there is an acute shortage of houses, and it is only in the small mining villages, where the village is grouped round the pit, that the men can be certain of living near their work. In the larger mining towns where I have stayed, nearly everyone went to work by bus; half a crown a week seemed to be the normal amount to spend on fares. One miner I stayed with was working on the morning shift, which was from six in the morning till half past one. He had to be out of bed at a quarter to four and got back somewhere after three in the afternoon. In another house where I stayed a boy of fifteen was working on the night shift. He left for work at nine at night and got back at eight in the morning, had his breakfast, and then promptly went to bed and slept till six in the evening; so that his leisure time amounted to, about four hours a day — actually a good deal less, if you take off the time for washing, eating, and dressing.

The adjustments a miner's family have to make when he is changed from one shift to another must be tiresome in the extreme. If he is on the night shift he gets home in time for breakfast, on the morning shift he gets home in the middle of the afternoon, and on the afternoon shift he gets home in the middle of the night; and in each case, of course, he wants his principal meal of the day as soon as he returns. I notice that the Rev. W. R. Inge, in his book England, accuses the miners of gluttony. From my own observation I should say that they eat astonishingly little. Most of the miners I stayed with ate slightly less than I did. Many of them declare that they cannot do their day's work if they have had a heavy meal beforehand, and the food they take with them is only a snack, usually bread-and-dripping and cold tea. They carry it in a flat tin called a snap-can which they strap to their belts. When a miner gets back late at night his wife waits up for him, but when he is on the morning shift it seems to be the custom for him to get his breakfast for himself. Apparently the old superstition that it is bad luck to see a woman before going to work on the morning shift is not quite extinct. In the old days, it is said, a miner who happened to meet a woman in the early morning would often turn back and do no work that day.

Before I had been in the coal areas I shared the wide-spread illusion that miners are comparatively well paid. One hears it loosely

stated that a miner is paid ten or eleven shillings a shift, and one does a small multiplication sum and concludes that every miner is earning round about L2 a week or L150 a year. But the statement that a miner receives ten or eleven shillings a shift is very misleading. To begin with, it is only the actual coal 'getter' who is paid at this rate; a 'dataller', for instance, who attends to the roofing, is paid at a lower rate, usually eight or nine shillings a shift. Again, when the coal 'getter' is paid piecework, so much per ton extracted, as is the case in many mines, he is dependent on the quality of the coal; a breakdown in the machinery or a 'fault' — that is, a streak of rock running through the coal seam — may rob him of his earnings for a day or two at a time. But in any case one ought not to think of the miner as working six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Almost certainly there will be a number of days when he is' laid off'. The average earning per shift worked for every mine-worker, of all ages and both sexes, in Great Britain in 1934, was 9s. 1 3*4d. [From the Colliery Tear Book and Coal Trades Directory for 1935.] If everyone were in work all the time, this would mean that the mine-worker was earning a little over L142 a year, or nearly L2 15s. a week. His real income, however, is far lower than this, for the 9s. 1 3*4d. is merely an average calculation on shifts actually worked and takes no account of blank days.

I have before me five pay-checks belonging to a Yorkshire miner, for five weeks (not consecutive) at the beginning of 1936. Averaging them up, the gross weekly wages they represent is L2 15s. 2d.; this is an average of nearly 9s. 2 1/2d. a shift. But these pay-checks are for the winter, when nearly all mines are running full time. As spring advances the coal trade slacks off and more and more men are 'temporarily stopped', while others still technically in work are laid off for a day or two in every week. It is obvious therefore that L150 or even L142 is an immense over-estimate for the mine-worker's yearly income. As a matter of fact, for the year 1934 the average gross earnings of all miners through-out Great Britain was only L115 11s. 6d. It varied consider-ably from district to district, rising as high as L133 2s. 8d. in Scotland, while in Durham it was a little under L105 or barely more than L2 a week. I take these figures from The Coid Scuttle, by Mr Joseph Jones, Mayor of Barnsley, Yorkshire. Mr

Jones adds:

These figures cover the earnings of youths as well as adults and of the higher — as well as the lower-paid grades . . . any particularly high earning would be included in these figures, as would the earnings of certain officials and other higher-paid men as well as the higher amounts paid for overtime work.

The figures, being averages, fail . . . to reveal the position of thousands of adult workers whose earnings were substantially below the average and' who received only 30s. to 40s. or less per week.

Mr Jones's italics. But please notice that even these wretched earnings are gross earnings. On top of this there are all kinds of stoppages which are deducted from the miner's wages every week. Here is a list of weekly stoppages which was given me as typical in one Lancashire district:

	s.	d.
Insurance (unemployment and health)	1	5
Hire of lamp		6
For sharpening tools		6
Check-weighman		9
Infirmary	2	
Hospital	1	
Benevolent Fund		6
Union fees		6
Total	4	5

Some of these stoppages, such as the Benevolent Fund and the union fees, are, so to speak, the miner's own responsibility, others are imposed by the colliery company. They are not the same in all districts. For instance, the iniquitous swindle of making the miner pay for the hire of his lamp (at sixpence a week he buys the lamp several times over in a single year) does not obtain everywhere. But the stoppages always seem to total up to about the same amount. On the Yorkshire miner's five pay-checks, the average gross earning per week is L2 15s. 2d.; the average net earning, after the stoppages have

come off, is only L2 11s. 4d. — a reduction of 3s. 10d. a week. But the pay-check, naturally, only mentions stoppages which are imposed or paid through the colliery company; one has got to add the union fees, bringing the total reduction up to something over four shillings. Probably it is safe to say that stoppages of one kind and another cut four shillings or thereabouts from every adult miner's weekly wage. So that the L115 11s. 6d. which was the mine-worker's average earning throughout Great Britain in 1934 should really be something nearer L105. As against this, most miners receive allowances in kind, being able to purchase coal for their own use at a reduced rate, usually eight or nine shillings a ton. But according to Mr Jones, quoted above, 'the average value of all allowances in kind for the country as a whole is only fourpence a day'. And this fourpence a day is offset, in many cases, by the amount the miner has to spend on fares in getting to and from the pit. So, taking the industry as a whole, the sum the miner can actually bring home and call his own does not average more, perhaps slightly less, than two pounds a week.

Meanwhile, how much coal is the average miner producing?

The tonnage of coal raised yearly per person employed in mining rises steadily though rather slowly. In 1914 every mine-worker produced, on average, 253 tons of coal; in 1934 he produced 280 tons.[The Coal Scuttle. The Colliery Yew Book end Coal Trades Directory gives a slightly higher figure.] This of course is an average figure for mine-workers of all kinds; those actually working at the coal face extract an enormously greater amount — in many cases, probably, well over a thousand tons each. But taking 280 tons as a representative figure, it is worth noticing what a vast achievement this is. One gets the best idea of it by comparing a miner's life with somebody else's. If I live to be sixty I shall probably have produced thirty novels, or enough to fill two medium-sized library shelves. In the same period the average miner produces 8400 tons of coal; enough coal to pave Trafalgar Square nearly two feet deep or to supply seven large families with fuel for over a hundred years.

Of the five pay-checks I mentioned above, no less than three are rubber-stamped with the words 'death stoppage'. When a miner is killed at work it is usual for the other miners to make up a

subscription, generally of a shilling each, for his widow, and this is collected by the colliery company and automatically deducted from their wages. The significant detail here is the rubber stamp. The rate of accidents among miners is so high, compared with that in other trades, that casualties are taken for granted almost as they would be in a minor war. Every year one miner in about nine hundred is killed and one in about six is injured; most of these injuries, of course, are petty ones, but a fair number amount to total disablement. This means that if a miner's working life is forty years the chances are nearly seven to one against his escaping injury and not much more than twenty to one against his being killed outright. No other trade approaches this in dangerousness; the next most dangerous is the shipping trade, one sailor in a little under 1300 being killed every year. The figures I have given apply, of course, to mine-workers as a whole; for those actually working underground the proportion of injuries would be very much higher. Every miner of long standing that I have talked to had either been in a fairly serious accident himself or had seen some of his mates killed, and in every mining family they tell you tales of fathers, brothers, or uncles killed at work. ('And he fell seven hundred feet, and they wouldn't never have collected t'pieces only he were wearing a new suit of oil-skins,' etc., etc., etc.) Some of these tales are appalling in the extreme. One miner, for instance, described to me how a mate of his, a 'dataller', was buried by a fall of rock. They rushed to him and managed to uncover his head and shoulders so that he could breathe, and he was alive and spoke to them. Then they saw that the roof was coming down again and had to run to save themselves; the 'dataller' was buried a second time. Once again they rushed to him and got his head and shoulders free, and again he was alive and spoke to them. Then the roof came down a third time, and this time they could not uncover him for several hours, after which, of course, he was dead. But the miner who told me the story (he had been buried himself on one occasion, but he was lucky enough to have his head jammed between his legs so that there was a small space in which he could breathe) did not think it was a particularly appalling one. Its significance, for him, was that the 'dataller' had known perfectly well that the place where he was working was unsafe, and had gone

there in daily expectation of an accident. ‘And it worked on his mind to that extent that he got to kissing his wife before he went to work. And she told me afterwards that it were over twenty years since he’d kissed her.’

The most obviously understandable cause of accidents is explosions of gas, which is always more or less present in the atmosphere of the pit. There is a special lamp which is used to test the air for gas, and when it is present in at all large quantities it can be detected by the flame of an ordinary Davy lamp burning blue. If the wick can be turned up to its full extent and the flame is still blue, the proportion of gas is dangerously high; it is, nevertheless, difficult to detect, because it does not distribute itself evenly throughout the atmosphere but hangs about in cracks and crevices. Before starting work a miner often tests for gas by poking his lamp into all the corners. The gas may be touched off by a spark during blasting operations, or by a pick striking a spark from a stone, or by a defective lamp, or by ‘gob fires’ — spontaneously generated fires which’ smoulder in the coal dust and are very hard to put out. The great mining disasters which happen from time to time, in which several hundred men are killed, are usually caused by explosions; hence one tends to think of explosions as the chief danger of mining. Actually, the great majority of accidents are due to the normal every-day dangers of the pit; in particular, to falls of roof. There are, for instance, ‘pot-holes’ — circular holes from which a lump of stone big enough to kill a man shoots out with the promptitude of a bullet. With, so far as I can remember, only one exception, all the miners I have talked to declared that the new machinery, and ‘speeding up’ generally, have made the work more dangerous. This may be partly due to conservatism, but they can give plenty of reasons. To begin with, the speed at which the coal is now extracted means that for hours at a time a dangerously large stretch of roof remains unpropped. Then there is the vibration, which tends to shake everything loose, and the noise, which makes it harder to detect signs of danger. One must remember that a miner’s safety underground depend largely on his own care and skill. An experienced miner claims to know by a sort of instinct when the roof is unsafe; the way he puts it is that he ‘can feel the weight on him’. He can, for instance,

hear the faint creaking of the props. The reason why wooden props are still generally preferred to iron girders is that a wooden prop which is about to collapse gives warning by creaking, whereas a girder flies out un-expectedly. The devastating noise of the machines makes it impossible to hear anything else, and thus the danger is increased.

When a miner is hurt it is of course impossible to attend to him immediately. He lies crushed under several hundred-weight of stone in some dreadful cranny underground, and even after he has been extricated it is necessary to drag his body a mile or more, perhaps, through galleries where nobody can stand upright. Usually when you talk to a man who has been injured you find that it was a couple of hours or so before they got him to the surface. Sometimes, of course, there are accidents to the cage. The cage is shooting several yards up or down at the speed of an express train, and it is operated by somebody on the surface who cannot see what is happening. He has very delicate indicators to tell him how far the cage has got, but it is possible for him to make a mistake, and there have been cases of the cage crashing into the pit-bottom at its very maximum speed. This seems to me a dreadful way to die. For as that tiny steel box whizzes through the blackness there must come a moment when the ten men who are locked inside it know that something has gone wrong; and the remaining seconds before they are smashed to pieces hardly bear thinking about. A miner told me he was once in a cage in which something went wrong. It did not slow up when it should have done, and they thought the cable must have snapped. As it happened they got to the bottom safely, but when he stepped out he found that he had broken a tooth; he had been clenching his teeth so hard in expectation of that frightful crash.

Apart from accidents miners seem to be healthy, as obviously they have got to be, considering the muscular efforts demanded of them. They are liable to rheumatism and a man with defective lungs does not last long in that dust-impregnated air, but the most characteristic industrial disease is nystagmus. This is a disease of the eyes which makes the eyeballs oscillate in a strange manner when they come near a light. It is due presumably to working in half-darkness, and sometimes results in total blindness. Miners who are disabled in this

way or any other way are compensated by the colliery company, sometimes with a lump sum, sometimes with a weekly pension. This pension never amounts to more than twenty-nine shillings a week; if it falls below fifteen shillings the disabled man can also get something from the dole or the P.A.C. If I were a disabled miner I should very much prefer the lump sum, for then at any rate I should know that I had got my money. Disability pensions are not guaranteed by any centralized fund, so that if the colliery company goes bankrupt that is the end of the disabled miner's pension, though he does figure among the other creditors.

In Wigan I stayed for a while with a miner who was suffering from nystagmus. He could see across the room but not much further. He had been drawing compensation of twenty-nine shillings a week for the past nine months, but the colliery company were now talking of putting him on 'partial compensation' of fourteen shillings a week. It all depended on whether the doctor passed him as fit for light work 'on top'. Even if the doctor did pass him there would, needless to say, be no light work available, but he could draw the dole and the company would have saved itself fifteen shillings a week. Watching this man go to the colliery to draw his compensation, I was struck by the profound differences that are still made by status. Here was a man who had been half blinded in one of the most useful of all jobs and was drawing a pension to which he had a perfect right, if anybody has a right to anything. Yet he could not, so to speak, demand this pension — he could not, for instance, draw it when and how he wanted it. He had to go to the colliery once a week at a time named by the company, and when he got there he was kept waiting about for hours in the cold wind. For all I know he was also expected to touch his cap and show gratitude to whoever paid him; at any rate he had to waste an afternoon and spend sixpence in bus fares. It is very different for a member of the bourgeoisie, even such a down-at-heel member as I am. Even when I am on the verge of starvation I have certain rights attaching to my bourgeois status. I do not earn much more than a miner earns, but I do at least get it paid into my bank in a gentle-manly manner and can draw it out when I choose. And even when my account is exhausted the bank people are passably polite.

This business of petty inconvenience and indignity, of being kept waiting about, of having to do everything at other people's convenience, is inherent in working-class life. A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive role. He does not act, he is acted upon. He feels himself the slave of mysterious authority and has a firm conviction that 'they' will never allow him to do this, that, and the other. Once when I was hop-picking I asked the sweated pickers (they earn something under sixpence an hour) why they did not form a union. I was told immediately that 'they' would never allow it. Who were 'they'? I asked. Nobody seemed to know, but evidently 'they' were omnipotent.

A person of bourgeois origin goes through life with some expectation of getting what he wants, within reasonable limits. Hence the fact that in times of stress 'educated' people tend to come to the front; they are no more gifted than the others and their 'education' is generally quite useless in itself, but they are accustomed to a certain amount of deference and consequently have the cheek necessary to a commander. That they will come to the front seems to be taken for granted, always and everywhere. In Lissagaray's History of the Commune there is an interesting passage describing the shootings that took place after the Commune had been suppressed. The authorities were shooting the ringleaders, and as they did not know who the ringleaders were, they were picking them out on the principle that those of better class would be the ringleaders. An officer walked down a line of prisoners, picking out likely-looking types. One man was shot because he was wearing a watch, another because he 'had an intelligent face'. I should not like to be shot for having an intelligent face, but I do agree that in almost any revolt the leaders would tend to be people who could pronounce their aitches.

4

AS you walk through the industrial towns you lose yourself in labyrinths of little brick houses blackened by smoke, festering in planless chaos round miry alleys and little cindered yards where there are stinking dust-bins and lines of grimy washing and half-ruinous w.c.s. The interiors of these houses are always very much the same, though the number of rooms varies between two or five. All have an almost exactly similar living-room, ten or fifteen feet square, with an open kitchen range; in the larger ones there is a scullery as well, in the smaller ones the sink and copper are in the living-room. At the back there is the yard, or part of a yard shared by a number of houses, just big enough for the dustbin and the w.c.s. Not a single one has hot water laid on. You might walk, I suppose, through literally hundreds of miles of streets inhabited by miners, every one of whom, when he is in work, gets black from head to foot every day, without ever passing a house in which one could have a bath. It would have been very simple to install a hot-water system working from the kitchen range, but the builder saved perhaps ten pounds on each house by not doing so, and at the time when these houses were built no one imagined that miners wanted baths.

For it is to be noted that the majority of these houses are old, fifty or sixty years old at least, and great numbers of them are by any ordinary standard not fit for human habitation. They go on being tenanted simply because there are no others to be had. And that is the central fact about housing in the industrial areas: not that the houses are poky and ugly, and insanitary and comfortless, or that they are distributed in incredibly filthy slums round belching foundries and stinking canals and slag-heaps that deluge them with sulphurous smoke — though all this is perfectly true — but simply that there are not enough houses to go round.

'Housing shortage' is a phrase that has been bandied about pretty freely since the war, but it means very little to anyone with an income of more than L10 a week, or even L5 a week for that matter. Where rents are high the difficulty is not to find houses but to find tenants. Walk down any street in Mayfair and you will see 'To Let'

boards in half the windows. But in the industrial areas the mere difficulty of getting hold of a house is one of the worst aggravations of poverty. It means that people will put up with anything — any hole and corner slum, any misery of bugs and rotting floors and cracking walls, any extortion of skinflint landlords and blackmailing agents — simply to get a roof over their heads. I have been into appalling houses, houses in which I would not live a week if you paid me, and found that the tenants had been there twenty and thirty years and only hoped they might have the luck to die there. In general these conditions are taken as a matter of course, though not always. Some people hardly seem to realize that such things as decent houses exist and look on bugs and leaking roofs as acts of God; others rail bitterly against their landlords; but all cling desperately to their houses lest worse should befall. So long as the housing shortage continues the local authorities cannot do much to make existing houses more livable. They can 'condemn' a house, but they cannot order it to be pulled down till the tenant has another house to go to; and so the condemned houses remain standing and are all the worse for being condemned, because naturally the landlord will not spend more than he can help on a house which is going to be demolished sooner or later. In a town like Wigan, for instance, there are over two thousand houses standing which have been condemned for years, and whole sections of the town would be condemned en bloc if there were any hope of other houses being built to replace them. Towns like Leeds and Sheffield have scores of thousands of 'back to back' houses which are all of a condemned type but will remain standing for decades.

I have inspected great numbers of houses in various mining towns and villages and made notes on their essential points. I think I can best give an idea of what conditions are like by transcribing a few extracts from my notebook, taken more or less at random. They are only brief notes and they will need certain explanations which I will give afterwards. Here are a few from Wigan:

1. House in Wallgate quarter. Blind back type. One up, one down. Living-room measures 12 ft by 10 ft, room upstairs the same. Alcove under stairs measuring 5 ft by 5 ft and serving as larder, scullery, and coal- hole. Windows will open. Distance to lavatory 50 yards. Rent

4s. 9d., rates 2s. 6d., total 7s. 3d.

2. Another near by. Measurements as above, but no alcove under stairs, merely a recess two feet deep containing the sink — no room for larder, etc. Rent 3s. 2d., rates 2s., total 5s. 2d.

3. House in Scholes quarter. Condemned house. One up, one down. Rooms 15 ft by 15 ft. Sink and copper in living-room, coal-hole under stairs. Floor subsiding. No windows will open. House decently dry. Landlord good. Rent 3s. 8d. rates 2s. 6d., total 6s. 2d.

4. Another near by. Two up, two down, and coal-hole. Walls falling absolutely to pieces. Water comes into upstairs rooms in quantities. Floor lopsided. Downstairs windows will not open. Landlord bad. Rent 6s., rates 3s. 6d., total 9s. 6d.

5. House in Greenough's Row. One up, two down. Living-room 13 ft by 8 ft. Walls coming apart and water comes in. Back windows will not open, front ones will. Ten in family with eight children very near together in age. Corporations are trying to evict them for overcrowding but cannot find another house to send them to. Landlord bad. Rent 4s., rates 2s. 3d., total 6s. 3d.

So much for Wigan. I have pages more of the same type. Here is one from Sheffield — a typical specimen of Sheffield's several score thousand 'back to back' houses:

House in Thomas Street. Back to back, two up, one down (i.e. a three-storey house with one room on each storey). Cellar below. Living-room 14 ft by 10 ft, and rooms above corresponding. Sink in living-room. Top floor has no door but gives on open stairs, Walls in living-room slightly damp, walls in top rooms coming to pieces and oozing damp on all sides. House is so dark that light has to be kept burning all day. Electricity estimated at 6d. a day (probably an exaggeration). Six in family, parents and foul children. Husband (on P.A.C.) is tuberculous. One child in hospital, the others appear healthy. Tenants have been seven years in this house. Would move, but no other house available. Rent 6s. 6d., rates included.

Here are one or two from Barnslcy:

1. House in Wortley Street. Two up, one down. Living-room 12 ft by 10 ft. Sink and copper in living-room, coal-hole under stairs. Sink worn almost flat and constantly overflowing. Walls not too sound. Penny in slot gas-light. House very dark and gas-light estimated 4d. a

day. Upstairs rooms are really one large room partitioned into two. Walls very bad — wall of back room cracked right through. Window-frames coming to pieces and have to be stuffed with wood. Rain comes through in several places. Sewer runs under house and stinks in summer but Corporation 'says they can't do nowt'. Six people in house, two adults and four children, the eldest aged fifteen. Youngest but one attending hospital — tuberculosis suspected. House infested by bugs. Rent 5s. 3d., including rates.

2. House in Peel Street. Back to back, two up, two down and large cellar. Living-room loft square with copper and sink. The other downstairs room the same size, probably intended as par-lour but used as bedroom. Upstairs rooms the same size as those below. Living-room very dark. Gas-light estimated at 4 1*2d. a day. Distance to lavatory 70 yards. Four beds in house for eight people — two old parents, two adult girls (the eldest aged twenty-seven), one young man, and three children. Parents have one bed, eldest son another, and remaining five people share the other two. Bugs very bad— 'You can't keep 'em down when it's 'ot.' Indescribable squalor in downstairs room and smell upstairs almost unbearable. Rent 5s. 7 1*2d., including rates.

3. House in Mapplewell (small mining village near Barnsley). Two up, one down. Living-room 14 ft by 13 ft. Sink in living-room. Plaster cracking and coming off walls. No shelves in oven. Gas leaking slightly. The upstairs rooms each 10 ft by 8 ft. Four beds (for six persons, all adult), but 'one bed does nowt', presumably for lack of bedclothes. Room nearest stairs has no door and stairs have no banister, so that when you step out of bed your foot hangs in vacancy and you may fall ten feet on to stones. Dry rot so bad that one can see through the floor into the room below. Bugs, but 'I keeps 'em down with sheep dip'. Earth road past these cottages is like a muck-heap and said to be almost impassable in winter. Stone lavatories at ends of gardens in semi-ruinous condition. Tenants have been twenty-two years in this house. Are L11 in arrears with rent, and have been paying an extra 1s. a week to pay this off. Landlord now refuses this and has served orders to quit. Rent 5s., including rates.

And so on and so on and so on. I could multiply examples by the score — they could be multiplied by the hundred thousand if anyone

chose to make a house-to-house inspection throughout the industrial districts. Meanwhile some of the expressions I have used need explaining. 'One up, one down' means one room on each storey — i.e. a two-roomed house. 'Back to back' houses are two houses built in one, each side of the house being somebody's front door, so that if you walk down a row of what is apparently twelve houses you are in reality seeing not twelve houses but twenty-four. The front houses give on the street and the back ones on the yard, and there is only one way out of each house. The effect of this is obvious. The lavatories are in the yard at the back, so that if you live on the side facing the street, to get to the lavatory or the dust-bin you have to go out of the front door and walk round the end of the block — a distance that may be as much as two hundred yards; if you live at the back, on the other hand, your outlook is on to a row of lavatories. There are also houses of what is called the 'blind back' type, which are single houses, but in which the builder has omitted to put in a back door — from pure spite, apparently. The windows which refuse to open are a peculiarity of old mining towns. Some of these towns are so undermined by ancient workings that the ground is constantly subsiding and the houses above slip sideways. In Wigan you pass whole rows of houses which have slid to startling angles, their windows being ten or twenty degrees out of the horizontal. Sometimes the front wall bellies outward till it looks as though the house were seven months gone in pregnancy. It can be refaced, but the new facing soon begins to bulge again. When a house sinks at all suddenly its windows are jammed for ever and the door has to be refitted. This excites no surprise locally. The story of the miner who comes home from work and finds that he can only get indoors by smashing down the front door with an axe is considered humorous. In some cases I have noted 'Landlord good' or 'Landlord bad', because there is great variation in what the slum-dwellers say about their landlords. I found — one might expect it, perhaps — that the small landlords are usually the worst. It goes against the grain to say this, but one can see why it should be so. Ideally, the worst type of slum landlord is a fat wicked man, preferably a bishop, who is drawing an immense income from extortionate rents. Actually, it is a poor old woman who has invested her life's savings in three slum

houses, inhabits one of them, and tries to live on the rent of the other two — never, in consequence, having any money for repairs.

But mere notes like these are only valuable as reminders to myself. To me as I read them they bring back what I have seen, but they cannot in themselves give much idea of what conditions are like in those fearful northern slums. Words are such feeble things. What is the use of a brief phrase like 'roof leaks' or 'four beds for eight people'? It is the kind of thing your eye slides over, registering nothing. And yet what a wealth of misery it can cover! Take the question of overcrowding, for instance. Quite often you have eight or even ten people living in a three-roomed house. One of these rooms is a living-room, and as it probably measures about a dozen feet square and contains, besides the kitchen range and the sink, a table, some chairs, and a dresser, there is no room in it for a bed. So there are eight or ten people sleeping in two small rooms, probably in at most four beds. If some of these people are adults and have to go to work, so much the worse. In one house, I remember, three grown-up girls shared the same bed and all went to work at different hours, each disturbing the others when she got up or came in; in another house a young miner working on the night shift slept by day in a narrow bed in which another member of the family slept by night. There is an added difficulty when there are grown-up children, in that you cannot let adolescent youths and girls sleep in the same bed. In one family I visited there were a father and mother and a son and daughter aged round about seventeen, and only two beds for the lot of them. The father slept with the son and the mother with the daughter; it was the only arrangement that ruled out the danger of incest. Then there is the misery of leaking roofs and oozing walls, which in winter makes some rooms almost uninhabitable. Then there are bugs. Once bugs get into a house they are in it till the crack of doom; there is no sure way of exterminating them. Then there are the windows that will not open. I need not point out what this must mean, in summer, in a tiny stuffy living-room where the fire, on which all the cooking is done, has to be kept burning more or less constantly. And there are the special miseries attendant upon back to back houses. A fifty yards' walk to the lavatory or the dust-bin is not exactly an inducement to be clean. In the front houses — at any rate

in a side-street where the Corporation don't interfere — the women get into the habit of throwing their refuse out of the front door, so that the gutter is always littered with tea-leaves and bread crusts. And it is worth considering what it is like for a child to grow up in one of the back alleys where its gaze is bounded by a row of lavatories and a wall.

In such places as these a woman is only a poor drudge muddling among an infinity of jobs. She may keep up her spirits, but she cannot keep up her standards of cleanliness and tidiness. There is always something to be done, and no conveniences and almost literally not room to turn round. No sooner have you washed one child's face than another's is dirty; before you have washed the crocks from one meal the next is due to be cooked. I found great variation in the houses I visited. Some were as decent as one could possibly expect in the circumstances, some were so appalling that I have no hope of describing them adequately. To begin with, the smell, the dominant and essential thing, is indescribable. But the squalor and the confusion! A tub full of filthy water here, a basin full of unwashed crocks there, more crocks piled in any odd corner, torn newspaper littered everywhere, and in the middle always the same dreadful table covered with sticky oilcloth and crowded with cooking pots and irons and half-darned stockings and pieces of stale bread and bits of cheese wrapped round with greasy newspaper! And the congestion in a tiny room where getting from one side to the other is a complicated voyage between pieces of furniture, with a line of damp washing getting you in the face every time you move and the children as thick underfoot as toadstools! There are scenes that stand out vividly in my memory. The almost bare living-room of a cottage in a little mining village, where the whole family was out of work and everyone seemed to be underfed; and the big family of grown-up sons and daughters sprawling aimlessly about, all strangely alike with red hair, splendid bones, and pinched faces ruined by malnutrition and idleness; and one tall son sitting by the fire-place, too listless even to notice the entry of a stranger, and slowly peeling a sticky sock from a bare foot. A dreadful room in Wigan where all the furniture seemed to be made of packing cases and barrel staves and was coming to pieces at that; and an old woman with a

blackened neck and her hair coining down denouncing her landlord in a Lancashire-Irish accent; and her mother, aged well over ninety, sitting in the background on the barrel that served her as a commode and regarding us blankly with a yellow, cretinous face. I could fill up pages with memories of similar interiors.

Of course the squalor of these people's houses is some-times their own fault. Even if you live in a back to back house and have four children and a total income of thirty-two and sixpence a week from the P.A.C., there is no need to have unemptied chamber-pots standing about in your living-room. But it is equally certain that their circumstances do not encourage self-respect. The determining factor is probably the number of children. The best-kept interiors I saw were always childless houses or houses where there were only one or two children; with, say, six children in a three-roomed house it is quite impossible to keep anything decent. One thing that is very noticeable is that the worst squalors are never downstairs. You might visit quite a number of houses, even among the poorest of the unemployed, and bring away a wrong impression. These people, you might reflect, cannot be so badly off if they still have a fair amount of furniture and crockery. But it is in the rooms upstairs that the gauntness of poverty really discloses itself. Whether this is because pride makes people cling to their living-room furniture to the last, or because bedding is more pawnable, I do not know, but certainly many of the bedrooms I saw were fearful places. Among people who have been unemployed for several years continuously I should say it is the exception to have anything like a full set of bedclothes. Often there is nothing that can be properly called bedclothes at all — just a heap of old overcoats and miscellaneous rags on a rusty iron bedstead. In this way overcrowding is aggravated. One family of four persons that I knew, a father and mother and two children, possessed two beds but could only use one of them because they had not enough bedding for the other.

Anyone who wants to see the effects of the housing shortage at their very worse should visit the dreadful caravan-dwellings that exist in numbers in many of the northern towns. Ever since the war, in the complete impossibility of getting houses, parts of the population have overflowed into supposedly temporary quarters in

fixed caravans. Wigan, for instance, with a population of about 85,000, has round about 200 caravan-dwellings with a family in each — perhaps somewhere near 1000 people in all. How many of these caravan-colonies exist throughout the industrial areas it would be difficult to discover with any accuracy. The local authorities are reticent about them and the census report of 1931 seems to have decided to ignore them. But so far as I can discover by inquiry they are to be found in most of the larger towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and perhaps further north as well. The probability is that throughout the north of England there are some thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of families (not individuals) who have no home except a fixed caravan.

But the word 'caravan' is very misleading. It calls up a picture of a cosy gypsy-encampment (in fine weather, of course) with wood fires crackling and children picking blackberries and many-coloured washing fluttering on the lines. The caravan-colonies in Wigan and Sheffield are not like that. I had a look at several of them, I inspected those in Wigan with considerable care, and I have never seen comparable squalor except in the Far East. Indeed when I saw them I was immediately reminded of the filthy kennels in which I have seen Indian coolies living in Burma. But, as a matter of fact, nothing in the East could ever be quite as bad, for in the East you haven't our clammy, penetrating cold to contend with, and the sun is a disinfectant.

Along the banks of Wigan's miry canal are patches of waste ground on which the caravans have been dumped like rubbish shot out of a bucket. Some of them are actually gypsy caravans, but very old ones and in bad repair. The majority are old single-decker buses (the rather smaller buses of ten years ago) which have been taken off their wheels and propped up with struts of wood. Some are simply wagons with semi-circular slats on top, over which canvas is stretched, so that the people inside have nothing but canvas between them and the outer air. Inside, these places are usually about five feet wide by six high (I could not stand quite upright in any of them) and anything from six to fifteen feet long. Some, I suppose, are inhabited by only one person, but I did not see any that held less than two persons, and some of them contained large families. One, for

instance, measuring fourteen feet long, had seven people in it — seven people in about 450 cubic feet of space; which is to say that each person had for his entire dwelling a space a good deal smaller than one compartment of a public lavatory. The dirt and congestion of these places is such that you cannot well imagine it unless you have tested it with your own eyes and more particularly your nose. Each contains a tiny cottage kitchener and such furniture as can be crammed in — sometimes two beds, more usually one, into which the whole family have to huddle as best they can. It is almost impossible to sleep on the floor, because the damp soaks up from below. I was shown mat-tresses which were still wringing wet at eleven in the morning. In winter it is so cold that the kitcheners have to be kept burning day and night, and the windows, need-less to say, are never opened. Water is got from a hydrant common to the whole colony, some of the caravan-dwellers having to walk 150 or 200 yards for every bucket of water. There are no sanitary arrangements at all. Most of the people construct a little hut to serve as a lavatory on the tiny patch of ground surrounding their caravan, and once a week dig a deep hole in which to bury the refuse. All the people I saw in these places, especially the children, were unspeakably dirty, and I do not doubt that they were lousy as well. They could not possibly be otherwise. The thought that haunted me as I went from caravan to caravan was, What can happen in those cramped interiors when anybody dies? But that, of course, is the kind of question you hardly care to ask.

Some of the people have been in their caravans for many years. Theoretically the Corporation are doing away with the caravan-colonies and getting the inhabitants out into houses; but as the houses don't get built, the caravans remain standing. Most of the people I talked to had given up the idea of ever getting a decent habitation again. They were all out of work, and a job and a house seemed to them about equally remote and impossible. Some hardly seemed to care; others realized quite clearly in what misery they were living. One woman's face stays by me, a worn skull-like face on which was a look of intolerable misery and degradation. I gathered that in that dreadful pigsty, struggling to keep her large brood of children clean, she felt as I should feel if I were coated all over with dung. One must

remember that these people are not gypsies; they are decent English people who have all, except the children born there, had homes of their own in their day; besides, their caravans are greatly inferior to those of gypsies and they have not the great advantage of being on the move. No doubt there are still middle-class people who think that the Lower Orders don't mind that kind of thing and who, if they happened to pass a caravan-colony in the train, would immediately assume that the people lived there from choice. I never argue nowadays with that kind of person. But it is worth noticing that the caravan-dwellers don't even save money by living there, for they are paying about the same rents as they would for houses. I could not hear of any rent lower than five shillings a week (five shillings for 200 cubic feet of space!) and there are even cases where the rent is as high as ten shillings. Somebody must be making a good thing out of those caravans! But dearly their continued existence is due to the housing shortage and not directly to poverty.

Talking once with a miner I asked him. when the housing shortage first became acute in his district; he answered, 'When we were told about it', meaning that till recently people's standards were so low that they took almost any degree of overcrowding for granted. He added that when he was a child his family had slept eleven in a room and thought nothing of it, and that later, when he was grown-up, he and his wife had lived in one of the old-style back to back houses in which you not only had to walk a couple of hundred yards to the lavatory but often had to wait in a queue when you got there, the lavatory being shared by thirty-six people. And when his wife was sick with the illness that killed her, she still had to make that two hundred yards' journey to the lavatory. This, he said, was the kind of thing people would put up with 'till they were told about it'.

I do not know whether that is true. What is certain is that nobody now thinks it bearable to sleep eleven in a room, and that even people with comfortable incomes are vaguely troubled by the thought of 'the slums'. Hence the clatter about 'rehousing' and 'slum clearance' which we have had at intervals ever since the war. Bishops, politicians, philanthropists, and what not enjoy talking piously about 'slum clearance', because they can thus divert attention from more serious evils and pretend that if you abolish the slums you

abolish poverty. But all this talk has led to surprisingly small results. So far as one can discover, the congestion is no better, perhaps slightly worse, than it was a dozen years ago. There is certainly great variation in the speed at which the different towns are attacking their housing problem. In some towns building seems to be almost at a standstill, in others it is proceeding rapidly and the private landlord is being driven out of business. Liver-pool, for instance, has been very largely rebuilt, mainly by the efforts of the Corporation. Sheffield, too, is being torn down and rebuilt pretty fast, though perhaps, considering the unparalleled beastliness of its slums, not quite fast enough.[The number of Corporation houses in process of construction in Sheffield at the beginning of 1936 was 1398. To replace the slum areas entirely Sheffield is said to need 100,000 houses.]

Why rehousing has on the whole moved so slowly, and why some towns can borrow money for building purposes so much more easily than others, I do not know. Those questions would have to be answered by someone who knows more about the machinery of local government than I do. A Corporation house costs normally somewhere between three and four hundred pounds; it costs rather less when it is built by 'direct labour' than when built by contract. The rent of these houses would average something over twenty pounds a year not counting rates, so one would think that, even allowing for overhead expenses and interest on loans, it would pay any Corporation to build as many houses as could be tenanted. In many cases, of course, the houses would have to be inhabited by people on the P.A.C., so that the local bodies would merely be taking money out of one pocket and putting it into another — i.e. paying out money in the form of relief and taking it back in the form of rent. But they have got to pay the relief in any case, and at present a proportion of what they pay is being swallowed up by private landlords. The reasons given for the slow rate of building are lack of money and the difficulty of getting hold of sites — for Corporation houses are not erected piecemeal but in 'estates', sometimes of hundreds of houses at a time. One thing that always strikes me as mysterious is that so many of the northern towns see fit to build themselves immense and luxurious public buildings at the same time as they are in crying need

of dwelling houses. The town of Barnsley, for instance, recently spent close on L150,000 on a new town hall, although admittedly needing at least 2000 new working-class houses, not to mention public baths. (The public baths in Barnsley contain nineteen men's slipper baths — this in a town of 70,000 inhabitants, largely miners, not one of whom has a bath in his house!) For L150,000 it could have built 350 Corporation houses and still had L10,000 to spend on a town hall. However, as I say, I do not pretend to understand the mysteries of local government. I merely record the fact that houses are desperately needed and are being built, on the whole, with paralytic slowness.

Still, houses are being built, and the Corporation building estates, with their row upon row of little red houses, all much liker than two. peas (where did that expression come from? Peas have great individuality) are a regular feature of the outskirts of the industrial towns. As to what they are like and how they compare with the slum houses, I can best give an idea by transcribing two more extracts from my diary. The tenants' opinions of their houses vary greatly, so I will give one favourable extract and one unfavourable. Both of these are from Wigan and both are the cheaper 'non-parlour type' houses:

1. House in Beech Hill Estate.

Downstairs. Large living-room with kitchener fireplace, cupboards, and fixed dresser, composition floor. Small hallway, largish kitchen. Up to date electric cooker hired from Corporation at much the same rate as a gas cooker.

Upstairs. Two largish bedrooms, one tiny one — suitable only for a boxroom or temporary bedroom. Bathroom, w.c., with hot and cold water.

Smallish garden. These vary throughout the estate, but mostly rather smaller than an allotment.

Four in family, parents and two children. Husband in good employ. Houses appear well built and are quite agreeable to look at. Various restrictions, e.g. it is forbidden to keep poultry or pigeons, take in lodgers, sub-let, or start any kind of business with-out leave from the Corporation. (This is easily granted in the case of taking in lodgers, but not in any of the others.) Tenant' very well satisfied with

house and proud of it. Houses in this estate all well kept. Corporation are good about repairs, but keep tenants up to the mark with regard to keeping the place tidy, etc.

Rent 11s. 3d. including rates. Bus fare into town 2d.

2. House in Welly Estate.

Downstairs. Living-room 14 ft by 10 ft, kitchen a good deal smaller, tiny larder under stairs, small but fairly good bathroom. Gas cooker, electric lighting. Outdoor w.c.

Upstairs. One bedroom 12 ft by 10 ft with tiny fireplace, another the same size without fireplace, another 7 ft by 6 ft. Best bedroom has small wardrobe let into wall. 'Garden about 20 yards by 10.

Six in family, parents and four children, eldest son nineteen, eldest daughter twenty-two. None in work except eldest son. Tenants very discontented. Their complaints are: 'House is cold, draughty, and damp. Fireplace in living-room gives out no heat and makes room very dusty — attributed to its being set too low. Fireplace in best bedroom too small to be of any use. Walls upstairs cracking. Owing to uselessness of tiny bedroom, five are sleeping in one bedroom, one (the eldest son) in the other.'

Gardens in this estate all neglected.

Rent 10s. 3d., inclusive. Distance to town a little over a mile — there is no bus here.

I could multiply examples, but these two are enough, as the types of Corporation houses being built do not vary greatly from place to place. Two things are immediately obvious. The first is that at their very worst the Corporation houses are better than the slums they replace. The mere possession of a bathroom and a bit of garden would out-weigh almost any disadvantage. The other is that they are much more expensive to live in. It is common enough for a man to be turned out of a condemned house where he is paying six or seven shillings a week and given a Corporation house where he has to pay ten. This only affects those who are in work or have recently been in work, because when a man is on the P.A.C. his rent is assessed at a quarter of his dole, and if it is more than this he gets an extra allowance; in any case, there are certain classes of Corporation houses to which people on the dole are not admitted. But there are other ways in which life in a Corporation estate is expensive,

whether you are in work or out of it. To begin with, owing to the higher rents, the shops in the estate are much more expensive and there are not so many of them. Then again, in a comparatively large, detached house, away from the frowsy huddle of the slum, it is much colder and more fuel has to be burnt. And again there is the expense, especially for a man in work, of getting to and from town. This last is one of the more obvious problems of rehousing. Slum clearance means diffusion of the population. When you rebuild on a large scale, what you do in effect is to scoop out the centre of the town and redistribute it on the outskirts. This is all very well in a way; you have got the people out of fetid alleys into places where they have room to breathe; but from the point of view of the people themselves, what you have done is to pick them up and dump them down five miles from their work. The simplest solution is flats. If people are going to live in large towns at all they must learn to live on top of one another. But the northern working people do not take kindly to flats; even where fiats exist they are contemptuously named 'tenements'. Almost everyone will tell you that he 'wants a house of his own', and apparently a house in the middle of an unbroken block of houses a hundred yards long seems to them more 'their own' than a flat situated in mid-air.

To revert to the second of the two Corporation houses I have just mentioned. The tenant complained that the house was cold, damp, and so forth. Perhaps the house was jerry-built, but equally probably he was exaggerating. He had come there from a filthy hovel in the middle of Wigan which I happened to have inspected previously; while there he had made every effort to get hold of a Corporation house, and he was no sooner in the Corporation house than he wanted to be back in the slum. This looks like mere captiousness but it covers a perfectly genuine grievance. In very many cases, perhaps in half the cases, I found that the people in Corporation houses don't really like them. They are glad to get out of the stink of the slum, they know that it is better for their children to have space to play about in, but they don't feel really at home. The exceptions are usually people in good employ who can afford to spend a little extra on fuel and furniture and journeys, and who in any case are of 'superior' type. The others, the typical slum-dwellers, miss the

frowsy warmth of the slum. They complain that 'out in the country', i.e. on the edge of the town, they are 'starving' (freezing). Certainly most Corporation estates are pretty bleak in winter. Some I have been through, perched on treeless clayey hillsides and swept by icy winds, would be horrible places to live in. It is not that slum-dwellers want dirt and congestion for their own sakes, as the fat-bellied bourgeoisie love to believe. (See for instance the conversation about slum-clearance in Galsworthy's Swan Song, where the rentier's cherished belief that the slum-dweller makes the slum, and not vice versa, is put into the mouth of a philanthropic Jew.) Give people a decent house and they will soon learn to keep it decent. Moreover, with a smart-looking house to live up to they improve in self-respect and cleanliness, and their children start life with better chances. Nevertheless, in a Corporation estate there is an uncomfortable, almost prison-like atmosphere, and the people who live there are perfectly well aware of it.

And it is here that one comes on the central difficulty of the housing problem. When you walk through the smoke-dim slums of Manchester you think that nothing is needed except to tear down these abominations and build decent houses in their place. But the trouble is that in destroying the slum you destroy other things as well. Houses are I' desperately needed and are not being built fast enough; but in so far as rehousing is being done, it is being done — perhaps it is unavoidable — in a monstrously inhuman 'manner. I don't mean merely that the houses are new and ugly. All houses have got to be new at some time, and as a matter of fact the type of Corporation house now being built is not at all offensive to look at. On the outskirts of Liverpool there are what amount to whole towns consisting entirely of Corporation houses, and they are quite pleasing to the eye; the blocks of workers' flats in the centre of the town modelled, I believe, on the workers' flats in Vienna, are definitely fine buildings. But there is something ruthless and soulless about the whole business. Take, for instance, the restrictions with which you are burdened in a Corporation house. You are not allowed to keep your house and garden as you want them — in some estates there is even a regulation that every garden must have the same kind of hedge. You are not allowed to keep poultry or pigeons. The

Yorkshire miners are fond of keeping homer pigeons; they keep them in the back yard and take them out and race them on Sundays. But pigeons are messy birds and the Corporation suppresses them as a matter of course. The restrictions about shops are more serious. The number of shops in a Corporation estate is rigidly limited, and it is said that preference is given to the Co-op and the chain stores; this may not be strictly true, but certainly those are the shops that one usually sees there. This is bad enough for the general public, but from the point of view of the independent shopkeeper it is a disaster. Many a small shopkeeper is utterly ruined by some rehousing scheme which takes no notice of his existence. A whole section of the town is condemned en bloc; presently the houses are pulled down and the people are transferred to some housing estate miles away. In this way all the small shopkeepers of the quarter have their whole clientele taken away from them at a single swoop and receive not a penny of compensation. They cannot transfer their business to the estate, because even if they can afford the move and the much higher rents, they would probably be refused a licence. As for pubs, they are banished from the housing estates almost completely, and the few that remain are dismal sham-Tudor places fitted out by the big brewery companies and very expensive. For a middle-class population this would be a nuisance — it might mean walking a mile to get a glass of beer; for a working-class population, which uses the pub as a kind of club, it is a serious blow at communal life. It is a great achievement to get slum-dwellers into decent houses, but it is unfortunate that, owing to the peculiar temper of our time, it is also considered necessary to rob them of the last vestiges of their liberty. The people themselves feel this, and it is this feeling that they are rationalizing when they complain that their new houses — so much better, as houses, than those they have come out of — are cold and uncomfortable and ‘unhomelike’.

I sometimes think that the price of liberty is not so much eternal vigilance as eternal dirt. There are some Corporation estates in which new tenants are systematically de-loused before being allowed into their houses. All their possessions except what they stand up in are taken away from them, fumigated, and sent on to the new house. This procedure has its points, for it is a pity that people should take

bugs into brand new houses (a bug will follow you about in your luggage if he gets half a chance), but it is the kind of thing that makes you wish that the word 'hygiene' could be dropped out of the dictionary. Bugs are bad, but a state of affairs in which men will allow themselves to be dipped like sheep is worse. 'Perhaps, however, when it is a case of slum clearance, one must take for granted a certain amount of restrictions and inhumanity. When all is said and done, the most important thing is that people shall live in decent houses and not in pigsties. I have seen too much of slums to go into Chestertonian raptures about them. A place where the children can breathe clean air, and women have a few conveniences to save them from drudgery, and a man has a bit of garden to dig in, must be better than the stinking back-streets of Leeds and Sheffield. On balance, the Corporation Estates are better than the slums; but only by a small margin.

When I was looking into the housing question I visited and inspected numbers of houses, perhaps a hundred or two hundred houses altogether, in various mining towns and villages. I cannot end this chapter without remarking on the extraordinary courtesy and good nature with which I was received everywhere. I did not go alone — I always had some local friend among the unemployed to show me round — but even so, it is an impertinence to go poking into strangers' houses and asking to see the cracks in the bedroom wall. Yet everyone was astonishingly patient and seemed to understand almost without explanation why I was questioning them and what I wanted to see. If any unauthorized person walked into my house and began asking me whether the roof leaked and whether I was much troubled by bugs and what I thought of my landlord, I should probably tell him to go to hell. This only happened to me once, and in that case the woman was slightly deaf and took me for a Means Test nark; but even she relented after a while and gave me the information I wanted.

I am told that it is bad form for a writer to quote his own reviews, but I want here to contradict a reviewer in the Manchester Guardian who says apropos of one of my books:

Set down in Wigan or Whitechapel Mr Orwell would still exercise an unerring power of closing his vision to all that is good in order to

proceed with his wholehearted vilification of humanity.

Wrong. Mr Orwell was ‘set down’ in Wigan for quite a while and it did not inspire him with any wish to vilify humanity. He liked Wigan very much — the people, not the scenery. Indeed, he has only one fault to find with it, and that is in respect of the celebrated Wigan Pier, which he had set his heart on seeing. Alas! Wigan Pier had been demolished, and even the spot where it used to stand is no longer certain.

5

When you see the unemployment figures quoted at two millions, it is fatally easy to take this as meaning that two million people are out of work and the rest of the population is comparatively comfortable. I admit that till recently I was in the habit of doing so myself. I used to calculate that if you put the registered unemployed at round about two millions and threw in the destitute and those who for one reason and another were not registered, you might take the number of underfed people in England (for everyone on the dole or thereabouts is underfed) as being, at the very most, five millions.

This is an enormous under-estimate, because, in the first place, the only people shown on unemployment figures are those actually drawing the dole — that is, in general, heads of families. An unemployed man's dependants do not figure on the list unless they too are drawing a separate allowance. A Labour Exchange officer told me that to get at the real number of people living on (not drawing) the dole, you have got to multiply the official figures by something over three. This alone brings the number of unemployed to round about six millions. But in addition there are great numbers of people who are in work but who, from a financial point of view, might equally well be unemployed, because they are not drawing anything that can be described as a living wage.[For instance, a recent census of the Lancashire cotton mills revealed the fact that over 40,000 full-time employees receive less than thirty shillings a week each. In Preston, to take only one town, the number receiving over thirty shillings a week was 640 and the number receiving wider thirty shillings was 3113.] Allow for these and their dependants, throw in as before the old-age pensioners, the destitute, and other nondescripts, and you get an underfed population of well over ten millions. Sir John Orr puts it at twenty millions.

Take the figures for Wigan, which is typical enough of the industrial and mining districts. The number of insured workers is round about 36,000 (26,000 men and 10,000 women). Of these, the number unemployed at the beginning of 1936 was about 10,000. But this was in winter when the mines are working full time; in summer

it would probably be 12,000. Multiply by three, as above, and you get 30,000 or 36,000. The total population of Wigan is a little under 87,000; so that at any moment more than one person in three out of the whole population — not merely the registered workers — is either drawing or living on the dole. Those ten or twelve thousand unemployed contain a steady core of from four to five thousand miners who have been continuously unemployed for the past seven years. And Wigan is not especially badly off as industrial towns go. 'Even in Sheffield, which has been doing well for the last year or so because of wars and rumours of war, the proportion of unemployment is about the same — one in three of registered workers unemployed.

When a man is first unemployed, until his insurance stamps are exhausted, he draws 'full benefit', of which the rates are as follows:

	per week
Single man	17s.
Wife	9s.
Each child below 14	3s.

Thus in a typical family of parents and three children of whom one was over fourteen, the total income would be 32s. per week, plus anything that might be earned by the eldest child. When a man's stamps are exhausted, before being turned over to the P.A.C. (Public Assistance Committee), he receives twenty-six weeks' 'transitional benefit' from the U.A.B. (Unemployment Assistance Board), the rates being as follows:

	per week
Single man	15s.
Man and wife	24s.
Children 14-18	6s.
Children 11-14	4s. 6d.
Children 8-11	4s.
Children 5-8	3s. 6d.
Children 3-5	3s.

Thus on the U.A.B. the income of the typical family of five persons would be 37s. 6d. a week if no child was in work. When a

man is on the U.A.B. a quarter of his dole is regarded as rent, with a minimum of 7s. 6d. a week. If the rent he is paying is more than a quarter of his dole he receives an extra allowance, but if it is less than 7s. 6d., a corresponding amount is deducted. Payments on the P.A.C. theoretically comes out of the local rates, but are backed by a central fund. The rates of benefit are:

	per week
Single man	12s. 6d.
Man and wife	23s.
Eldest child	4s.
Any other child	3s.

Being at the discretion of the local bodies these rates vary slightly, and a single man may or may not get an extra 2s. 6d. weekly, bringing his benefit up to 15s. As on the U.A.B., a quarter of a married man's dole is regarded as rent. Thus in the typical family considered above the total income would be 33s. a week, a quarter of this being regarded as rent. In addition, in most districts a coal allowance of 1s. 6d. a week (1s. 6d. is equivalent to about a hundredweight of coal) is granted for six weeks before and six weeks after Christmas.

It will be seen that the income of a family on the dole normally averages round about thirty shillings a week. One can write at least a quarter of this off as rent, which is to say that the average person, child or adult, has got to be fed, clothed, warmed, and otherwise cared-for for six or seven shillings a week. Enormous groups of people, probably at least a third of the whole population of the industrial areas, are living at this level. The Means Test is very strictly enforced, and you are liable to be refused relief at the slightest hint that you are getting money from another source. Dock-labourers, for instance, who are generally hired by the half-day, have to sign on at a Labour Exchange twice daily; if they fail to do so it is assumed that they have been working and their dole is reduced correspondingly. I have seen cases of evasion of the Means Test, but I should say that in the industrial towns, where there is still a certain amount of communal life and everyone has neighbours who know him, it is much harder than it would be in London. The usual method

is for a young man who is actually living with his parents to get an accommodation address, so that supposedly he has a separate establishment and draws a separate allowance. But there is much spying and tale-bearing. One man I knew, for instance, was seen feeding his neighbour's chickens while the neighbour was away. It was reported to the authorities that he 'had a job feeding chickens' and he had great difficulty in refuting this. The favourite joke in Wigan was about a man who was refused relief on the ground that he 'had a job carting firewood'. He had been seen, it was said, carting firewood at night. He had to explain that he was not carting firewood but doing a moonlight flit. The 'firewood' was his furniture.

The most cruel and evil effect of the Means Test is the way in which it breaks up families. Old people, sometimes bedridden, are driven out of their homes by it. An old age pensioner, for instance, if a widower, would normally live with one or other of his children; his weekly ten shillings goes towards the household expenses, and probably he is not badly cared for. Under the Means Test, however, he counts as a 'lodger' and if he stays at home his children's dole will be docked. So, perhaps at seventy or seventy-five years of age, he has to turn out into lodgings, handing his pension over to the lodging-house keeper and existing on the verge of starvation. I have seen several cases of this myself. It is happening all over England at this moment, thanks to the Means Test.

Nevertheless, in spite of the frightful extent of unemployment, it is a fact that poverty — extreme poverty — is less in evidence in the industrial North than it is in London. Everything is poorer and shabbier, there are fewer motor-cars and fewer well-dressed people; but also there are fewer people who are obviously destitute. Even in a town the size of Liverpool or Manchester you are struck by the fewness of the beggars. London is a sort of whirlpool which draws derelict people towards it, and it is so vast that life there is solitary and anonymous. Until you break the law nobody will take any notice of you, and you can go to pieces as you could not possibly do in a place where you had neighbours who knew you. But in the industrial towns the old communal way of life has not yet broken up, tradition is still strong and almost everyone has a family — potentially, therefore, a home. In a town of 50,000 or 100,000 inhabitants there is

no casual and as it were unaccounted-for population; nobody sleeping in the streets, for instance. Moreover, there is just this to be said for the unemployment regulations, that they do not discourage people from marrying. A man and wife on twenty-three shillings a week are not far from the starvation line, but they can make a home of sorts; they are vastly better off than a single man on fifteen shillings. The life of a single unemployed man is dreadful. He lives sometimes in a common lodging-house, more often in a 'furnished' room for which he usually pays six shillings a week, finding himself as best he can on the other nine (say six shillings a week for food and three for clothes, tobacco, and amusements). Of course he cannot feed or look after himself properly, and a man who pays six shillings a week for his room is not encouraged to be indoors more than is necessary. So he spends his days loafing in the public library or any other place where he can keep warm. That keeping warm — is almost the sole preoccupation of a single unemployed man in winter. In Wigan a favourite refuge was the pictures, which are fantastically cheap there. You can always get a seat for fourpence, and at the matinee at some houses you can even get a seat for twopence. Even people on the verge of starvation will readily pay twopence to get out of the ghastly cold of a winter afternoon. In Sheffield I was taken to a public hall to listen to a lecture by a clergyman, and it was by a long way the silliest and worst-delivered lecture I have ever heard or ever expect to hear. I found it physically impossible to sit it out, indeed my feet carried me out, seemingly of their own accord, before it was half-way through. Yet the hall was thronged with unemployed men; they would have sat through far worse drivel for the sake of a warm place to shelter in.

At times I have seen unmarried men on the dole living in the extreme of misery. In one town I remember a whole colony of them who were squatting, more or less illicitly, in a derelict house which was practically falling down. They had collected a few scraps of furniture, presumably off refuse-tips, and I remember that their sole table was an old marble-topped wash-hand-stand. But this kind of thing is exceptional. A working-class bachelor is a rarity, and so long as a man is married unemployment makes comparatively little alteration in his way of life. His home is impoverished but it is still a

home, and it is noticeable everywhere that the anomalous position created by unemployment — the man being out of work while the woman's work continues as before — has not altered the relative status of the sexes. In a working-class home it is the man who is the master and not, as in a middle-class home, the woman or the baby. Practically never, for instance, in a working-class home, will you see the man doing a stroke of the housework. Unemployment has not changed this convention, which on the face of it seems a little unfair. The man is idle from morning to night but the woman is as busy as ever — more so, indeed, because she has to manage with less money. Yet so far as my experience goes the women do not protest. I believe that they, as well as the men, feel that a man would lose his manhood if, merely because he was out of work, he developed into a 'Mary Ann'.

But there is no doubt about the deadening, debilitating effect of unemployment upon everybody, married or single, and upon men more than upon women. The best intellects will not stand up against it. Once or twice it has happened to me to meet unemployed men of genuine literary ability; there are others whom I haven't met but whose work I occasionally see in the magazines. Now and again, at long intervals, these men will produce an article or a short story which is quite obviously better than most of the stuff that gets whooped up by the blurb-reviewers. Why, then, do they make so little use of their talents? They have all the leisure in the world; why don't they sit down and write books? Because to write books you need not only comfort and solitude — and solitude is never easy to attain in a working-class home — you also need peace of mind. You can't settle to anything, you can't command the spirit of hope in which anything has got to be created, with that dull evil cloud of unemployment hanging over you. Still, an unemployed man who feels at home with books can at any rate occupy himself by reading. But what about the man who cannot read without discomfort? Take a miner, for instance, who has worked in the pit since childhood and has been trained to be a miner and nothing else. How the devil is he to fill up the empty days? It is absurd to say that he ought to be looking for work. There is no work to look for, and everybody knows it. You can't go on looking for work every day for seven years. There

are allotments, which occupy the time and help to feed a family, but in a big town there are only allotments for a small proportion of the people. Then there are the occupational centres which were started a few years ago to help the unemployed. On the whole this movement has been a failure, but some of the centres are still flourishing. I have visited one or two of them. There are shelters where the men can keep warm and there are periodical classes in carpentering, boot-making, leather-work, handloom-weaving, basket-work, sea-grass work, etc., etc.; the idea being that the men can make furniture and so forth, not for sale but for their own homes, getting tools free and materials cheaply. Most of the Socialists I have talked to denounce this movement as they denounce the project — it is always being talked about but it never comes to anything — to give the unemployed small-holdings. They say that the occupational centres are simply a device to keep the unemployed quiet and give them the illusion that something is being done for them. Undoubtedly that is the underlying motive. Keep a man busy mending boots and he is less likely to read the Daily Worker. Also there is a nasty Y.M.C.A. atmosphere about these places which you can feel as soon as you go in. The unemployed men who frequent them are mostly of the cap-touching type — the type who tells you oilily that he is 'Temperance' and votes Conservative. Yet even here you feel yourself torn both ways. For probably it is better that a man should waste his time even with such rubbish as sea-grass work than that for years upon end he should do absolutely nothing.

By far the best work for the unemployed is being done by the N.U.W.M. — National Unemployed Workers' Movement. This is a revolutionary organization intended to hold the unemployed together, stop them blacklegging during strikes, and give them legal advice against the Means Test. It is a movement that has been built out of nothing by the pennies and efforts of the unemployed themselves. I have seen a good deal of the N.U.W.M., and I greatly admire the men, ragged and underfed like the others, who keep the organization going. Still more I admire the tact and patience with which they do it; for it is not easy to coax even a penny-a-week subscription out of the pockets of people on the P.A.C. As I said earlier, the English working class do not show much capacity for leadership, but they

have a wonderful talent for organization. The whole trade union movement testifies to this; so do the excellent working-men's clubs — really a sort of glorified cooperative pub, and splendidly organized — which are so common in Yorkshire. In many towns the N.U.W.M. have shelters and arrange speeches by Communist speakers. But even at these shelters the men who go there do nothing but sit round the stove and occasionally play a game of dominoes. If this move-met could be combined with something along the lines of the occupational centres, it would be nearer what is needed. It is a deadly thing to see a skilled man running to seed, year after year, in utter, hopeless idleness. It ought not to be impossible to give him the chance of using his hands and making furniture and so forth for his own home, with-out turning him into a Y.M.C.A. cocoa-drunkard. We may as well face the fact that several million men in England will — unless another war breaks out — never have a real job this side the grave. One thing that probably could be done and certainly ought to be done as a matter of course is to give every unemployed man a patch of ground and free tools if he chose to apply for them. It is disgraceful that men who are expected to keep alive on the P.A.C. should not even have the chance to grow vegetables for their families.

To study unemployment and its effects you have got to go to the industrial areas. In the South unemployment exists, but it is scattered and queerly unobtrusive. There are plenty of rural districts where a man out of work is almost unheard-of, and you don't anywhere see the spectacle of whole blocks of cities living on the dole and the P.A.C. It is only when you lodge in streets where nobody has a job, where getting a job seems about as probable as owning an aeroplane and much less probable than winning fifty pounds in the Football Pool, that you begin to grasp the changes that are being worked in our civilization. For a change is taking place, there is no doubt about that. The attitude of the submerged working class is profoundly different from what it was seven or eight years ago.

I first became aware of the unemployment problem in 1928. At that time I had just come back from Burma, where unemployment was only a word, and I had gone to Burma when I was still a boy and the post-war boom was not quite over. When I first saw unemployed

men at close quarters, the thing that horrified and amazed me was to find that many of them were ashamed of being unemployed. I was very ignorant, but not so ignorant as to imagine that when the loss of foreign markets pushes two million men out of work, those two million are any more to blame than the people who draw blanks in the Calcutta Sweep. But at that time nobody cared to admit that unemployment was inevitable, because this meant admitting that it would probably continue. The middle classes were still talking about 'lazy idle loafers on the dole' and saying that 'these men could all find work if they wanted to', and naturally these opinions percolated to the working class themselves. I remember the shock of astonishment it gave me, when I first mingled with tramps and beggars, to find that a fair proportion, perhaps a quarter, of these beings whom I had been taught to regard as cynical parasites, were decent young miners and cotton-workers gazing at their destiny with the same sort of dumb amazement as an animal in a trap. They simply could not understand what was happening to them. They had been brought up to work, and behold! it seemed as if they were never going to have the chance of working again. In their circumstances it was inevitable, at first, that they should be haunted by a feeling of personal degradation. That was the attitude towards unemployment in those days: it was a disaster which happened to you as an individual and for which you were to blame.

When a quarter of a million miners are unemployed, it is part of the order of things that Alf Smith, a miner living in the back streets of Newcastle, should be out of work. Alf Smith is merely one of the quarter million, a statistical unit. But no human being finds it easy to regard himself as a statistical unit. So long as Bert Jones across the street is still at work, Alf Smith is bound to feel himself dishonoured and a failure. Hence that frightful feeling of impotence and despair which is almost the worst evil of unemployment — far worse than any hardship, worse than the demoralization of enforced idleness, and Only less bad than the physical degeneracy of Alf Smith's children, born on the P.A.C. Everyone who saw Greenwood's play Love on the Dole must remember that dreadful moment when the poor, good, stupid working man beats on the table and cries out, 'O God, send me some work!' This was not dramatic exaggeration, it

was a touch from life. That cry must have been uttered, in almost those words, in tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of English homes, during the past fifteen years.

But, I think not again — or at least, not so often. That is the real point: people are ceasing to kick against the pricks. After all, even the middle classes — yes, even the bridge dubs in the country towns — are beginning to realize that there is such a thing as unemployment. The 'My dear, I don't believe in all this nonsense about unemployment. Why, only last week we wanted a man to weed the garden, and we simply couldn't get one. They don't want to work, that's all it is!' which you heard at every decent tea-table five years ago, is growing perceptibly less frequent. As for the working class themselves, they have gained immensely in economic knowledge. I believe that the Daily Worker has accomplished a great deal here: its influence is out of all proportion to its circulation. But in any case they have had their lesson well rubbed into them, not only because unemployment is so widespread but because it has lasted so long. When people live on the dole for years at a time they grow used to it, and drawing the dole, though it remains unpleasant, ceases to be shameful. Thus the old, independent, workhouse-fearing tradition is undermined, just as the ancient fear of debt is undermined by the hire-purchase system. In the back streets of Wigan and Barnsley I saw every kind of privation, but I probably saw much less conscious misery than I should have seen ten years ago. The people have at any rate grasped that unemployment is a thing they cannot help. It is not only Alf Smith who is out of work now; Bert Jones is out of work as well, and both of them have been 'out' for years. It makes a great deal of difference when things are the same for everybody.

So you have whole populations settling down, as it were, to a lifetime on the P.A.C. And what I think is admirable, perhaps even hopeful, is that they have managed to do it without going spiritually to pieces. A working man does not disintegrate under the strain of poverty as a middle-class person does. Take, for instance, the fact that the working class think nothing of getting married on the dole. It annoys the old ladies in Brighton, but it is a proof of their essential good sense; they realize that losing your job does not mean that you

cease to be a human being. So that in one way things in the distressed areas are not as bad as they might be. Life is still fairly normal, more normal than one really has the right to expect. Families are impoverished, but the family-system has not broken up. The people are in effect living a reduced version of their former lives. Instead of raging against their destiny they have made things tolerable by lowering their standards.

But they don't necessarily lower their standards by cutting I out luxuries and concentrating on necessities; more often it is the other way about — the more natural way, if you come to think of it. Hence the fact that in a decade of unparalleled depression, the consumption of all cheap luxuries has in-creased. The two things that have probably made the greatest difference of all are the movies and the mass-production of cheap smart clothes since the war. The youth who leaves school at fourteen and gets a blind-alley job is out of work at twenty, probably for life; but for two pounds ten on the hire-purchase he can buy himself a suit which, for a little while and at a little distance, looks as though it had been tailored in Savile Row. The girl can look like a fashion plate at an even lower price. You may have three halfpence in your pocket and not a prospect in the world, and only the corner of a leaky bedroom to go home to; but in your new clothes you can stand on the street corner, indulging in a private daydream of yourself as dark Gable or Greta Garbo, which compensates you for a great deal. And even at home there is generally a cup of tea going — a 'nice cup of tea' — and Father, who has been out of work since 1929, is temporarily happy because he has a sure tip for the Cesarewitch.

Trade since the war has had to adjust itself to meet the demands of underpaid, underfed people, with the result that a luxury is nowadays almost always cheaper than a necessity. One pair of plain solid shoes costs as much as two ultra-smart pairs. For the price of one square meal you can get two pounds of cheap sweets. You can't get much meat for threepence, but you can get a lot offish-and-chips. Milk costs threepence a pint and even 'mild' beer costs fourpence, but aspirins are seven a penny and you can wring forty cups of tea out of a quarter-pound packet. And above all there is gambling, the cheapest of all luxuries. Even people on the verge of starvation can

buy a few days' hope ('Something to live for', as they call it) by having a penny on a sweepstake. Organized gambling has now risen almost to the status of a major industry. Consider, for instance, a phenomenon like the Football Pools, with a turnover of about six million pounds a year, almost all of it from the pockets of working-class people. I happened to be in Yorkshire when Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland. Hitler, Locarno, Fascism, and the threat of war aroused hardly a flicker of interest locally, but the decision of the Football Association to stop publishing their fixtures in advance (this was an attempt to quell the Football Pools) flung all Yorkshire into a storm of fury. And then there is the queer spectacle of modern electrical science showering miracles upon people with empty bellies. You may shiver all night for lack of bedclothes, but in the morning you can go to the public library and read the news that has been telegraphed for your benefit from San Francisco and Singapore. Twenty million people are underfed but literally everyone in England has access to a radio. What we have lost in food we have gained in electricity. Whole sections of the working class who have been plundered of all they really need are being compensated, in part, by cheap luxuries which mitigate the surface of life.

Do you consider all this desirable? No, I don't. But it may be that the psychological adjustment which the working class are visibly making is the best they could make in the circumstances. They have neither turned revolutionary nor lost their self-respect; merely they have kept their tempers and settled down to make the best of things on a fish-and-chip standard. The alternative would be God knows what continued agonies of despair; or it might be attempted insurrections which, in a strongly governed country like England, could only lead to futile massacres and a regime of savage repression.

Of course the post-war development of cheap luxuries has been a very fortunate thing for our rulers. It is quite likely that fish-and-chips, art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate (five two-ounce bars for sixpence), the movies, the radio, strong tea, and the Football Pools have between them averted revolution. Therefore we are some-times told that the whole thing is an astute manoeuvre by the governing class — a sort of 'bread and circuses' business —

to hold the unemployed down. What I have seen of our governing class does not convince me that they have that much intelligence. The thing has happened, but by an un-conscious process — the quite natural interaction between the manufacturer's need for a market and the need of half-starved people for cheap palliatives.

6

When I was a small boy at school a lecturer used to come once a term and deliver excellent lectures on famous battles of the past, such as Blenheim, Austerlitz, etc. He was fond of quoting Napoleon's maxim 'An army marches on its stomach', and at the end of his lecture he would suddenly turn to us and demand, 'What's the most important thing in the world?' We were expected to shout 'Food!' and if we did not do so he was disappointed.

Obviously he was right in a way. A human being is primarily a bag for putting food into; the other functions and faculties may be more godlike, but in point of time they come afterwards. A man dies and is buried, and all his words and actions are forgotten, but the food he has eaten lives after him in the sound or rotten bones of his children. I think it could be plausibly argued that changes of diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion. The Great War, for instance, could never have happened if tinned food had not been invented. And the history of the past four hundred years in England would have been immensely different if it had not been for the introduction of root-crops and various other vegetables at the end of the Middle Ages, and a little later the introduction of non-alcoholic drinks (tea, coffee, cocoa) and also of distilled liquors to which the beer-drinking English were not accustomed. Yet it is curious how seldom the all-importance of food is recognized. You see statues everywhere to politicians, poets, bishops, but none to cooks or bacon-curers or market-gardeners. The Emperor Charles V is said to have erected a statue to the inventor of bloaters, but that is the only case I can think of at the moment.

So perhaps the really important thing about the unemployed, the really basic thing if you look to the future, is the diet they are living on. As I said earlier, the average unemployed family lives on an income of round about thirty shillings a week, of which at least a quarter goes in rent. It is worth considering in some detail how the remaining money is spent. I have here a budget which was made out for me by an unemployed miner and his wife. I asked them to make a list which represented as exactly as possible their expenditure in a

typical week. This man's allowance was thirty-two shillings a week, and besides his wife he had two children, one aged two years and five months and the other ten months. Here is the list:

	s. d.
Rent	9 0 1/2
Clothing Club	3 0
Coal	2 0
Gas	1 3
Milk	0 10 1/2
Union Fees	0 3
Insurance (on the children)	0 2
Meat	2 6
Flour (2 stone)	3 4
Yeast	0 4
Potatoes	1 0
Dripping	0 10
Margarine	0 10
Bacon	1 2
Sugar	1 9
Tea	1 0
Jam	0 7 1/2
Peas and cabbage	0 6
Carrots and onions	0 4
Quaker oats	0 4 1/2
Soap, powders, blue, etc.	0 10
Total	L1 12 0

In addition to this, three packets of dried milk were sup-plied weekly for the baby by the Infants' Welfare Clinic. One or two comments are needed here. To begin with the list leaves out a great deal — blacking, pepper, salt, vinegar, matches, kindling-wood, raeor blades, replacements of utensils, and wear and tear of furniture and bedding, to name the first few that come to mind. Any money spent on these would mean reduction on some other item. A more serious charge is tobacco. This man happened to be a small smoker,

but even so his tobacco would hardly cost less than a shilling a week, meaning a further reduction on food. The 'clothing clubs' into which unemployed people pay so much a week are run by big drapers in all the industrial towns. Without them it would be impossible for unemployed people to buy new clothes at all. I don't know whether or not they buy bedding through these clubs. This particular family, as I happen to know, possessed next to no bedding.

In the above list, if you allow a shilling for tobacco and deduct this and the other non-food items, you are left with sixteen and fivepence halfpenny. Call it sixteen shillings and leave the baby out of account — for the baby was getting its weekly packets of milk from the Welfare Clinic. This sixteen shillings has got to provide the entire nourishment, including fuel, of three persons, two of them adult. The first question is whether it is even theoretically possible for three persons to be properly nourished on sixteen shillings a week. When the dispute over the Means Test was in progress there was a disgusting public wrangle about the minimum weekly sum on which a human being could keep alive. So far as I remember, one school of dietitians worked it out at five and ninepence, while another school, more generous, put it at five and ninepence halfpenny. After this there were letters to the papers from a number of people who claimed to be feeding themselves on four shillings a week. Here is a weekly budget (it was printed in the New Statesman and also in the News of the World) which I picked out from among a number of others:

	s. d.
3 wholemeal loaves	1 0
1/2 lb. margarine	0 2 1/2
1/2 lb. dripping	0 3
1 lb. cheese	0 7
1 lb. onions	0 1 1/2
1 lb. carrots	0 1 1/2
1 lb. broken biscuits	0 4
2 lb. dates	0 6
1 tin evaporated milk	0 5
10 oranges	0 5

Total	3 11 1/2

Please notice that this budget contains nothing for fuel. In fact, the writer explicitly stated that he could not afford to buy fuel and ate all his food raw. Whether the letter was genuine or a hoax does not matter at the moment. What I think will be admitted is that this list represents about as wise an expenditure as could be contrived; if you had to live on three and elevenpence halfpenny a week, you could hardly extract more food-value from it than that. So perhaps it is possible to feed yourself adequately on the P.A.C. allowance if you concentrate on essential foodstuffs; but not otherwise.

Now compare this list with the unemployed miner's budget that I gave earlier. The miner's family spend only tenpence a week on green vegetables and tenpence half-penny on milk (remember that one of them is a child less than three years old), and nothing on fruit; but they spend one and nine on sugar (about eight pounds of sugar, that is) and a shilling on tea. The half-crown spent on meat might represent a small joint and the materials for a stew; probably as often as not it would represent four or five tins of bully beef. The basis of their diet, therefore, is white bread and margarine, corned beef, sugared tea, and potatoes — an appalling diet. Would it not be better if they spent more money on wholesome things like oranges and wholemeal bread or if they even, like the writer of the letter to the New Statesman, saved on fuel and ate their carrots raw? Yes, it would, but the point is that no ordinary human being is ever going to do such a thing. The ordinary human being would sooner starve than live on brown bread and raw carrots. And the peculiar evil is this, that the less money you have, the less inclined you feel to spend it on wholesome food. A millionaire may enjoy breakfasting off orange juice and Ryvita biscuits; an unemployed man doesn't. Here the tendency of which I spoke at the end of the last chapter comes into play. When you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored, and miserable, you don't want to eat dull wholesome food. You want something a little bit 'tasty'. There is always some cheaply pleasant thing to tempt you. Let's have three pennorth of chips! Run out and buy us a twopenny ice-cream! Put the

kettle on and we'll all have a nice cup of tea! That is how your mind works when you are at the P.A.C. level. White bread-and-marg and sugared tea don't nourish you to any extent, but they are nicer (at least most people think so) than brown bread-and-dripping and cold water. Unemployment is an endless misery that has got to be constantly palliated, and especially with tea, the English-man's opium. A cup of tea or even an aspirin is much better as a temporary stimulant than a crust of brown bread.

The results of all this are visible in a physical degeneracy which you can study directly, by using your eyes, or inferentially, by having a look at the vital statistics. The physical average in the industrial towns is terribly low, lower even than in London. In Sheffield you have the feeling of walking among a population of troglodytes. The miners are splendid men, but they are usually small, and the mere fact that their muscles are toughened by constant work does not mean that their children start life with a better physique. In any case the miners are physically the pick of the population. The most obvious sign of under-nourishment is the badness of everybody's teeth. In Lancashire you would have to look for a long time before you saw a working-class person with good natural teeth. Indeed, you see very few people with natural teeth at all, apart from the children; and even the children's teeth have a frail bluish appearance which means, I suppose, calcium deficiency. Several dentists have told me that in industrial districts a person over thirty with any of his or her own teeth is coming to be an abnormality. In Wigan various people gave me their opinion that it is best to get shut of your teeth as early in life as possible. 'Teeth is just a misery,' one woman said to me. In one house where I stayed there were, apart from myself, five people, the oldest being forty-three and the youngest a boy of fifteen. Of these the boy was the only one who possessed a single tooth of his own, and his teeth were obviously not going to last long. As for the vital statistics, the fact that in any large industrial town the death rate and infant mortality of the poorest quarters are always about double those of the well-to-do residential quarters — a good deal more than double in some cases — hardly needs commenting on.

Of course one ought not to imagine that the prevailing bad physique is due solely to unemployment, for it is probable that the

physical average has been declining all over England for a long time past, and not merely among the unemployed in the industrial areas. This cannot be proved statistically, but it is a conclusion that is forced upon you if you use your eyes, even in rural places and even in a prosperous town like London. On the day when King George V's body passed through London on its way to Westminster, I happened to be caught for an hour or two in the crowd in Trafalgar Square. It was impossible, looking about one then, not to be struck by the physical degeneracy of modern England. The people surrounding me were not working-class people for the most part; they were the shopkeeper — commercial-traveller type, with a sprinkling of the well-to-do. But what a set they looked! Puny limbs, sickly faces, under the weeping London sky! Hardly a well-built man or a decent-looking woman, and not a fresh complexion anywhere. As the King's coffin went by, the men took off their hats, and a friend who was in the crowd at the other side of the Strand said to me afterwards, 'The only touch of colour anywhere was the bald heads.' Even the Guards, it seemed to me — there was a squad of guardsmen marching beside the coffin — were not what they used to be. Where are the monstrous men with chests like barrels and moustaches like the wings of eagles who strode across my child-hood's gaze twenty or thirty years ago? Buried, I suppose, in the Flanders mud. In their place there are these pale-faced boys who have been picked for their height and consequently look like hop-poles in overcoats — the truth being that in modern England a man over six feet high is usually skin and bone and not much else. If the English physique has declined, this is no doubt partly due to the fact that the Great War carefully selected the million best men in England and slaughtered them, largely before they had had time to breed. But the process must have begun earlier than that, and it must be due ultimately to un-healthy ways of living, i.e. to industrialism. I don't mean 'the habit of living in towns — probably the town is healthier than the country, in many ways — but the modern industrial technique which provides you with cheap substitutes for everything. We may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun.

It is unfortunate that the English working class — the English nation generally, for that matter — are exception-ally ignorant about

and wasteful of food. I have pointed out elsewhere how civilized is a French navvy's idea of a meal compared with an Englishman's, and I cannot believe that you would ever see such wastage in a French house as you habitually see in English ones. Of course, in the very poorest homes, where everybody is unemployed, you don't see much actual waste, but those who can afford to waste food often do so. I could give startling instances of this. Even the Northern habit of baking one's own bread is slightly wasteful in itself, because an overworked woman cannot bake more than once or, at most, twice a week and it is impossible to tell beforehand how much bread will be wasted, so that a certain amount generally has to be thrown away. The usual thing is to bake six large loaves and twelve small ones at a time. All this is part of the old, generous English attitude to life, and it is an amiable quality, but a disastrous one at the present moment.

English working people everywhere, so far as I know, refuse brown bread; it is usually impossible to buy whole-meal bread in a working-class district. They sometimes give the reason that brown bread is 'dirty'. I suspect the real reason is that in the past brown bread has been confused with black bread, which is traditionally associated with Popery and wooden shoes. (They have plenty of Popery and wooden shoes in Lancashire. A pity they haven't the black bread as well!) But the English palate, especially the working-class palate, now rejects good food almost automatically. The number of people who prefer tinned peas and tinned fish to real peas and real fish must be increasing every year, and plenty of people who could afford real milk in their tea would much sooner have tinned milk — even that dreadful tinned milk which is made of sugar and corn-flour and has UNFIT FOR BABIES on the tin in huge letters. In some districts efforts are now being made to teach the unemployed more about food-values and more about the intelligent spending of money. When you hear of a thing like this you feel yourself torn both ways. I have heard a Communist speaker on the platform grow very angry about it. In London, he said, parties of Society dames now have the cheek to walk into East End houses and give shopping-lessons to the wives of the unemployed. He gave this as an instance of the mentality of the English governing class. First you condemn a family to live on thirty shillings a week, and then you have the

damned impertinence to tell them how they are to spend their money. He was quite right — I agree heartily. Yet all the same it is a pity that, merely for the lack of a proper tradition, people should pour muck like tinned milk down their throats and not even know that it is inferior to the product of the cow.

I doubt, however, whether the unemployed would ultimately benefit if they learned to spend their money more economically. For it is only the fact that they are not economical that keeps their allowances so high. An English-man on the P.A.C. gets fifteen shillings a week because fifteen shillings is the smallest sum on which he can conceivably keep alive. If he were, say, an Indian or Japanese coolie, who can live on rice and onions, he wouldn't get fifteen shillings a week — he would be lucky if he got fifteen shillings a month. Our unemployment allowances, miser-able though they are, are framed to suit a population with very high standards and not much notion of economy. If the unemployed learned to be better managers they would be visibly better off, and I fancy it would not be long before the dole was docked correspondingly.

There is one great mitigation of unemployment in the North, and that is the cheapness of fuel. Anywhere in the coal areas the retail price of coal is about one and sixpence a hundredweight; in the South of England it is about half a crown. Moreover, miners in work can usually buy coal direct from the pit at eight or nine shillings a ton, and those who have a cellar in their homes sometimes store a ton and sell it (illicitly, I suppose) to those who are out of work. But apart from this there is immense and systematic thieving of coal by the unemployed. I call it thieving because technically it is that, though it does no harm to anybody. In the 'dirt' that is sent up from the pits there is a certain amount of broken coal, and unemployed people spend a lot of time in picking it out of the slag-heaps. All day long over those strange grey mountains you see people wandering to and fro with sacks and baskets across the sulphurous smoke (many slag-heaps are on fire under the surface), prising out the tiny nuggets of coal which are buried here and there. You meet men coming away, wheeling strange and wonderful home-made bicycles — bicycles made of rusty parts picked off refuse-tips, without saddles, without chains and almost always without tyres — across which are slung

bags containing perhaps half a hundredweight of coal, fruit of half a day's searching. In times of strikes, when everybody is short of fuel, the miners turn out with pick and shovel and burrow into the slag-heaps, whence the hummocky appearance which most slag-heaps have. During long strikes, in places where there are outcrops of coal, they have sunk surface mines and carried them scores of yards into the earth.

In Wigan the competition among unemployed people for the waste coal has become so fierce that it has led to an extraordinary custom called' scrambling for the coal', which is well worth seeing. Indeed I rather wonder that it has never been filmed. An unemployed miner took me to see it one afternoon. We got to the place, a mountain range of ancient slag-heaps with a railway running through the valley below. A couple of hundred ragged men, each with a sack and coal-hammer strapped under his coat-tails, were waiting on the 'broo'. When the dirt comes up-from the pit it is loaded on to trucks and an engine runs these to the top of another slag-heap a quarter of a mile away and there leaves them. The process of 'scrambling for the coal' consists in getting on to the train while it is moving; any truck which you have succeeded in boarding while it is in motion counts as 'your' truck. Presently the train hove in sight. With a wild yell a hundred men dashed down the slope to catch her as she rounded the bend. Even at the bend the train was making twenty miles an hour. The men hurled themselves upon it, caught hold of the rings at the rear of the trucks and hoisted themselves up by way of the bumpers, five or ten of them on each truck. The driver took no notice, He drove up to the top of the slag-heap, uncoupled the trucks, and ran the engine back to the pit, presently returning with a fresh string of trucks. There was the same wild rush of ragged figures as before. In the end only about fifty men had failed to get on to either train.

We walked up to the top of the slag-heap. The men were shovelling the dirt out of the trucks, while down below their wives and children were kneeling, swiftly scrabbling with their hands in the damp dirt and picking out lumps of coal the size of an egg or smaller. You would see a woman pounce on a tiny fragment of stuff, wipe it on her apron, scrutinize it to make sure it was coal, and pop it jealously into her sack. Of course, when you are boarding a truck you

don't know beforehand what is in it; it may be actual 'dirt' from the roads or it may merely be shale from the roofing. If it is a shale truck there will be no coal in it, but there occurs among the shale another inflammable rock called cannel, which looks very like ordinary shale but is slightly darker and is known by splitting in parallel lines, like slate. It makes tolerable fuel, not good enough to be commercially valuable, but good enough to be eagerly sought after by the unemployed. The miners on the shale trucks were picking out the cannel and splitting it up with their hammers. Down at the bottom of the 'broo' the people who had failed to get on to either train were gleaning the tiny chips of coal that came rolling down from above — fragments no bigger than a hazel-nut, these, but the people were glad enough to get them.

We stayed there till the train was empty. In a couple of hours the people had picked the dirt over to the last grain. They slung their sacks over shoulder or bicycle, and started on the two-mile trudge back to Wigan. Most of the families had gathered about half a hundredweight of coal or carmel, so that between them they must have stolen five or ten tons of fuel. This business of robbing the dirt trains takes place every day in Wigan, at any rate in winter, and at more collieries than one. It is of course extremely dangerous. No one was hurt the afternoon I was there, but a man had had both his legs cut off a few weeks earlier, and another man lost several fingers a week later. Technically it is stealing but, as everybody knows, if the coal were not stolen it would simply be wasted. Now and again, for form's sake, the colliery companies prosecute somebody for coal-picking, and in that morning's issue of the local paper there was a paragraph saying that two men had been fined ten shillings. But no notice is taken of the prosecutions — in fact, one of the men named in the paper was there that afternoon — and the coal-pickers subscribe among themselves to pay the fines. The thing is taken for granted. Everyone knows that the unemployed have got to get fuel somehow. So every afternoon several hundred men risk their necks and several hundred women scrabble in the mud for hours — and all for half a hundredweight of inferior fuel, value ninepence.

That scene stays in my mind as one of my pictures of Lancashire: the dumpy, shawled women, with their sacking aprons and their

heavy black clogs, kneeling in the cindery mud and the bitter wind, searching eagerly for tiny chips of coal. They are glad enough to do it. In winter they are desperate for fuel; it is more important almost than food. Meanwhile all round, as far as the eye can see, are the slag-heaps and hoisting gear of collieries, and not one of those collieries can sell all the coal it is capable of producing. This ought to appeal to Major Douglas.

7

As you travel northward your eye, accustomed to the South or East, does not notice much difference until you are beyond Birmingham. In Coventry you might as well be in Finsbury Park, and the Bull Ring in Birmingham is not unlike Norwich Market, and between all the towns of the Midlands there stretches a villa-civilization indistinguishable from that of the South. It is only when you get a little further north, to the pottery towns and beyond, that you begin to encounter the real ugliness of industrialism — an ugliness so frightful and so arresting that you are obliged, as it were, to come to terms with it.

A slag-heap is at best a hideous thing, because it is so planless and functionless. It is something just dumped on the earth, like the emptying of a giant's dust-bin. On the outskirts of the mining towns there are frightful landscapes where your horizon is ringed completely round by jagged grey mountains, and underfoot is mud and ashes and over-head the steel cables where tubs of dirt travel slowly across miles of country. Often the slag-heaps are on fire, and at night you can see the red rivulets of fire winding this way and that, and also the slow-moving blue flames of sulphur, which always seem on the point of expiring and always spring out again. Even when a slag-heap sinks, as it does ultimately, only an evil brown grass grows on it, and it retains its hummocky surface. One in the slums of Wigan, used as a playground, looks like a choppy sea suddenly frozen; 'the flock mattress', it is called locally. Even centuries hence when the plough drives over the places where coal was once mined, the sites of ancient slag-heaps will still be distinguishable from an aeroplane.

I remember a winter afternoon in the dreadful environs of Wigan. All round was the lunar landscape of slag-heaps, and to the north, through the passes, as it were, between the mountains of slag, you could see the factory chimneys sending out their plumes of smoke. The canal path was a mixture of cinders and frozen mud, criss-crossed by the imprints of innumerable clogs, and all round, as far as the slag-heaps in the distance, stretched the 'flashes' — pools of

stagnant water that had seeped into the hollows caused by the subsidence of ancient pits. It was horribly cold. The 'flashes' were covered with ice the colour of raw umber, the bargemen were muffled to the eyes in sacks, the lock gates wore beards of ice. It seemed a world from which vegetation had been banished; nothing existed except smoke, shale, ice, mud, ashes, and foul water. But even Wigan is beautiful compared with Sheffield. Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World: its inhabitants, who want it to be pre-eminent in everything, very likely do make that claim for it. It has a population of half a million and it contains fewer decent buildings than the average East Anglian village of five hundred. And the stench! If at rare moments you stop smelling sulphur it is because you have begun smelling gas. Even the shallow river that runs through the town is-usually bright yellow with some chemical or other. Once I halted in the street and counted the factory chimneys I could see; there were thirty-three of them, but there would have been far more if the air had not been obscured by smoke. One scene especially lingers in my mind. A frightful patch of waste ground (somehow, up there, a patch of waste ground attains a squalor that would be impossible even in London) trampled bare of grass and littered with newspapers and old saucepans. To the right an isolated row of gaunt four-roomed houses, dark red, blackened by smoke. To the left an interminable vista of factory chimneys, chimney beyond chimney, fading away into a dim blackish haze. Behind me a railway embankment made of the slag from furnaces. In front, across the patch of waste ground, a cubical building of red and yellow brick, with the sign 'Thomas Grocock, Haulage Contractor'.

At night, when you cannot see the hideous shapes of the houses and the blackness of everything, a town like Sheffield assumes a kind of sinister magnificence. Sometimes the drifts of smoke are rosy with sulphur, and serrated flames, like circular saws, squeeze themselves out from beneath the cowls of the foundry chimneys. Through the open doors of foundries you see fiery serpents of iron being hauled to and fro by redlit boys, and you hear the whizz and thump of steam hammers and the scream of the iron under the blow. The pottery towns are almost equally ugly in a pettier way. Right in among the

rows of tiny blackened houses, part of the street as it were, are the 'pot banks' — conical brick chimneys like gigantic burgundy bottles buried in the soil and belching their smoke almost in your face. You come upon monstrous clay chasms hundreds of feet across and almost as deep, with little rusty tubs creeping on chain railways up one side, and on the other workmen clinging like samphire-gatherers and cutting into the face of the cliff with their picks. I passed that way in snowy weather, and even the snow was black. The best thing one can say for the pottery towns is that they are fairly small and stop abruptly. Less than ten miles away you can stand in un-defiled country, on the almost naked hills, and the pottery towns are only a smudge in the distance.

When you contemplate such ugliness as this, there are two questions that strike you. First, is it inevitable? Secondly, does it matter?

I do not believe that there is anything inherently and unavoidably ugly about industrialism. A factory or even a gasworks is not obliged of its own nature to be ugly, any more than a palace or a dog-kennel or a cathedral. It all depends on the architectural tradition of the period. The industrial towns of the North are ugly because they happen to have been built at a time when modem methods of steel-construction and smoke-abatement were unknown, and when everyone was too busy making money to think about anything else. They go on being ugly largely because the Northerners have got used to that kind of thing and do not notice it. Many of the people in Sheffield or Manchester, if they smelled the air along the Cornish cliffs, would probably declare that it had no taste in it. But since the war, industry has tended to shift southward and in doing so has grown almost comely. The typical post-war factory is not a gaunt barrack or an awful chaos of blackness and belching chimneys; it is a glittering white structure of concrete, glass, and steel, surrounded by green lawns and beds of tulips. Look at the factories you pass as you travel out of London on the G.W.R.; they may not be aesthetic triumphs but certainly they are not ugly in the same way as the Sheffield gasworks. But in any case, though the ugliness of industrialism is the most obvious thing about it and the thing every newcomer exclaims against, I doubt whether it is centrally important.

And perhaps it is not even desirable, industrialism being what it is, that it should leam to disguise itself as something else. As Mr Aldous Huxley has truly remarked, a dark Satanic mill ought to look like a dark Satanic mill and not like the temple of mysterious and splendid gods. Moreover, even in the worst of the industrial towns one sees a great deal that is not ugly in the narrow aesthetic sense. A belching chimney or a stinking slum is repulsive chiefly because it implies warped lives and ailing children. Look at it from a purely aesthetic standpoint and it may, have a certain macabre appeal. I find that anything outrageously strange generally ends by fascinating me even when I abominate it. The landscapes of Burma, which, when I was among them, so appalled me as to assume the qualities of nightmare, afterwards stayed so hauntingly in my mind that I was obliged to write a novel about them to get rid of them. (In all novels about the East the scenery is the real subject-matter.) It would probably be quite easy to extract a sort of beauty, as Arnold Bennett did, from the blackness of the industrial towns; one can easily imagine Baudelaire, for instance, writing a poem about a slag-heap. But the beauty or ugliness of industrialism hardly matters. Its real evil lies far deeper and is quite uneradicable. It is important to remember this, because there is always a temptation to think that industrialism is harmless so long as it is clean and orderly.

But when you go to the industrial North you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but still more because of the North-South antithesis which has been rubbed into us for such a long time past. There exists in England a curious cult of Northemness, sort of Northern snobbishness. A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know that he regards you as an inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain that it is only in the North that life is ‘real’ life, that the industrial work done in the North is the only ‘real’ work, that the North is inhabited by ‘real’ people, the South merely by rentiers and their parasites. The Northerner has ‘grit’, he is grim, ‘dour’, plucky, warm-hearted, and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate, and lazy — that at any rate is the theory. Hence the Southerner goes north, at any rate for the first time, with the vague inferiority-complex of a civilized

man venturing among savages, while the Yorkshireman, like the Scotchman, comes to London in the spirit of a barbarian out for loot. And feelings of this kind, which are the result of tradition, are not affected by visible facts. Just as an Englishman five feet four inches high and twenty-nine inches round the chest feels that as an Englishman he is the physical superior of Camera (Camera being a Dago), so also with the Northerner and the Southerner. I remember a weedy little Yorkshireman, who would almost certainly have run away if a fox-terrier had snapped at him, telling me that in the South of England he felt 'like a wild invader'. But the cult is often adopted by people who are not by birth Northerners themselves. A year or two ago a friend of mine, brought up in the South but now living in the North, was driving me through Suffolk in a car. We passed through a rather beautiful village. He glanced disapprovingly at the cottages and said:

'Of course most of the villages in Yorkshire are hideous; but the Yorkshiremen are splendid chaps. Down here it's just the other way about — beautiful villages and rotten people. All the people in those cottages there are worthless, absolutely worthless.'

I could not help inquiring whether he happened to know anybody in that village. No, he did not know them; but because this was East Anglia they were obviously worthless. Another friend of mine, again a Southerner by birth, loses no opportunity of praising the North to the detriment of the South. Here is an extract from one of his letters to me:

I am in Clitheroe, Lanes. . . . I think running water is much more attractive in moor and mountain country than in the fat and sluggish South. 'The smug and silver Trent,' Shakespeare says; and the South-er the smugger, I say.

Here you have an interesting example of the Northern cult. Not only are you and I and everyone else in the South of England written off as 'fat and sluggish', but even water when it gets north of a certain latitude, ceases to be H2O and becomes something mystically superior. But the interest of this passage is that its writer is an extremely intelligent man of 'advanced' opinions who would have nothing but con-tempt for nationalism in its ordinary form. Put to

him some such proposition as 'One Britisher is worth three foreigners', and he would repudiate it with horror. But when it is a question of North versus South, he is quite ready to generalize. All nationalistic distinctions — all claims to be better than somebody else because you have a different-shaped skull or speak a different dialect — are entirely spurious, but they are important so long as people believe in them. There is no doubt about the Englishman's inbred conviction that those who live to the south of him are his inferiors; even our foreign policy is governed by it to some extent. I think, therefore, that it is worth pointing out when and why it came into being.

When nationalism first became a religion, the English looked at the map, and, noticing that their island lay very high in the Northern Hemisphere, evolved the pleasing theory that the further north you live the more virtuous you become. The histories I was given when I was a little boy generally started off by explaining in the naivest way that a cold climate made people energetic while a hot one made them lazy, and hence the defeat of the Spanish Armada. This nonsense about the superior energy of the English (actually the laziest people in Europe) has been current for at least a hundred years. 'Better is it for us', writes a Quarterly Reviewer of 1827, 'to be condemned to labour for our country's good than to luxuriate amid olives, vines, and vices.' 'Olives, vines, and vices' sums up the normal English attitude towards the Latin races. In the mythology of Garlyle, Creasey, etc., the Northerner ('Teutonic', later 'Nordic') is pictured as a hefty, vigorous chap with blond moustaches and pure morals, while the Southerner is sly, cowardly, and licentious. This theory was never pushed to its logical end, which would have meant assuming that the finest people in the world were the Eskimos, but it did involve admitting that the people who lived to the north of us were superior to ourselves. Hence, partly, the cult of Scotland and of Scotch things which has so deeply marked English life during the past fifty years. But it was the industrialization of the North that gave the North-South antithesis its peculiar slant. Until comparatively recently the northern part of England was the backward and feudal part, and such industry as existed was concentrated in London and the South-East. In the Civil War for instance, roughly speaking a war

of money versus feudalism, the North and West were for the King and the South and East for the Parliament. But with the increasing use of coal industry passed to the North, and there grew up a new type of man, the self-made Northern business man — the Mr Rouncewell and Mr Bounderby of Dickens. The Northern business man, with his hateful 'get on or get out' philosophy, was the dominant figure of the nineteenth century, and as a sort of tyrannical corpse he rules us still. This is the type edified by Arnold Bennett — the type who starts off with half a crown and ends up with fifty thousand pounds, and whose chief pride is to be an even greater boor after he has made his money than before. On analysis his sole virtue turns out to be a talent for making money. We were bidden to admire him because though he might be narrow-minded, sordid, ignorant, grasping, and uncouth, he had 'grit', he 'got on'; in other words, he knew how to make money.

This kind of cant is nowadays a pure anachronism, for the Northern business man is no longer prosperous. But traditions are not killed by facts, and the tradition of Northern' grit' lingers. It is still dimly felt that a Northerner will 'get on', i.e. make money, where a Southerner will fail. At the back of the mind of every Yorkshireman and every Scotchman who comes to London is a sort of Dick Whittington picture of himself as the boy who starts off by selling newspapers and ends up as Lord Mayor. And that, really, is at the bottom of his bumptiousness. But where one can make a great mistake is in imagining that this feeling extends to the genuine working class. When I first went to Yorkshire, some years ago, I imagined that I was going to a country of boors. I was used to the London Yorkshireman with his interminable harangues and his pride in the supposed raciness of his dialect ('"A stitch in time saves nine", as we say in the West Riding'), and I expected to meet with a good deal of rudeness. But I met with nothing of the kind, and least of all among the miners. Indeed the Lancashire and Yorkshire miners treated me with a kindness and courtesy that were even embarrassing; for if there is one type of man to whom I do feel myself inferior, it is a coal-miner. Certainly no one showed any sign of despising me for coming from a different part of the country. This has its importance when one remembers that the English regional

snobberies are nationalism in miniature; for it suggests that place-snobbery is not a working-class characteristic.

There is nevertheless a real difference between North and South, and there is at least a tinge of truth in that picture of Southern England as one enormous Brighton inhabited by lounge-lizards. For climatic reasons the parasitic divi-dend-drawing class tend to settle in the South. In a Lancashire cotton-town you could probably go for months on end without once hearing an 'educated' accent, whereas there can hardly be a town in the South of England where you could throw a brick without hitting the niece of a bishop. Consequently, with no petty gentry to set the pace, the bourgeoisification of the working class, though it is taking place in the North, is taking place more slowly. All the Northern accents, for instance, persist strongly, while the Southern ones are collapsing before the movies and the B.B.C. Hence your 'educated' accent stamps you rather as a foreigner than as a chunk of the petty gentry; and this is an immense advantage, for it makes it much easier to get into contact with the working class.

But is it ever possible to be really intimate with the working class? I shall have to discuss that later; I will only say here that I do not think it is possible. But undoubtedly it is easier in the North than it would be in the South to meet working-class people on approximately equal terms. It is fairly easy to live in a miner's house and be accepted as one of the family; with, say, a farm labourer in the Southern counties it probably would be impossible. I have seen just enough of the working class to avoid idealizing them, but I do know that you can leam a great deal in a working-class home, if only you can get there. The essential point is that your middle-class ideals and prejudices are tested by contact with others which are not necessarily better but are certainly different.

Take for instance the different attitude towards the family. A working-class family hangs together as a middle-class one does, but the relationship is far less tyrannical. A working man has not that deadly weight of family prestige hanging round his neck like a millstone. I have pointed out earlier that a middle-class person goes utterly to pieces under the influence of poverty; and this is generally due to the behaviour of his family — to the fact that he has scores of

relations nagging and badgering him night and day for failing to 'get on'. The fact that the working class know how to combine and the middle class don't is probably due to their different conceptions of family loyalty. You cannot have an effective trade union of middle-class workers, be-cause in times of strikes almost every middle-class wife would be egging her husband on to blackleg and get the other fellow's job. Another working-class characteristic, disconcerting at first, is their plain-spokenness towards anyone they regard as an equal. If you offer a working man something he doesn't want, he tells you that he doesn't want it; a middle-class person would accept it to avoid giving offence. And again, take the working-class attitude towards 'education'. How different it is from ours, and how immensely sounder! Working people often have a vague reverence for learning in others, but where 'education' touches their own lives they see through it and reject it by a healthy instinct. The time was when I used to lament over quite imaginary pictures of lads of fourteen dragged protesting from their lessons and set to work at dismal jobs. It seemed to me dreadful that the doom of a 'job' should descend upon anyone at fourteen. Of course I know now that there is not one working-class boy in a thousand who does not pine for the day when he will leave school. He wants to be doing real work, not wasting his time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography. To the working class, the notion of staying at school till you are nearly grown-up seems merely contemptible and unmanly. The idea of a great big boy of eighteen, who ought to be bringing a pound a week home to his parents, going to school in a ridiculous uniform and even being caned for not doing his lessons! Just fancy a working-class boy of eighteen allowing himself to be caned! He is a man when the other is still a baby. Ernest Pontifex, in Samuel Butler's Way of All Flesh, after he had had a few glimpses of real life, looked back on his public school and university education and found it a 'sickly, debilitating debauch'. There is much in middle-class life that looks sickly and debilitating when you see it from a working-class angle.

In a working-class home — I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes — you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so

easy to find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages — an 'if which gets bigger and bigger — has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated' man. His home life seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape. I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best. Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat — it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted.

This scene is still reduplicated in a majority of English homes, though not in so many as before the war. Its happiness depends mainly upon one question — whether Father is in work. But notice that the picture I have called up, of a working-class family sitting round the coal fire after kippers and strong tea, belongs only to our own moment of time and could not belong either to the future or the past. Skip forward two hundred years into the Utopian future, and the scene is totally different. Hardly one of the things I have imagined will still be there. In that age when there is no manual labour and everyone is 'educated', it is hardly likely that Father will still be a rough man with enlarged hands who likes to sit in shirt-sleeves and says 'Ah wur coomin' oop street'. And there won't be a coal fire in the grate, only some kind of invisible heater. The furniture will be made of rubber, glass, and steel. If there are still such things as evening papers there will certainly be no racing news in them, for gambling will be meaningless in a world where there is no poverty and the horse will have vanished from the face of the earth. Dogs, too, will have been sup-pressed on grounds of hygiene. And there won't be so many children, either, if the birth-controllers have their way. But move backwards into the Middle Ages and you are in a world almost equally foreign. A windowless hut, a wood fire which smokes in your face because there is no chimney, mouldy bread, 'Poor John', lice, scurvy, a yearly child-birth and a yearly child-

death, and the priest terrifying you with tales of Hell.

Curiously enough it is not the triumphs of modem engineering, nor the radio, nor the cinematograph, nor the five thousand novels which are published yearly, nor the crowds at Ascot and the Eton and Harrow match, but the memory of working-class interiors — especially as I sometimes saw them in my childhood before the war, when England was still prosperous — that reminds me that our age has not been altogether a bad one to live in.

Part Two

8

The road from Mandalay to Wigan is a long one and the reasons for taking it are not immediately clear.

In the earlier chapters of this book I have given a rather fragmentary account of various things I saw in the coal areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire. I went there partly because I wanted to see what mass-unemployment is like at its worst, partly in order to see the most typical section of the English working class at close quarters. This was necessary to me as part of my approach to Socialism, for before you can be sure whether you are genuinely in favour of Socialism, you have got to decide whether things at present are tolerable or not tolerable, and you have got to take up a definite attitude on the terribly difficult issue of class. Here I shall have to digress and explain how my own attitude towards the class question was developed. Obviously this involves writing a certain amount of autobiography, and I would not do it if I did not think that I am sufficiently typical of my class, or rather sub-caste, to have a certain symptomatic importance.

I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class. The upper-middle class, which had its heyday in the eighties and nineties, with Kipling as its poet laureate, was a sort of mound of wreckage left behind when the tide of Victorian prosperity receded. Or perhaps it would be better to change the metaphor and describe it not as a mound but as a layer — the layer of society lying between L2000 and L300 a year: my own family was not far from the bottom. You notice that I define it in terms of money, because that is always the quickest way of making yourself understood. Nevertheless, the essential point about the English class-system is that it is not entirely explicable in terms of money. Roughly speaking it is a money-stratification, but it is also interpenetrated by a sort of shadowy caste-system; rather like a jerrybuilt modem bungalow haunted by medieval ghosts. Hence the fact that the upper-middle class extends or extended to incomes as low as L300 a year — to incomes, that is, much lower than those of merely middle-class people with no social pretensions. Probably there are countries where

you can predict a man's opinions from his income, but it is never quite safe to do so in England; you have always got to take his traditions into consideration as well. A naval officer and his grocer very likely have the same income, but they are not equivalent persons and they would only be on the same side in very large issues such as a war or a general strike — possibly not even then.

Of course it is obvious now that the upper-middle class is done for. In every country town in Southern England, not to mention the dreary wastes of Kensington and Earl's Court, those who knew it in the days of its glory are dying, vaguely embittered by a world which has not behaved as it ought. I never open one of Kipling's books or go into one of the huge dull shops which were once the favourite haunt of the upper-middle class, without thinking 'Change and decay in all around I see'. But before the war the upper-middle class, though already none too prosperous, still felt sure of itself. Before the war you were either a gentleman or not a gentleman, and if you were a gentleman you struggled to behave as such, whatever your income might be. Between those with L400 a year and those with L2000 or even L1000 a year there was a great gulf fixed, but it was a gulf which those with L400 a year did their best to ignore. Probably the distinguishing mark of the upper-middle class was that its traditions were not to any extent commercial, but mainly military, official, and professional.

People in this class owned no land, but they felt that they were landowners in the sight of God and kept up a semi-aristocratic outlook by going into the professions and the fighting services rather than into trade. Small boys used to count the plum stones on their plates and foretell their destiny by chanting, 'Army, Navy, Church, Medicine, Law'; and even of these 'Medicine' was faintly inferior to the others and only put in for the sake of symmetry. To belong to this class when you were at the L400 a year level was a queer business, for it meant that your gentility was almost purely theoretical. You lived, so to speak, at two levels simultaneously. Theoretically you knew all about servants and how to tip them, although in practice you had one, at most, two resident servants. Theoretically you knew how to wear your clothes and how to order a dinner, although in practice you could never afford to go to a decent tailor or a decent

restaurant. Theoretically you knew how to shoot and ride, although in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch of ground to shoot over. It was this that explained the attraction of India (more recently Kenya, Nigeria, etc.) for the lower-upper-middle class. The people who went there as soldiers and officials did not go there to make money, for a soldier or an official does not want money; they went there because in India, with cheap horses, free shooting, and hordes of black servants, it was so easy to play at being a gentleman.

In the kind of shabby-genteel family that I am talking about there is far more consciousness of poverty than in any working-class family above the level of the dole. Rent and clothes and school-bills are an unending nightmare, and every luxury, even a glass of beer, is an unwarrantable extravagance. Practically the whole family income goes in keeping up appearances. It is obvious that people of this kind are in an anomalous position, and one might 'be tempted to write them off as mere exceptions and therefore unimportant. Actually, however, they are or were fairly numerous. Most clergymen and schoolmasters, for instance, nearly all Anglo-Indian officials, a sprinkling of soldiers and sailors, and a fair number of professional men and artists, fall into this category. But the real importance of this class is that they are the shock-absorbers of the bourgeoisie. The real bourgeoisie, those in the L2000 a year class and over, have their money as a thick layer of padding between themselves and the class they plunder; in so far as they are aware of the Lower Orders at all they are aware of them as employees, servants, and tradesmen. But it is quite different for the poor devils lower down who are struggling to live genteel lives on what are virtually working-class incomes. These last are forced into close and, in a sense, intimate contact with the working class, and I suspect it is from them that the traditional upper-class attitude towards 'common' people is derived.

And what is this attitude? An attitude of sniggering superiority punctuated by bursts of vicious hatred. Look at any number of Punch during the. past thirty years. You will find it everywhere taken for granted that a working-class person, as such, is a figure of fun, except at odd moments when he shows signs of being too prosperous, whereupon he ceases to be a figure of fun and becomes a demon. It is no use wasting breath in denouncing this attitude. It is better to

consider how it has arisen, and to do that one has got to realize what the working classes look like to those who live among them but have different habits and traditions.

A shabby genteel family is in much the same position as a family of 'poor whites' living in a street where everyone else is a Negro. In such circumstances you have got to cling to your gentility because it is the only thing you have; and meanwhile you are hated for your stuck-up-ness and for the accent and manners which stamp you as one of the boss class. I was very young, not much more than six, when I first became aware of class-distinctions. Before that age my chief heroes had generally been working-class people, because they always seemed to do such interesting things, such as being fishermen and blacksmiths and bricklayers. I remember the farm hands on a farm in Cornwall who used to let me ride on the drill when they were sowing turnips and would sometimes catch the ewes and milk them to give me a drink; and the workmen building the new house next door, who let me play with the wet mortar and from whom I first learned the word 'b — — '; and the plumber up the road with whose children I used to go out bird-nesting. But it was not long before I was forbidden to play with the plumber's children; they were 'common' and I was told to keep away from them. This was snobbish, if you like, but it was also necessary, for middle-class people can-not afford to let their children grow up with vulgar accents. So, very early, the working class ceased to be a race of friendly and wonderful beings and became a race of enemies. We realized that they hated us, but we could never understand why, and naturally we set it down to pure, vicious malignity. To me in my early boyhood, to nearly all children of families like mine, 'common' people seemed almost sub-human. They had coarse faces, hideous accents, and gross manners, they hated everyone who was not like themselves, and if they got half a chance they would insult you in brutal ways. That was our view of them, and though it was false it was understandable. For one must remember that before the war there was much more overt class-hatred in England than there is now. In those days you were quite likely to be insulted simply for looking like a member of the upper classes; nowadays, on the other hand, you are more likely to be fawned upon. Anyone over thirty can

remember the time when it was impossible for a well-dressed person to walk through a slum street without being hooted at. Whole quarters of big towns were considered unsafe because of' hooligans' (now almost an extinct type), and the London gutter-boy everywhere, with his loud voice and lack of intellectual scruples, could make life a misery for people who considered it beneath their dignity to answer back. A recurrent terror of my holidays, when I was a small boy, was the gangs of' cads' who were liable to set upon you five or ten to one. In term time, on the other hand, it was we who were in the majority and the 'cads' who were oppressed; I remember a couple of savage mass-battles in the cold winter of 1916-17. And this tradition of open hostility between upper and lower class had apparently been the same for at least a century past. A typical joke in Punch in the sixties is a picture of a small, nervous-looking gentleman riding through a slum street and a crowd of street-boys closing in on him with shouts ''Ere comes a swell! Let's frighten 'is 'oss!' Just fancy the street boys trying to frighten his horse now! They would be much likelier to hang round him in vague hopes of a tip. During the past dozen years the English working class have grown servile with a rather horrifying rapidity. It was bound to happen, for the frightful weapon of unemployment has cowed them. Before the war their economic position was comparatively strong, for though there was no dole to fall back upon, there was not much unemployment, and the power of the boss class was not so obvious as it is now. A man did not see ruin staring him in the face every time he cheeked a 'toff', and naturally he did cheek a 'toff' whenever it seemed safe to do so. G. J. Renier, in his book on Oscar Wilde, points out that the strange, obscene burst of popular fury which followed the Wilde trial was essentially social in character. The 'London mob had caught a member of the upper classes on the hop, and they took care to keep him hopping. All this was natural and even proper. If you treat people as the English working class have been treated during the past two centuries, you must expect them to resent it. On the other hand the children of shabby-genteel families could not be blamed if they grew up with a hatred of the working class, typified for them by prowling gangs of 'cads'.

But there was another and more serious difficulty. Here you come

to the real secret of class distinctions in the West — the real reason why a European of bourgeois upbringing, even when he calls himself a Communist, cannot without a hard effort think of a working man as his equal. It is summed up in four frightful words which people nowadays are chary of uttering, but which were bandied about quite freely in my childhood. The words were: The lower classes smell.

That was what we were taught — the lower classes smell. And here, obviously, you are at an impassable barrier. For no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a physical feeling. Race-hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code, can be got over; but physical repulsion can-not. You can have an affection for a murderer or a sodomite, but you cannot have an affection for a man whose breath stinks — habitually stinks, I mean. However well you may wish him, however much you may admire his mind and character, if his breath stinks he is horrible and in your heart of hearts you will hate him. It may not greatly matter if the average middle-class person is brought up to believe that the working classes are ignorant, lazy, drunken, boorish, and dishonest; it is when he is brought up to believe that they are dirty that the harm is done. And in my childhood we were brought up to believe that they were dirty. Very early in life you acquired the idea that there was something subtly repulsive about a working-class body; you would not get nearer to it than you could help. You watched a great sweaty navvy walking down the road with his pick over his shoulder; you looked at his discoloured shirt and his corduroy trousers stiff with the dirt of a decade; you thought of those nests and layers of greasy rags below, and, under all, the unwashed body, brown all over (that was how I used to imagine it), with its strong, bacon-like reek. You watched a tramp taking off his boots in a ditch — ugh! It did not seriously occur to you that the tramp might not enjoy having black feet. And even 'lower-class' people whom you knew to be quite clean — servants, for instance — were faintly unappetizing. The smell of their sweat, the very texture of their skins, were mysteriously different from yours.

Everyone who has grown up pronouncing his aitches and in a house with a bathroom and one servant is likely to have grown up

with these feelings; hence the chasmic, impassable quality of class-distinctions in the West. It is queer how seldom this is admitted. At the moment I can think of only one book where it is set forth without humbug, and that is Mr Somerset Maugham's On a Chinese Screen. Mr Maugham describes a high Chinese official arriving at a wayside inn and blustering and calling everybody names in order to impress upon them that he is a supreme dignitary and they are only worms. Five minutes later, having asserted his dignity in the way he thinks proper, he is eating his dinner in perfect amity with the baggage coolies. As an official he feels that he has got to make his presence felt, but he has no feeling that the coolies are of different clay from himself. I have observed countless similar scenes in Burma. Among Mongolians — among all Asiatics, for all I know — there is a sort of natural equality, an easy intimacy between man and man, which is simply unthinkable in the West. Mr Maugham adds:

In the West we are divided from our fellows by our sense of smell. The working man is our master, inclined to rule us with an iron hand, but it cannot be denied that he stinks: none can wonder at it, for a bath in the dawn when you have to hurry to your work before the factory bell rings is no pleasant thing, nor 'does heavy labour tend to sweetness; and you do not change your linen more than you can help when the week's washing must be done by a sharp-tongued wife. I do not blame the working man because he stinks, but stink he does. It makes social intercourse difficult to persons of sensitive nostril. The matutinal tub divides the classes more effectually than birth, wealth, or education.

Meanwhile, do the 'lower classes' smell? Of course, as a whole, they are dirtier than the upper classes. They are bound to be, considering the circumstances in which they live, for even at this late date less than half the houses in England have bathrooms. Besides, the habit of washing yourself all over every day is a very recent one in Europe, and the working classes are generally more conservative than the bourgeoisie. But the English are growing visibly cleaner, and we may hope that in a hundred years they will be almost as clean as the Japanese. It is a pity that those who idealize the working class so often think it necessary to praise every working-class characteristic and therefore to pretend that dirtiness is somehow

meritorious in itself. Here, curiously enough, the Socialist and the sentimental democratic Catholic of the type of Chesterton sometimes join hands; both will tell you that dirtiness is healthy and 'natural' and cleanliness is a mere fad or at best a luxury.[According to Chesterton, dirtiness is merely a kind of 'discomfort' and therefore ranks as self-mortification. Unfortunately, the discomfort of dirtiness is chiefly suffered by other people. It is not really very uncomfortable to be dirty — not nearly so uncomfortable as having a cold bath on a winter morning.] They seem not to see that they are merely giving colour to the notion that working-class people are dirty from choice and not from necessity. Actually, people who have access to a bath will generally use it. But the essential thing is that middle-class people believe that the working class are dirty — you see from the passage quoted above that Mr Maugham himself believes it — and, what is worse, that they are some-how inherently dirty. As a child, one of the most dreadful things I could imagine was to drink out of a bottle after a navvy. Once when I was thirteen, I was in a train coming from a market town, and the third-class carriage was packed full of shepherds and pig-men who had been selling their beasts. Somebody produced a quart bottle of beer and passed it round; it travelled from mouth to mouth to mouth, everyone taking a swig. I cannot describe the horror I felt as that bottle worked its way towards me. If I drank from it after all those lower-class male mouths I felt certain I should vomit; on the other hand, if they offered it to me I dared not refuse for fear of offending them — you see here how the middle-class squeamishness works both ways. Nowadays, thank God, I have no feelings of that kind. A working man's body, as such, is no more repulsive to me than a millionaire's. I still don't like drinking out of a cup or bottle after another person — another man, I mean; with women I don't mind — but at. least the question of class does not enter. It was rubbing shoulders with the tramps that cured me of it. Tramps are not really very dirty as English people go, but they have the name for being dirty, and when you have shared a bed with a tramp and drunk tea out of the same snufftin, you feel that you have seen the worst and the worst has no terrors for you.

I have dwelt on these subjects because they are vitally important. To get rid of class-distinctions you have got to start by understanding

how one class appears when seen through the eyes of another. It is useless to say that the middle classes are 'snobbish' and leave it at that. You get no further if you do not realize that snobbishness is bound up with a species of idealism. It derives from the early training in which a middle-class child is taught almost simultaneously to wash his neck, to be ready to die for his country, and to despise the 'lower classes'.

Here I shall be accused of being behind the times, for I was a child before and during the war and it may be claimed that children nowadays are brought up with more enlightened notions. It is probably true that class-feeling is for the moment a very little less bitter than it was. The working class are submissive where they used to be openly hostile, and the post-war manufacture of cheap clothes and the general softening of manners have toned down the surface differences between class and class. But undoubtedly the essential feeling is still there. Every middle-class person has a dormant class-prejudice which needs only a small thing to arouse it; and if he is over forty he probably has a firm conviction that his own class has been sacrificed to the class below. Suggest to the average unthinking person of gentle birth who is struggling to keep up appearances on four or five hundred a year that he is a member of an exploiting parasite class, and he will think you are mad. In perfect sincerity he will point out to you a dozen ways in which he is worse-off than a working man. In his eyes the workers are not a submerged race of slaves, they are a sinister flood creeping upwards to engulf himself and his friends and his family and to sweep all culture and all decency out of existence. Hence that queer watchful anxiety lest the working class shall grow too prosperous. In a number of Punch soon after the war, when coal was still fetching high prices, there is a picture of four or five miners with grim, sinister faces riding in a cheap motor-car. A friend they are passing calls out and asks them where they have borrowed it. They answer, 'We've bought the thing!' This, you see, is 'good enough for Punch'; for miners to buy a motor-car, even one car between four or five of them, is a monstrosity, a sort of crime against nature. That was the attitude of a dozen years ago, and I see no evidence of any fundamental change. The notion that the working class have been absurdly pampered,

hopelessly demoralized by doles, old age pensions, free education, etc., is still widely held; it has merely been a little shaken, perhaps, by the recent recognition that unemployment does exist. For quantities of middle-class people, probably for a large majority of those over fifty, the typical working man still rides to the Labour Exchange on a motor-bike and keeps coal in his bath-tub: 'And, if you'll believe it, my dear, they actually get married on. the dole!'

The reason why class-hatred seems to be diminishing is that nowadays it tends not to get into print, partly owing to the mealy-mouthed habits of our time, partly because newspapers and even books now have to appeal to a working-class public. As a rule you can best study it in private conversations. But if you want some printed examples, it is worth having a look at the obiter dicta of the late Professor Saintsbury. Saintsbury was a very learned man and along certain lines a judicious literary critic, but when he talked of political or economic matters he only differed from the rest of his class by the fact that he was too thick-skinned and had been born too early to see any reason for pretending to common decency. According to Saintsbury, unemployment insurance was simply 'contributing to the support of lazy ne'er-do-weels', and the whole trade union movement was no more than a kind of organized mendicancy:

'Pauper' is almost actionable now, is it not, when used as a word? though to be paupers, in the sense of being wholly or partly supported at the expense of other people, is the ardent, and to a considerable extent achieved, aspiration of a large proportion of our population, and of an entire political party.

(Second Scrap Book)

It is to be noticed, however, that Saintsbury recognizes that unemployment is bound to exist, and, in fact, thinks that it ought to-.exist, so long as the unemployed are made to suffer as much as possible:

Is not 'casual' labour the very secret and safety-valve of a safe and sound labour-system generally?

. . . In a complicated industrial and commercial state constant employment at regular wages is impossible; while dole-supported unemployment, at anything like the wages of employment, is

demoralizing to begin with and ruinous at its more or less quickly arriving end.

(Last Scrap Book)

What exactly is to happen to the 'casual labourers' when no casual labour happens to be available is not made clear. Presumably (Saintsbury speaks approvingly of 'good Poor Laws') they are to go into the work-house or sleep in the streets. As to the notion that every human being ought as a matter of course to have the chance of earning at least a tolerable livelihood, Saintsbury dismisses it with contempt:

Even the 'right to live' . . . extends no further than the right to protection against murder. Charity certainly will, morality possibly may, and public utility perhaps ought to add to this protection supererogatory provision for continuance of life; but it is questionable whether strict justice demands it.

As for the insane doctrine that being born in a country gives some right to the possession of the soil of that country, it hardly requires notice.

(Last Scrap Book)

It is worth reflecting for a moment upon the beautiful implications of this last passage. The interest of passages like these (and they are scattered all through Saintsbury's work) lies in their having been printed at all. Most people are a little shy of putting that kind of thing on paper. But what Saintsbury is saying here is what any little worm with a fairly safe five hundred a year thinks, and therefore in a way one must admire him for saying it. It takes a lot of guts to be openly such a skunk as that.

This is the outlook of a confessed reactionary. But how about the middle-class person whose views are not reactionary but 'advanced'? Beneath his revolutionary mask, is he really so different from the other?

A middle-class person embraces Socialism and perhaps even joins the Communist Party. How much real difference does it make? Obviously, living within the framework of capitalist society, he has got to go on earning his living, and one cannot blame him if he clings to his bourgeois economic status. But is there any change in his tastes, his habits, his manners, his imaginative background — his

‘ideology’, in Communist jargon? Is there any change in him except that he now votes Labour, or, when possible, Communist at the elections? It is noticeable that he still habitually associates with his own class; he is vastly more at home with a member of his own class, who thinks him a dangerous Bolshie, than with a member of the working class who supposedly agrees with him; his tastes in food, wine, clothes, books, pictures, music, ballet, are still recognizably bourgeois tastes; most significant of all, he invariably marries into his own class. Look at any bourgeois Socialist. Look at Comrade X, member of the C.P.G.B. and author of Marxism for Infants. Comrade X, it so happens, is an old Etonian. He would be ready to die on the barricades, in theory anyway, but you notice that he still leaves his bottom waistcoat button undone. He idealizes the proletariat, but it is remarkable how little his habits resemble theirs. Perhaps once, out of sheer bravado, he has smoked a cigar with the band on, but it would be almost physically impossible for him to put pieces of cheese into his mouth on the point of his knife, or to sit indoors with his cap on, or even to drink his tea out of the saucer. I have known numbers of bourgeois Socialists, I have listened by the hour to their tirades against their own class, and yet never, not even once, have I met one who had picked up proletarian table-manners. Yet, after all, why not? Why should a man who thinks all virtue resides in the proletariat still take such pains to drink his soup silently? It can only be because in his heart he feels that proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to the training of his childhood, when he was taught to hate, fear, and despise the working class.

9

When I was fourteen or fifteen I was an odious little snob, but no worse than other boys of my own age and class. I suppose there is no place in the world where snobbery is quite so ever-present or where it is cultivated in such refined and subtle forms as in an English public school. Here at least one cannot say that English 'education' fails to do its job. You forget your Latin and Greek within a few months of leaving school — I studied Greek for eight or ten years, and now, at thirty-three, I cannot even repeat the Greek alphabet — but your snobbishness, unless you persistently root it out like the bindweed it is, sticks by you till your grave.

At school I was in a difficult position, for I was among boys who, for the most part, were much richer than myself, and I only went to an expensive public school because I happened to win a scholarship. This is the common experience of boys of the lower-upper-middle class, the sons of clergymen, Anglo-Indian officials, etc., and the effects it had on me were probably the usual ones. On the one hand it made me cling tighter than ever to my gentility; on the other hand it filled me with resentment against the boys whose parents were richer than mine and who took care to let me know it. I despised anyone who was not describable as a 'gentleman', but also I hated the hoggishly rich, especially those who had grown rich too recently. The correct and elegant thing, I felt, was to be of gentle birth but to have no money. This is part of the credo of the lower-upper-middle class. It has a romantic, Jacobite-in-exile feeling about it which is very comforting.

But those years, during and just after the war, were a queer time to be at school, for England was nearer revolution than she has been since or had been for a century earlier. Throughout almost the whole nation there was running a wave of revolutionary feeling which has since been reversed and forgotten, but which has left various deposits of sediment behind. Essentially, though of course one could not then see it in perspective, it was a revolt of youth against age, resulting directly from the war. In the war the young had been sacrificed and the old had behaved in a way which, even at this distance of time, is

horrible to contemplate; they had been sternly patriotic in safe places while their sons went down like swathes of hay before the German machine guns. Moreover, the war had been conducted mainly by old men and had been conducted with supreme incompetence. By 1918 everyone under forty was in a bad temper with his elders, and the mood of anti-militarism which followed naturally upon the fighting was extended into a general revolt against orthodoxy and authority. At that time there was, among the young, a curious cult of hatred of 'old men'. The dominance of 'old men' was held to be responsible for every evil known to humanity, and every accepted institution from Scott's novels to the House of Lords was derided merely because 'old men' were in favour of it. For several years it was all the fashion to be a 'Bolshie', as people then called it. England was full of half-baked antinomian opinions. Pacifism, internationalism, humanitarianism of all kinds, feminism, free love, divorce-reform, atheism, birth-control — things like these were getting a better hearing than they would get in normal times. And of course the revolutionary mood extended to those who had been too young to fight, even to public schoolboys. At that time we all thought of ourselves as enlightened creatures of a new age, casting off the orthodoxy that had been forced upon us by those detested 'old men'. We retained, basically, the snobbish outlook of our class, we took it for granted that we could continue to draw our dividends or tumble into soft jobs, but also it seemed natural to us to be 'agin the Government'.

We derided the O.T.C., the Christian religion, and perhaps even compulsory games and the Royal Family, and we did not realize that we were merely taking part in a world-wide gesture of distaste for war. Two incidents stick in my mind as examples of the queer revolutionary feeling of that time. One day the master who taught us English set us a kind of general knowledge paper of which one of the questions was, 'Whom do you consider the ten greatest men now living?' Of sixteen boys in the class (our average age was about seventeen) fifteen included Lenin in their list. This was at a snobbish expensive public school, and the date was 1920, when the horrors of the Russian Revolution was still fresh in everyone's mind. Also there were the so-called peace celebrations in 1919. Our elders had

decided for us that we should celebrate peace in the traditional manner by whooping over the fallen foe. We were to march into the school-yard, carrying torches, and sing jingo songs of the type of 'Rule Britannia'. The boys — to their honour, I think — guyed the whole proceeding and sang blasphemous and seditious words to the tunes provided. I doubt whether things would happen in quite that manner now. Certainly the public schoolboys I meet nowadays, even the intelligent ones, are much more right-wing in their opinions than I and my contemporaries were fifteen years ago.

Hence, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, I was both a snob and a revolutionary. I was against all authority. I had read and re-read the entire published works of Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy (at that time still regarded as dangerously 'advanced' writers), and I loosely described myself as a Socialist. But I had not much grasp of what Socialism meant, and no notion that the working class were human beings. At a distance, and through the medium of books — Jack London's The People of the Abyss, for instance — I could agonize over their sufferings, but I still hated them and despised them when I came anywhere near them. I was still revolted by their accents and infuriated by their habitual rudeness. One must remember that just then, immediately after the war, the English working class were in a fighting mood. That was the period of the great coal strikes, when a miner was thought of as a fiend incarnate and old ladies looked under their beds every night lest Robert Smillie should be concealed there. All through the war and for a little time afterwards there had been high wages and abundant employment; things were now returning to something worse than normal, and naturally the working class resisted. The men who had fought had been lured into the army by gaudy promises, and now they were coming home to a world where there were no jobs and not even any houses. Moreover, they had been at war and were coming home with the soldier's attitude to life, which is fundamentally, in spite of discipline, a lawless attitude. There was a turbulent feeling in the air. To that time belongs the song with the memorable refrain:

There's nothing sure but
The rich get richer and the poor get children;

In the mean time,
In between time,
Ain't we got fun?

People had not yet settled down to a lifetime of unemployment mitigated by endless cups of tea. They still vaguely expected the Utopia for which they had fought, and even more than before they were openly hostile to the aitch-pronouncing class. So to the shock-absorbers of the bourgeoisie, such as myself, 'common people' still appeared brutal and repulsive. Looking back upon that period, I seem to have spent half the time in denouncing the capitalist system and the other half in raging over the insolence of bus-conductors.

When I was not yet twenty I went to Burma, in the Indian Imperial Police. In an 'outpost of Empire' like Burma the class-question appeared at first sight to have been shelved. There was no obvious class-friction here, because the all-important thing was not whether you had been to one of the right schools but whether your skin was technically white. As a matter of fact most of the white men in Burma were not of the type who in England would be called 'gentlemen', but except for the common soldiers and a few nondescripts they lived lives appropriate to 'gentlemen' — had servants, that is, and called their evening meal 'dinner' — and officially they were regarded as being all of the same class. They were 'white men', in contradistinction to the other and inferior class, the 'natives'. But one did not feel towards the 'natives' as one felt towards the 'lower classes' at home. The essential point was that the 'natives', at any rate the Burmese, were not felt to be physically repulsive. One looked down on them as 'natives', but one was quite ready to be physically intimate with them; and this, I noticed, was the case even with white men who had the most vicious colour prejudice. When you have a lot of servants you soon get into lazy habits, and I habitually allowed myself, for instance, to be dressed and undressed by my Burmese boy. This was because he was a Burman and undisgusting; I could not have endured to let an English manservant handle me in that intimate manner. I felt towards a Burman almost as I felt towards a woman. Like most other races, the Burmese have a distinctive smell — I cannot describe it: it is a smell that makes one's

teeth tingle — but this smell never disgusted me. (Incidentally, Orientals say that we smell. The Chinese, I believe, say that a white man smells like a corpse. The Burmese say the same — though no Burman was ever rude enough to say so to me.) And in a way my attitude was defensible, for if one faces the fact one must admit that most Mongolians have much nicer bodies than most white men. Compare the firm-knit silken skin of the Burman, which does not wrinkle at all till he is past forty, and then merely withers up like a piece of dry leather, with the coarse-grained, flabby, sagging skin of the white man. The white man has lank ugly hair growing down his legs and the backs of his arms and in an ugly patch on his chest. The Burman has only a tuft or two of stiff black hair at the appropriate places; for the rest he is quite hairless and is usually beardless as well. The white man almost always goes bald, the Burman seldom or never. The Burman's teeth are perfect, though generally discoloured by betel juice, the white man's teeth invariably decay. The white man is generally ill-shaped, and when he grows fat he bulges in improbable places; the Mongol has beautiful bones and in old age he is almost as shapely as in youth. Admittedly the white races throw up a few individuals who for a few years are supremely beautiful; but on the whole, say what you will, they are far less comely than Orientals. But it was not of this that I was thinking when I found the English 'lower classes' so much more repellant than Burmese 'natives'. I was still thinking in terms of my early-acquired class-prejudice. When I was not much past twenty I was attached for a short time to a British regiment. Of course I admired and liked the private soldiers as any youth of twenty would admire and like hefty, cheery youths five years older than himself with the medals of the Great War on their chests. And yet, after all, they faintly repelled me; they were 'common people' and I did not care to be too close to them. In the hot mornings when the company marched down the road, myself in the rear with one of the junior subalterns, the steam of those hundred sweating bodies in front made my stomach turn. And this, you observe, was pure prejudice. For a soldier is probably as inoffensive, physically, as it is possible for a male white person to be. He is generally young, he is nearly always healthy from fresh air and exercise, and a rigorous discipline compels him to be clean. But I

could not see it like that. All I knew was that it was lower-class sweat that I was smelling, and the thought of it made me sick.

When later on I got rid of my class-prejudice, or part of it, it was in a roundabout way and by a process that took several years. The thing that changed my attitude to the class-issue was something only indirectly connected with it — something almost irrelevant.

I was in the Indian Police five years, and by the end of that time I hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear. In the free air of England that kind of thing is not fully intelligible. In order to hate imperialism you have got to be part of it. Seen from the outside the British rule in India appears — indeed, it is — benevolent and even necessary; and so no doubt are the French rule in Morocco and the Dutch rule in Borneo, for people usually govern foreigners better than they govern themselves. But it is not possible to be a part of such a system without recognizing it as an unjustifiable tyranny. Even the thickest-skinned Anglo-Indian is aware of this. Every 'native' face he sees in the street brings home to him his monstrous intrusion. And the majority of Anglo-Indians, intermittently at least, are not nearly so complacent about their position as people in England believe. From the most unexpected people, from gin-pickled old scoundrels high up in the Government service, I have heard some such remark as: 'Of course we've no right in this blasted country at all. Only now we're here for God's sake let's stay here.' The truth is that no modem man, in his heart of hearts, believes that it is right to invade a foreign country and hold the population down by force. Foreign oppression is a much more obvious, understandable evil than economic oppression. Thus in England we tamely admit to being robbed in order to keep half a million worthless idlers in luxury, but we would fight to the last man sooner than be rilled by Chinamen; similarly, people who live on unearned dividends without a single qualm of conscience, see clearly enough that it is wrong to go and lord it in a foreign country where you are not wanted. The result is that every Anglo-Indian is haunted by a sense of guilt which he usually conceals as best he can, because there is no freedom of speech, and merely to be overheard making a seditious remark may damage his career. All over India there are Englishmen who secretly loathe the

system of which they are part; and just occasionally, when they are quite certain of being in the right company, their hidden bitterness overflows. I remember a night I spent on the train with a man in the Educational Service, a stranger to myself whose name I never discovered. It was too hot to sleep and we spent the night in talking. Half an hour's cautious questioning decided each of us that the other was 'safe'; and then for hours, while the train jolted slowly through the pitch-black night, sitting up in our bunks with bottles of beer handy, we damned the British Empire — damned it from the inside, intelligently and intimately. It did us both good. But we had been speaking forbidden things, and in the haggard morning light when the train crawled into Mandalay, we parted as guiltily as any adulterous couple.

So far as my observation goes nearly all Anglo-Indian officials have moments when their conscience troubles them. The exceptions are men who are doing something which is demonstrably useful and would still have to be done whether the British were in India or not: forest officers, for instance, and doctors and engineers. But I was in the police, which is to say that I was part of the actual machinery of despotism. Moreover, in the police you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters, and there is an appreciable difference between doing dirty work and merely profiting by it. Most people approve of capital punishment, but most people wouldn't do the hangman's job. Even the other Europeans in Burma slightly looked down on the police because of the brutal work they had to do. I remember once when I was inspecting a police station, an American missionary whom I knew fairly well came in for some purpose or other. Like most Nonconformist missionaries he was a complete ass but quite a good fellow. One of my native sub-inspectors was bullying a suspect (I described this scene in Burmese Days). The American watched it, and then turning to me said thoughtfully, 'I wouldn't care to have your job.' It made me horribly ashamed. So that was the kind of job I had! Even an ass of an American missionary, a teetotal cock-virgin from the Middle West, had the right to look down on me and pity me! But I should have felt the same shame even if there had been no one to bring it home to me. I had begun to have an indescribable loathing of the whole machinery of so-called justice. Say what you

will, pur criminal law (far more humane, by the way, in India than in England) is a horrible thing. It needs very insensitive people to administer it. The wretched prisoners squatting in the reeking cages of the lock-ups, the grey cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos, the women and children howling when their menfolk were led away under arrest — things like these are beyond bearing when you are in any way directly responsible for them. I watched a man hanged once; it seemed to me worse than a thousand murders. I never went into a jail without feeling (most visitors to jails feel the same) that my place was on the other side of the bars. I thought then — I think now, for that matter — that the worst criminal who ever walked is morally superior to a hanging judge. But of course I had to keep these notions to myself, because of the almost utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. In the end I worked out an anarchistic theory that all government is evil, that the punishment always does more harm than the crime and that people can be trusted to behave decently if only you will let them alone. This of course was sentimental nonsense. I see now as I did not see then, that it is always necessary to protect peaceful people from violence. In any state of society where crime can be profitable you have got to have a harsh criminal law and administer it ruthlessly; the alternative is Al Capone. But the feeling that punishment is evil arises inescapably in those who have to administer it. I should expect to find that even in England many policemen, judges, prison warders, and the like are haunted by a secret horror of what they do. But in Burma it was a double oppression that we were committing. Not only were we hanging people and putting them in jail and so forth; we were doing it in the capacity of unwanted foreign invaders. The Burmese themselves never really recognized our jurisdiction. The thief whom we put in prison did not think of himself as a criminal justly punished, he thought of himself as the victim of a foreign conqueror. The thing that was done to him was merely a wanton meaningless cruelty. His face, behind the stout teak bars of the lock-up and the iron bars of the jail, said so clearly. And unfortunately I had not trained myself to be indifferent to the expression of the human face.

When I came home on leave in 1927 I was already half

determined to throw up my job, and one sniff of English air decided me. I was not going back to be a part of that evil despotism. But I wanted much more than merely to escape from my job. For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. Innumerable remembered faces — faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates I had bullied and aged peasants I had snubbed, of servants and coolies I had hit with my fist in moments of rage (nearly everyone does these things in the East, at any rate occasionally: Orientals can be very provoking) — haunted me intolerably. I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate. I suppose that sounds exaggerated; but if you do for five years a job that you thoroughly disapprove of, you will probably feel the same. I had reduced everything to the simple theory that the oppressed are always right and the oppressors are always wrong: a mistaken theory, but the natural result of being one of the oppressors yourself. I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants. And, chiefly because I had had to. think everything out in solitude, I had carried my hatred of oppression to extraordinary lengths. At that time failure seemed to me to be the only virtue. Every suspicion of self-advancement, even to 'succeed' in life to the extent of making a few hundreds a year, seemed to me spiritually ugly, a species of bullying.

It was in this way that my thoughts turned towards the English working class. It was the first time that I had ever been really aware of the working class, and to begin with it was only because they supplied an analogy. They were the symbolic victims of injustice, playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in Burma. In Burma the issue had been quite simple. The whites were up and the blacks were down, and therefore as a matter of course one's sympathy was with the blacks. I now realized that there was no need to go as far as Burma to find tyranny and exploitation. Here in England, down under one's feet, were the submerged working class, suffering miseries which in their different way were as bad as any an Oriental ever knows. The word 'unemployment' was on everyone's

lips. That was more or less new to me, after Burma, but the driyel which the middle classes were still talking ('These unemployed are all unemployables', etc., etc.) failed to deceive me. I often wonder whether that kind of stuff deceives even the fools who utter it. On the other hand I had at that time no interest in Socialism or any other economic theory. It seemed to me then — it sometimes seems to me now, for that matter — that economic injustice will stop the moment we want it to stop, and no sooner, and if we genuinely want it to stop the method adopted hardly matters.

But I knew nothing about working-class conditions. I had read the unemployment figures but I had no notion of what they implied; above all, I did not know the essential fact that 'respectable' poverty is always the worst. The frightful doom of a decent working man suddenly thrown on the streets after a lifetime of steady work, his agonized struggles against economic laws which he does not understand, the disintegration of families, the corroding sense of shame — all this was outside the range of my experience. When I thought of poverty I thought of it in terms of brute starvation. Therefore my mind turned immediately towards the extreme cases, the social outcasts: tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes. These were 'the lowest of the low', and these were the people with whom I wanted to get in contact. What I profoundly wanted, at that time, was to find some way of getting out of the respectable world altogether. I meditated upon it a great deal, I even planned parts of it in detail; how one could sell everything, give everything away, change one's name and start out with no money and nothing but the clothes one stood up in. But in real life nobody ever does that kind of thing; apart from the relatives and friends who have to be considered, it is doubtful whether an educated man could do it if there were any other course open to him. But at least I could go among these people, see what their lives were like and feel myself temporarily part of their world. Once I had been among them and accepted by them, I should have touched bottom, and — this is what I felt: I was aware even then that it was irrational — part of my guilt would drop from me.

I thought it over and decided what I would do. I would go suitably disguised to Limehouse and Whitechapel and such places and sleep in common lodging-houses and pal up with dock labourers, street

hawkers, derelict people, beggars, and, if possible, criminals. And I would find out about tramps and how you got in touch with them and what was the proper procedure for entering the casual ward; and then, when I felt that I knew the ropes well enough, I would go on the road myself.

At the start it was not easy. It meant masquerading and I have no talent for acting. I cannot, for instance, disguise my accent, at any rate not for more than a very few minutes. I imagined — notice the frightful class-conscious-ness of the Englishman — that I should be spotted as a 'gentleman' the moment I opened my mouth; so I had a hard luck story ready in case I should be questioned, I got hold of the right kind of clothes and dirtied them in appropriate places. I am a difficult person to disguise, being abnormally tall, but I did at least know what a tramp looks like. (How few people do know this, by the way! Look at any picture of a tramp in Punch. They are always twenty years out of date.) One evening, having made ready at a friend's house, I set out and wandered eastward till I landed up at a common lodging-house in Limehouse Cause-way. It was a dark, dirty-looking place. I knew it was a common lodging-house by the sign 'Good Beds for Single Men' in the window. Heavens, how I had to screw up my courage before I went in! It seems ridiculous now. But you see I was still half afraid of the working class. I wanted to get in touch with them, I even wanted to become one of them, but I still thought of them as alien and dangerous; going into the dark doorway of that common lodging-house seemed to me like going down into some dreadful subterranean place — a sewer full of rats, for instance. I went in fully expecting a fight. The people would spot that I was not one of themselves and immediately infer that I had come to spy on them; and then they would set upon me and throw me out — that was what I expected. I felt that I had got to do it, but I did not enjoy the prospect.

Inside the door a man in shirt-sleeves appeared from somewhere or other. This was the 'deputy', and I told him that I wanted a bed for the night. My accent did not make him stare, I noticed; he merely demanded ninepence and then showed me the way to a frowsy firelit kitchen underground. There were stevedores and navvies and a few sailors sitting about and playing draughts and drinking tea. They

barely glanced at me as I entered. But this was Saturday night and a hefty young stevedore was drunk and was reeling about the room. He turned, saw me, and lurched towards me with broad red face thrust out and a dangerous-looking fishy gleam in his eyes. I stiffened myself. So the fight was coming already! The next moment the stevedore collapsed on my chest and flung his arms round my neck. ‘‘Ave a cup of tea, chum!’ he cried tear-fully; ‘‘ave a cup of tea!’

I had a cup of tea. It was a kind of baptism. After that my fears vanished. Nobody questioned me, nobody showed offensive curiosity; everybody was polite and gentle and took me utterly for granted. I stayed two or three days in that common lodging-house, and a few weeks later, having picked up a certain amount of information about the habits of destitute people, I went on the road for the first time.

I have described all this in Down and Out in Paris and London (nearly all the incidents described there actually happened, though they have been rearranged) and I do not want to repeat it. Later I went on the road for much longer periods, sometimes from choice, sometimes from necessity. I have lived in common lodging-houses for months together. But it is that first expedition that sticks most vividly in my mind, because of the strangeness of it — the strangeness of being at last down there among ‘the lowest of the low’, and on terms of utter equality with working-class people. A tramp, it is true, is not a typical working-class person; still, when you are among tramps you are at any rate merged in one section — one sub-caste — of the working class, a thing which so far as I know can happen to you in no other way. For several days I wandered through the northern outskirts of London with an Irish tramp. I was his mate, temporarily. We shared the same cell at night, and he told me the history of his life and I told him a fictitious history of mine, and we took it in turns to beg at likely-looking houses and divided up the proceeds. I was very happy. Here I was; among ‘the lowest of the low’, at the bedrock of the Western world! The class-bar was down, or seemed to be down. And down there in the squalid and, as a matter of fact, horribly boring sub-world of the tramp I had a feeling of release, of adventure, which seems absurd when I look back, but which was sufficiently vivid at the time.

But unfortunately you do not solve the class problem by making friends with tramps. At most you get rid of some of your own class-prejudice by doing so.

Tramps, beggars, criminals, and social outcasts generally are very exceptional beings and no more typical of the working class as a whole than, say, the literary intelligentsia are typical of the bourgeoisie. It is quite easy to be on terms of intimacy with a foreign 'intellectual', but it is not at all easy to be on terms of intimacy with an ordinary respectable foreigner of the middle class. How many Englishmen have seen the inside of an ordinary French bourgeois family, for instance? Probably it would be quite impossible to do so, short of marrying into it. And it is rather similar with the English working class. Nothing is easier than to be bosom pals with a pickpocket, if you know where to look for him; but it is very difficult to be bosom pals with a bricklayer.

But why is it so easy to be on equal terms with social outcasts? People have often said to me, 'Surely when you are with the tramps they don't really accept you as one of themselves? Surely they notice that you are different — notice the difference of accent?' etc., etc. As a matter of fact, a fair proportion of tramps, well over a quarter I should say, notice nothing of the kind. To begin with, many people have no ear for accent and judge you entirely by your clothes. I was often struck by this fact when I was begging at back doors. Some people were obviously surprised by my 'educated' accent, others completely failed to notice it; I was dirty and ragged and that was all they saw. Again, tramps come from all parts of the British Isles and the variation in English accents is enormous. A tramp is used to hearing all kinds of accents among his mates, some of them so strange to him that he can hardly understand them, and a man from, say, Cardiff or Durham or Dublin does not necessarily know which of the south English accents is an 'educated' one. In any case men with 'educated' accents, though rare among tramps, are not unknown. But even when tramps are aware that you are of different origin from themselves, it does not necessarily alter their attitude.

From their point of view all that matters is that you, like themselves, are 'on the bum'. And in that world it is not done to ask too many questions. You can tell people the history of your life if you choose, and most tramps do so on the smallest provocation, but you are under no compulsion to tell it and whatever story you tell will be accepted without question. Even a bishop could be at home among tramps if he wore the right clothes; and even if they knew he was a bishop it might not make any difference, provided that they also knew or believed that he was genuinely destitute. Once you are in that world and seemingly of it, it hardly matters what you have been in the past. It is a sort of world-within-a-world where everyone is equal, a small squalid democracy — perhaps the nearest thing to a democracy that exists in England.

But when you come to the normal working class the position is totally different. To begin with, there is no short cut into their midst. You can become a tramp simply by putting on the right clothes and going to the nearest casual ward, but you can't become a navvy or a coal-miner. You couldn't get a job as a navvy or a coal-miner even if you were equal to the work. Via Socialist politics you can get in touch with the working-class intelligentsia, but they are hardly more typical than tramps or burglars. For the rest you can only mingle with the working class by staying in their houses as a lodger, which always has a dangerous resemblance to 'slumming'. For some months I lived entirely in coal-miners' houses. I ate my meals with the family, I washed at the kitchen sink, I shared bedrooms with miners, drank beer with them, played darts with them, talked to them by the hour together. But though I was among them, and I hope and trust they did not find me a nuisance, I was not one of them, and they knew it even better than I did. However much you like them, however interesting you find their conversation, there is always that accursed itch of class-difference, like the pea under the princess's mattress. It is not a question of dislike or distaste, only of difference, but it is enough to make real intimacy impossible. Even with miners who described themselves as Communists I found that it needed tactful manoeuvrings to prevent them from calling me 'sir'; and all of them, except in moments of great animation, softened their northern accents for my benefit. I liked them and hoped they liked

me; but I went among them as a foreigner, and both of us were aware of it. Whichever way you turn this curse of class-difference confronts you like a wall of stone. Or rather it is not so much like a stone wall as the plate-glass pane of an aquarium; it is so easy to pretend that it isn't there, and so impossible to get through it.

Unfortunately it is nowadays the fashion to pretend that the glass is penetrable. Of course everyone knows that class-prejudice exists, but at the same time everyone claims that he, in some mysterious way, is exempt from it. Snob-bishness is one of those vices which we can discern in every-one else but' never in ourselves. Not only the croyant et pratiquant Socialist, but every 'intellectual' takes it as a matter of course that he at least is outside the class-racket; he, unlike his neighbours, can see through the absurdity of wealth, ranks, titles, etc., etc. 'I'm not a snob' is nowadays a kind of universal credo. Who is there who has not jeered at the House of Lords, the military caste, the Royal Family, the public schools, the huntin' and shootin' people, the old ladies in Cheltenham boarding-houses, the horrors of 'county' society, and the social hierarchy generally? To do so has become an automatic gesture. You notice this particularly in novels. Every novelist of serious pretensions adopts an ironic attitude towards his upper-class characters. Indeed when a novelist has to put a definitely upper-class person — a duke or a baronet or whatnot — into one of his stories he guys him more or less instinctively. There is an important subsidiary cause of this in the poverty of the modern upper-class dialect. The speech of 'educated' people is now so lifeless and characterless that a novelist can do nothing with it. By far the easiest way of making it amusing is to burlesque it, which means pretending that every upper-class person is an ineffectual ass. The trick is imitated from novelist to novelist, and in the end becomes almost a reflex action.

And yet all the while, at the bottom of his heart, every-one knows that this is humbug. We all rail against class-distinctions, but very few people seriously want to abolish them. Here you come upon the important fact that every revolutionary opinion draws part of its strength from a secret conviction that nothing can be changed.

If you want a good illustration of this, it is worth studying the novels and plays of John Galsworthy, keeping one eye on their

chronology. Galsworthy is a very fine specimen of the thin-skinned, tear-in-the-eye, pre-war humanitarian. He starts out with a morbid pity-complex which extends even to thinking that every married woman is an angel chained to a satyr. He is in a perpetual quiver of indignation over the sufferings of overworked clerks, of under-paid farm hands, of fallen women, of criminals, of prostitutes, of animals. The world, as he sees it in his earlier books (The Man of Property, Justice, etc.), is divided into oppressors and oppressed, with the oppressors sitting on top like some monstrous stone idol which all the dynamite in the world cannot overthrow. But is it so certain that he really wants it overthrown? On the contrary, in his fight against an immovable tyranny he is upheld by the consciousness that it is immovable. When things happen unexpectedly and the world-order which he has known begins to crumble, he feels somewhat differently about it. So, having set out to be the champion of the underdog against tyranny and injustice, he ends by advocating (vide The Silver Spoon) that the English working class, to cure their economic ills, shall be deported to the colonies like batches of cattle. If he had lived ten years longer he would quite probably have arrived at some genteel version of Fascism. This is the inevitable fate of the sentimentalist. All his opinions change into their opposites at the first brush of reality.

The same streak of soggy half-baked insincerity runs through all 'advanced' opinion. Take the question of imperialism, for instance. Every left-wing 'intellectual' is, as a matter of course, an anti-imperialist. He claims to be outside the empire-racket as automatically and self-right-eously as he claims to be outside the class-racket. Even the right-wing 'intellectual', who is not definitely in revolt against British imperialism, pretends to regard it with a sort of amused detachment. It is so easy to be witty about the British Empire. The White Man's Burden and 'Rule, Britannia' and Kipling's novels and Anglo-Indian bores — who could even mention such things without a snigger? And is there any cultured person who has not at least once in his life made a joke about that old Indian havildar who said that if the British left India there would not be a rupee or a virgin left between Peshawar and Delhi (or wherever it was)? That is the attitude of the typical left-winger towards

imperialism, and a thoroughly flabby, boneless attitude it is. For in the last resort, the only important question is. Do you want the British Empire to hold together or do you want it to disintegrate? And at the bottom of his heart no Englishman, least of all the kind of person who is witty about Anglo-Indian colonels, does want it to disintegrate. For, apart from any other consideration, the high standard of life we enjoy in England depends upon our keeping a tight hold on the Empire, particularly the tropical portions of it such as India and Africa. Under the capitalist system, in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation — an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream. The alternative is to throw the Empire overboard and reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should all have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes. That is the very last thing that any left-winger wants. Yet the left-winger continues to feel that he has no moral responsibility for imperialism. He is perfectly ready to accept the products of Empire and to save his soul by sneering at the people who hold the Empire together.

It is at this point that one begins to grasp the unreality of most people's attitude towards the class question. So long as it is merely a question of ameliorating the worker's lot, every decent person is agreed. Take a coal-miner, for example. Everyone, barring fools and scoundrels, would like to see the miner better off. If, for instance, the miner could ride to the coal face in a comfortable trolley instead of crawling on his hands and knees, if he could work a three-hour shift instead of seven and a half hours, if he could live in a decent house with five bedrooms and a bath-room and have ten pounds a week wages — splendid! Moreover, anyone who uses his brain knows perfectly well that this is within the range of possibility. The world, potentially at least, is immensely rich; develop it as it might be developed, and we could all live like princes, supposing that we wanted to. And to a very superficial glance the social side of the question looks equally simple. In a sense it is true that almost everyone would like to see class-distinctions abolished. Obviously this perpetual uneasiness between man and man, from which we

suffer in modern England, is a curse and a nuisance. Hence the temptation few scoutmasterish bellows of good-will. Stop calling me 'sir', you chaps! Surely we're all men? Let's pal up and get our shoulders to the wheel and remember that we're all equal, and what the devil does it matter if I know what kind of ties to wear and you don't, and I drink my soup comparatively quietly and you drink yours with the noise of water going down a waste-pipe — and so on and so on and so on; all of it the most pernicious rubbish, but quite alluring when it is suitably expressed.

But unfortunately you get no further by merely wishing class-distinctions away. More exactly, it is necessary to wish them away, but your wish has no efficacy unless you grasp what it involves. The fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself. Here am I, a typical member of the middle class. It is easy for me to say that I want to get rid of class-distinctions, but nearly everything I think and do is a result of class-distinctions. All my notions — notions of good and evil, of pleasant and unpleasant, of funny and serious, of ugly and beautiful — are essentially middle-class notions; my taste in books and food and clothes, my sense of honour, my table manners, my turns of speech, my accent, even the characteristic movements of my body, are the products of a special kind of upbringing and a special niche about half-way up the social hierarchy. When I grasp this I grasp that it is no use clapping a proletarian on the back and telling him that he is as good a man as I am; if I want real contact with him, I have got to make an effort for which very likely I am unprepared. For to get outside the class-racket I have got to suppress not merely my private snobbishness, but most of my other tastes and prejudices as well. I have got to alter myself so completely that at the end I should hardly be recognizable as the same person. What is involved is not merely the amelioration of working-class conditions, nor an avoidance of the more stupid forms of snobbery, but a complete abandonment of the upper-class and middle-class attitude to life. And whether I say Yes or No probably depends upon the extent to which I grasp what is demanded of me.

Many people, however, imagine that they can abolish class-distinctions without making any uncomfortable change in their own

habits and 'ideology'. Hence the eager class-breaking activities which one can see in progress on all sides. Everywhere there are people of goodwill who quite honestly believe that they are working for the overthrow of class-distinctions. The middle-class Socialist enthuses over the proletariat and runs 'summer schools' where the proletarian and the repentant bourgeois are supposed to fall upon one another's necks and be brothers for ever; and the bourgeois visitors come away saying how wonderful and inspiring it has all been (the proletarian ones come away saying something different). And then there is the outer-suburban creeping Jesus, a hangover from the William Morris period, but still surprisingly common, who goes about saying 'Why must we level down? Why not level up?' and proposes to level the working class 'up' (up to his own standard) by means of hygiene, fruit-juice, birth-control, poetry, etc. Even the Duke of York (now King George VI) runs a yearly camp where public-school boys and boys from the slums are supposed to mix on exactly equal terms, and do mix for the time being, rather like the animals in one of those 'Happy Family' cages where a dog, a cat, two ferrets, a rabbit, and three canaries preserve an armed truce while the showman's eye is on them.

All such deliberate, conscious efforts at class-breaking are, I am convinced, a very serious mistake. Sometimes they are merely futile, but where they do show a definite result it is usually to intensify class-prejudice. This, if you come to think of it, is only what might be expected. You have forced the pace and set up an uneasy, unnatural equality between class and class; the resultant friction brings to the surface all kinds of feelings that might other-wise have remained buried, perhaps for ever. As I said apropos of Galsworthy, the opinions of the sentimentalist change into their opposites at the first touch of reality. Scratch the average pacifist and you find a jingo. The middle-class I.L.P.'er and the bearded fruit-juice drinker are all for a classless society so long as they see the proletariat through the wrong end of the telescope; force them into any real contact with a proletarian — let them get into a fight with a drunken fish-porter on Saturday night, for instance — and they are capable of swinging back to the most ordinary middle-class snobbishness. Most middle-class Socialists, however, are very unlikely to get into fights

with drunken fish-porters; when they do make a genuine contact with the working class, it is usually with the working-class intelligentsia. But the working-class intelligentsia is sharply divisible into two different types. There is the type who remains working-class — who goes on working as a mechanic or a dock-labourer or whatever it may be and does not bother to change his working-class accent and habits, but who 'improves his mind' in his spare time and works for the I.L.P. or the Communist Party; and there is the type who does alter his way of life, at least externally, and who by means of State scholarships succeeds in climbing into the middle class. The first is one of the finest types of man we have. I can think of some I have met whom not even the most hidebound Tory could help liking and admiring. The other type, with exceptions — D. H. Lawrence, for example — is less admirable.

To begin with, it is a pity, though it is a natural result of the scholarship system, that the proletariat should tend to interpenetrate the middle class via the literary intelligentsia. For it is not easy to crash your way into the literary intelligentsia if you happen to be a decent human being. The modem English literary world, at any rate the high-brow section of it, is a sort of poisonous jungle where only weeds can flourish. It is just possible to be a literary gent and to keep your decency if you are a definitely popular writer — a writer of detective stories, for instance; but to be a highbrow, with a footing in the snootier magazines, means delivering yourself over to horrible campaigns of wire-pulling and backstairs-crawling. In the highbrow world you 'get on', if you 'get on' at all, not so much by your literary ability as by being the life and soul of cocktail parties and kissing the bums of verminous little lions. This, then, is the world that most readily opens its doors to the proletarian who is climbing out of his own class. The 'clever' boy of a working-class family, the sort of boy who wins scholarships and is obviously not fitted for a life of manual labour, may find other ways of rising into the class above — a slightly different type, for instance, rises via Labour Party politics — but the literary way is by far the most usual. Literary London now teems with young men who are of proletarian origin and have been educated by means of scholarships. Many of them are very disagreeable people, quite unrepresentative of their class, and it is

most unfortunate that when a person of bourgeois origin does succeed in meeting a proletarian face to face on equal terms, this is the type he most commonly meets. For the result is to drive the bourgeois, who has idealized the proletariat so long as he knew nothing about them, back into frenzies of snobbishness. The process is sometimes very comic to watch, if you happen to be watching it from the outside. The poor well-meaning bourgeois, eager to embrace his proletarian brother, leaps forward with open arms; and only a little while later he is in retreat, minus a borrowed five pounds and exclaiming dolefully, 'But, dash it, the fellow's not a gentleman!'

The thing that disconcerts the bourgeois in a contact of this kind is to find certain of his own professions being taken seriously. I have pointed out that the left-wing opinions of the average 'intellectual' are mainly spurious. From pure imitativeness he jeers at things which in fact he believes in. As one example out of many, take the public-school code of honour, with its 'team spirit' and 'Don't hit a man when he's down', and all the rest of that familiar bunkum. Who has not laughed at it? Who, calling himself an 'intellectual', would dare not to laugh at it? But it is a bit different when you meet somebody who laughs at it from the outside; just as we spend our lives in abusing England but grow very angry when we hear a foreigner saying exactly the same things. No one has been more amusing about the public schools than 'Beachcomber' of the Express. He laughs, quite rightly, at the ridiculous code which makes cheating at cards the worst of all sins. But would 'Beachcomber' like it if one of his own friends was caught cheating at cards? I doubt it. It is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realize what your own beliefs really are. If you are a bourgeois 'intellectual' you too readily imagine that you have somehow become unbourgeois because you find it easy to laugh at patriotism and the G. of E. and the Old School Tie and Colonel Blimp and all the rest of it. But from the point of view of the proletarian 'intellectual', who at least by origin is genuinely outside the bourgeois culture, your resemblances to Colonel Blimp may be more important than your differences. Very likely he looks upon you and Colonel Blimp as practically equivalent persons; and in a way he is

right, though neither you nor Colonel Blimp would admit it. So that the meeting of proletarian and bourgeois, when they do succeed in meeting, is not always the embrace of long-lost brothers; too often it is the clash of alien cultures which can only meet in war.

I have been looking at this from the point of view of the bourgeois who finds his secret beliefs challenged and is driven back to a frightened conservatism. But one has also got to consider the antagonism that is aroused in the proletarian 'intellectual'. By his own efforts and sometimes with frightful agonies he has struggled out of his own class into another where he expects to find a wider freedom and a greater intellectual refinement; and all he finds, very often, is a sort of hollowness, a deadness, a lack of any warm human feeling — of any real life whatever. Sometimes the bourgeoisie seem to him just dummies with money and water in their veins instead of blood. This at any rate is what he says, and almost any young highbrow of proletarian origin will spin you this line of talk. Hence the 'proletarian' cant from which we now suffer. Everyone knows, or ought to know by this time, how it runs: the bourgeoisie are 'dead' (a favourite word of abuse nowadays and very effective be-cause meaningless), bourgeois culture is bankrupt, bourgeois 'values' are despicable, and so on and so forth; if you want examples, see any number of the Left Review or any of the younger Communist writers such as Alee Brown, Philip Henderson, etc. The sincerity of much of this is suspect, but D. H. Lawrence, who was sincere, whatever else he may not have been, expresses the same thought over and over again. It is curious how he harps upon that idea that the English bourgeoisie are all dead, or at least gelded. Mellors, the gamekeeper in Lady Chatterley's Lover (really Lawrence himself), has had the opportunity to get out of his own class and does not particularly want to return to it, because English working people have various 'disagree-able habits'; on the other hand the bourgeoisie, with whom he has also mixed to some extent, seem to him half dead, a race of eunuchs. Lady Chatterley's husband, symbolically, is impotent in the actual physical sense. And then there is the poem about the young man (once again Lawrence himself) who 'got up to the top of the tree' but came down saying:

Oh you've got to be like a monkey
if you climb up the tree!
You've no more use for the solid earth
and the lad you used to be.
You sit in the boughs and gibber
with superiority.
They all gibber and gibber and chatter,
and never a word they say
comes really out of their guts, lad,
they make it up half-way. . . .
I tell you something's been done to 'em,
to the pullets up above;
there's not a cock bird among 'em, etc., etc.

You could hardly have it in plainer terms than that. Possibly by the people at 'the top of the tree' Lawrence only means the real bourgeoisie, those in the L2000 a year class and over, but I doubt it. More probably he means everyone who is more or less within the bourgeois culture — everyone who was brought up with a mincing accent and in a house where there were one or two servants. And at this point you realize the danger of the 'proletarian' cant — realize, I mean, the terrible antagonism that it is capable of arousing. For when you come to such an accusation as this, you are up against a blank wall. Lawrence tells me that because I have been to a public school I am a eunuch. Well, what about it? I can produce medical evidence to the contrary, but what good will that do? Lawrence's condemnation remains. If you tell me I am a scoundrel I may mend my ways, but if you tell me I am a eunuch you are tempting me to hit back in any way that seems feasible. If you want to make an enemy of a man, tell him that his ills are incurable.

This then is the net result of most meetings between proletarian and bourgeois: they lay bare a real antagonism which is intensified by the 'proletarian' cant, itself the product of forced contacts between class and class. The only sensible procedure is to go slow and not force the pace. If you secretly think of yourself as a gentleman and as such the superior of the greengrocer's errand boy, it is far better to say so than to tell lies about it. Ultimately you have

got to drop your snobbishness, but it is fatal to pretend to drop it before you are really ready to do so.

Meanwhile one can observe on every side that dreary phenomenon, the middle-class person who is an ardent Socialist at twenty-five and a sniffish Conservative at thirty-five. In a way his recoil is natural enough — at any rate, one can see how his thoughts run. Perhaps a classless society doesn't mean a beatific state of affairs in which we shall all go on behaving exactly as before except that there will be no class-hatred and no snobbishness; perhaps it means a bleak world in which all our ideals, our codes, our tastes — our 'ideology', in fact — will have no meaning. Perhaps this class-breaking business isn't so simple as it looked! On the contrary, it is a wild ride into the darkness, and it may be that at the end of it the smile will be on the face of the tiger. With loving though slightly patronizing smiles we set out to greet our proletarian brothers, and behold! our proletarian brothers — in so far as we understand them — are not asking for our greetings, they are asking us to commit suicide. When the bourgeois sees it in that form he takes to flight, and if his flight is rapid enough it may carry him to Fascism.

11

Meanwhile what about Socialism?

It hardly needs pointing out that at this moment we are in a very serious mess, so serious that even the dullest-witted people find it difficult to remain unaware of it. We are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive. For enormous blocks of the working class the conditions of life are such as I have described in the opening chapters of this book, and there is no chance of those conditions showing any fundamental improvement. The very best the English-working class can hope for is an occasional temporary decrease in unemployment when this or that industry is artificially stimulated by, for instance, rearmament. Even the middle classes, for the first time in their history, are feeling the pinch. They have not known actual hunger yet, but more and more of them find themselves floundering in a sort of deadly net of frustration in which it is harder and harder to persuade yourself that you are either happy, active, or useful. Even the lucky ones at the top, the real bourgeoisie, are haunted periodically by a consciousness of the miseries below, and still more by fears of the menacing future. And this is merely a preliminary stage, in a country still rich with the loot of a hundred years. Presently there may be coining God knows what horrors — horrors of which, in this sheltered island, we have not even a traditional knowledge.

And all the while everyone who uses his brain knows that Socialism, as a world-system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out. It would at least ensure our getting enough to eat even if it deprived us of everything else. Indeed, from one point of view, Socialism is such elementary common sense that I am sometimes amazed that it has not established itself already. The world is a raft sailing through space with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody; the idea that we must all cooperate and see to it that every-one does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions seems so blatantly obvious that one would say that no one could possibly fail to accept it unless he had some corrupt

motive for clinging to the present system. Yet the fact that we have got to face is that Socialism is not establishing itself. Instead of going forward, the cause of Socialism is visibly going back. At this moment Socialists almost everywhere are in retreat before the onslaught of Fascism, and events are moving at terrible speed. As I write this the Spanish Fascist forces are bombarding Madrid, and it is quite likely that before the book is printed we shall have another Fascist country to add to the list, not to mention a Fascist control of the Mediterranean which may have the effect of delivering British foreign policy into the hands of Mussolini. I do not, however, want here to discuss the wider political issues. What I am concerned with is the fact that Socialism is losing ground exactly where it ought to be gaining it. With so much in its favour — for every empty belly is an argument for Socialism — the idea of Socialism is less widely accepted than it was ten years ago. The average thinking person nowadays is not merely not a Socialist, he is actively hostile to Socialism. This must be due chiefly to mistaken methods of propaganda. It means that Socialism, in the form of which it is now presented to us, has about it something inherently distasteful — something that drives away the very people who ought to be nocking to its support.

A few years ago this might have seemed unimportant. It seems only yesterday that Socialists, especially orthodox Marxists, were telling me with superior smiles that Socialism was going to arrive of its own accord by some mysterious process called 'historic necessity'. Possibly that belief still lingers, but it has been shaken, to say the least of it. Hence the sudden attempts of Communists in various countries to ally themselves with democratic forces which they have been sabotaging for years past. At a moment like this it is desperately necessary to discover just why Socialism has failed in its appeal. And it is no use writing off the current distaste for Socialism as the product of stupidity or corrupt motives. If you want to remove that distaste you have got to understand it, which means getting inside the mind of the ordinary objector to Socialism, or at least regarding his viewpoint sympathetically. No case is really answered until it has had a fair hearing. Therefore, rather paradoxically, in order to defend Socialism it is necessary to start by attacking it.

In the last three chapters I tried to analyse the difficulties that are raised by our anachronistic class-system; I shall have to touch on that subject again, because I believe that the present intensely stupid handling of the class-issue may stampede quantities of potential Socialists into Fascism. In the chapter following this one I want to discuss certain underlying assumptions that alienate sensitive minds from Socialism. But in the present chapter I am merely dealing with the obvious, preliminary objections — the kind of thing that the person who is not a Socialist (I don't mean the 'Where's the money to come from?' type) always starts by saying when you tax him on the subject. Some of these objections may appear frivolous or self-contradictory, but that is beside the point; I am merely discussing symptoms. Anything is relevant which helps to make clear why Socialism is not accepted. And please notice that I am arguing for Socialism, not against it. But for the moment I am advocatus diaboli. I am making out a case for the sort of person who is in sympathy with the fundamental aims of Socialism, who has the brains to see that Socialism would 'work', but who in practice always takes to flight when Socialism is mentioned.

Question a person of this type, and you will often get the semi-frivolous answer: 'I don't object to Socialism, but I do object to Socialists.' Logically it is a poor argument, but it carries weight with many people. As with the Christian religion, the worst advertisement for Socialism is its adherents.

The first thing that must strike any outside observer is that Socialism, in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle classes. The typical Socialist is not, as tremulous old ladies imagine, a ferocious-looking working man with greasy overalls and a raucous voice. He is either a youthful snob-Bolshevik who in five years' time will quite probably have made a wealthy marriage and been converted to Roman Catholicism; or, still more typically, a prim little man with a white-collar job, usually a secret teetotaller and often with vegetarian leanings, with a history of Nonconformity behind him, and, above all, with a social position which he has no intention of forfeiting. This last type is surprisingly common in Socialist parties of every shade; it has perhaps been taken over en bloc from. the old Liberal Party. In addition to this there is the

horrible — the really disquieting — prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together. One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and feminist in England. One day this summer I was riding through Letchworth when the bus stopped and two dreadful-looking old men got on to it. They were both about sixty, both very short, pink, and chubby, and both hatless. One of them was obscenely bald, the other had long grey hair bobbed in the Lloyd George style. They were dressed in pistachio-coloured shirts and khaki shorts into which their huge bottoms were crammed so tightly that you could study every dimple. Their appearance created a mild stir of horror on top of the bus. The man next to me, a commercial traveller I should say, glanced at me, at them, and back again at me, and murmured 'Socialists', as who should say, 'Red Indians'. He was probably right — the I.L.P. were holding their summer school at Letchworth. But the point is that to him, as an ordinary man, a crank meant a Socialist and a Socialist meant a crank. Any Socialist, he probably felt, could be counted on to have something eccentric about him. And some such notion seems to exist even among Socialists themselves. For instance, I have here a prospectus from another summer school which states its terms per week and then asks me to say 'whether my diet is ordinary or vegetarian'. They take it for granted, you see, that it is necessary to ask this question. This kind of thing is by itself sufficient to alienate plenty of decent people. And their instinct is perfectly sound, for the food-crank is by definition a person willing to cut himself off from human society in hopes of adding five years on to the life of his carcase; that is, a person but of touch with common humanity.

To this you have got to add the ugly fact that most middle-class Socialists, while theoretically pining for a class-less society, cling like glue to their miserable fragments of social prestige. I remember my sensations of horror on first attending an I.L.P. branch meeting in London. (It might have been rather different in the North, where the bourgeoisie are less thickly scattered.) Are these mingy little beasts, I thought, the champions of the working class? For every person there,

male and female, bore the worst stigmata of sniffish middle-class superiority. If a real working man, a miner dirty from the pit, for instance, had suddenly walked into their midst, they would have been embarrassed, angry, and disgusted; some, I should think, would have fled holding their noses. You can see the same tendency in Socialist literature, which, even when it is not openly written de haut en bos, is always completely removed from the working class in idiom and manner of thought. The Coles, Webbs, Stracheys, etc., are not exactly proletarian writers. It is doubtful whether anything describable as proletarian literature now exists — even the Daily Worker is written in standard South English — but a good music-hall comedian comes nearer to producing it than any Socialist writer I can think of. As for the technical jargon of the Communists, it is as far removed from the common speech as the language of a mathematical textbook. I remember hearing a professional Communist speaker address a working-class audience. His speech was the usual bookish stuff, full of long sentences and parentheses and 'Notwithstanding' and 'Be that as it may', besides the usual jargon of 'ideology' and 'class-consciousness' and 'proletarian solidarity' and all the rest of it. After him a Lancashire working man got up and spoke to the crowd in their own broad lingo. There was not much doubt which of the two was nearer to his audience, but I do not suppose for a moment that the Lancashire working man was an orthodox Communist.

For it must be remembered that a working man, so long as he remains a genuine working man, is seldom or never a Socialist in the complete, logically consistent sense. Very likely he votes Labour, or even Communist if he gets the chance, but his conception of Socialism is quite different from that of the, book-trained Socialist higher up. To the ordinary working man, the sort you would meet in any pub on Saturday night, Socialism does not mean much more than better wages and shorter' hours and nobody bossing you about. To the more revolutionary type, the type who is a hunger-marcher and is blacklisted by employers, the word is a sort of rallying-cry against the forces of oppression, a vague threat of future violence. But, so far as my experience goes, no genuine working man grasps the deeper implications of Socialism. Often, in my opinion, he is a truer Socialist than the orthodox Marxist, because he does remember, what

the other so often forgets, that Socialism means justice and common decency. But what he does not grasp is that Socialism cannot be narrowed down to mere economic justice' and that a reform of that magnitude is bound to work immense changes in our civilization and his own way of life. His vision of the Socialist future is a vision of present society with the worst abuses left out, and with interest centring round the same things as at present — family life, the pub, football, and local politics. As for the philosophic side of Marxism, the pea-and-thimble trick with those three mysterious entities, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, I have never met a working man who had the faintest interest in it. It is of course true that plenty of people of working-class origin are Socialists of the theoretical bookish type. But they are never people who have remained working men; they don't work with their hands, that is. They belong either to the type I mentioned in the last chapter, the type who squirms into the middle class via the literary intelligentsia, or the type who becomes a Labour M.P. or a high-up trade union official. This last type is one of the most desolating spectacles the world contains. He has been picked out to fight for his mates, and all it means to him is a soft job and the chance of 'bettering' himself. Not merely while but by fighting the bourgeoisie he becomes a bourgeois himself. And meanwhile it is quite possible that he has remained an orthodox Marxist. But I have yet to meet a working miner, steel-worker, cotton-weaver, docker, navvy, or whatnot who was 'ideologically' sound.

One of the analogies between Communism and Roman Catholicism is that only the 'educated' are completely orthodox. The most immediately striking thing about the English Roman Catholics — I don't mean the real Catholics, I mean the converts: Ronald Knox, Arnold Lunn et hoc genus — is their intense self-consciousness. Apparently they never think, certainly they never write, about anything but the fact that they are Roman Catholics; this single fact and the self-praise resulting from it form the entire stock-in-trade of the Catholic literary man. But the really interesting thing about these people is the way in which they have worked out the supposed implications of orthodoxy until the tiniest details of life are involved. Even the liquids you drink, apparently, can be orthodox or heretical; hence the campaigns of Chesterton, 'Beachcomber', etc.,

against tea and in favour of beer. According to Chesterton, tea-drinking' is 'pagan', while beer-drinking is 'Christian', and coffee is 'the puritan's opium'. It is unfortunate for this theory that Catholics abound in the 'Temperance' movement and the greatest tea-boozers in the world are the Catholic Irish; but what I am interested in here is the attitude of mind that can make even food and drink an occasion for religious intolerance. A working-class Catholic would never be so absurdly consistent as that. He does not spend his time in brooding on the fact that he is a Roman Catholic, and he is not particularly conscious of being different from his non-Catholic neighbours. Tell an Irish dock-labourer in the slums of Liverpool that his cup of tea is 'pagan', and he will call you a fool. And even in more serious matters he I does not always grasp the implications of his faith. In the I Roman Catholic homes of Lancashire you see the crucifix I on the wall and the Daily Worker on the table. It is only the 'educated' man, especially the literary man, who knows how to be a bigot. And, mutatis mutandis, it is the same with Communism. The creed is never found in its pure form in a genuine proletarian.

It may be said, however, that even if the theoretical book-trained Socialist is not a working man himself, at least he is actuated by a love of the working class. He is endeavouring to shed his bourgeois status and fight on the side of the proletariat — that, obviously, must be his motive.

But is it? Sometimes I look at a Socialist — the intellectual, tract-writing type of Socialist, with his pullover, his fuzzy hair, and his Marxian quotation — and wonder what the devil his motive really is. It is often difficult to believe that it is a love of anybody, especially of the working class, from whom he is of all people the furthest removed. The underlying motive of many Socialists, I believe, is simply a hypertrophied sense of order. The present state of affairs offends them not because it causes misery, still less because it makes freedom impossible, but because it is untidy; what they desire, basically, is to reduce the world to something resembling a chessboard. Take the plays of a lifelong Socialist like Shaw. How much understanding or even awareness of working-class life do they display? Shaw himself declares that you can only bring a working man on the stage 'as an object of compassion'; in practice he doesn't

bring him on even as that, but merely as a sort of W. W. Jacobs figure of fun — the ready-made comic East Ender, like those in Major Barbara and Captain Brassbound's Conversion. At best his attitude to the working class is the sniggering Punch attitude, in more serious moments (consider, for instance, the young man who symbolizes the dispossessed classes in Misalliance) he finds them merely contemptible and disgusting. Poverty and, what is more, the habits of mind created by poverty, are something to be abolished from above, by violence if necessary; perhaps even preferably by violence. Hence his worship of 'great' men and appetite for dictatorships, Fascist or Communist; for to him, apparently (vide his remarks apropos of the Italo-Abyssinian war and the Stalin-Wells conversations), Stalin and Mussolini are almost equivalent persons. You get the same thing in a more mealy-mouthed form in Mrs Sidney Webb's autobiography, which gives, unconsciously, a most revealing picture of the high-minded Socialist slum-visitor. The truth is that, to many people calling themselves Socialists, revolution does not mean a movement of the masses with which they hope to associate themselves; it means a set of reforms which 'we', the clever ones, are going to impose upon 'them', the Lower Orders. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to regard the book-trained Socialist as a bloodless creature entirely incapable of emotion. Though seldom giving much evidence of affection for the exploited, he is perfectly capable of displaying hatred — a sort of queer, theoretical, in vacua hatred — against the exploiters. Hence the grand old Socialist sport of denouncing the bourgeoisie. It is strange how easily almost any Socialist writer can lash himself into frenzies of rage against the class to which, by birth or by adoption, he himself invariably belongs. Sometimes the hatred of bourgeois habits and 'ideology' is so far-reaching that it extends even to bourgeois characters in books. According to Henri Barbusse, the characters in the novels of Proust, Gide, etc., are 'characters whom one would dearly love to have at the other side of a barricade'. 'A barricade', you observe. Judging from Le Feu, I should have thought Barbusse's experience of barricades had left him with a distaste for them. But the imaginary bayoneting of 'bourgeois', who presumably don't hit back, is a bit different from the real article.

The best example of bourgeois-baiting literature that I have yet come across is Mirsky's Intelligentsia of Great Britain. This is a very interesting and ably-written book, and it should be read by everyone who wants to understand the rise of Fascism. Mirsky (formerly Prince Mirsky) was a White Russian emigre who came to England and was for some years a lecturer in Russian literature at London University. Later he was converted to Communism, returned to Russia, and produced his book as a sort of 'show-up' of the British intelligentsia from a Marxist standpoint. It is a viciously malignant book, with an unmistakable note of 'Now I'm out of your reach I can say what I like about you' running all through it, and apart from a general distortion it contains some quite definite and probably intentional misrepresentation: as, for instance, when Conrad is declared to be 'no less imperialist than Kipling', and D. H. Lawrence is described as writing 'bare-bodied pornography' and as having 'succeeded in erasing all clues to his proletarian origin' — as though Lawrence had been a pork-butcher climbing into the House of Lords! This kind of thing is very disquieting when one remembers that it is addressed to a Russian audience who have no means of checking its accuracy. But what I am thinking of at the moment is the effect of such a book on the English public. Here you have a literary man of aristocratic extraction, a man who had probably never in his life spoken to a working man on any-thing approaching equal terms, uttering venomous screams of libel against his 'bourgeois' colleagues. Why? So far as appearances go, from pure malignity. He is battling against the British intelligentsia, but what is he battling for? Within the book itself there is no indication. Hence the net effect of books like this is to give outsiders the impression that there is nothing in Communism except hatred. And here once again you come upon that queer resemblance between Communism and (convert) Roman Catholicism. If you want to find a book as evil-spirited as The Intelligentsia of Great Britain, the likeliest place to look is among the popular Roman Catholic apologists. You will find there the same venom and the same dishonesty, though, to do the Catholic justice, you will not usually find the same bad manners. Queer that Comrade Mirsky's spiritual brother should be Father — ! The Communist and the Catholic are not saying the same thing, in a

sense they are even saying opposite things, and each would gladly boil the other in oil if circumstances permitted; but from the point of view of an outsider they are very much alike.

The fact is that Socialism, in the form in which it is now presented, appeals chiefly to unsatisfactory or even inhuman types. On the one hand you have the warm-hearted un-thinking Socialist, the typical working-class Socialist, who only wants to abolish poverty and does not always grasp what this implies. On the other hand, you have the intellectual, book-trained Socialist, who understands that it is necessary to throw our present civilization down the sink and is quite willing to do so. And this type is drawn, to begin with, entirely from the middle class, and from a rootless town-bred section of the middle class at that. Still more unfortunately, it includes — so much so that to an outsider it even appears to be composed of — the kind of people I have been discussing; the foaming denouncers of the bourgeoisie, and the more-water-iri-your-beer reformers of whom Shaw is the prototype, and the astute young social-literary climbers who are Communists now, as they will be Fascists five years hence, because it is all the go, and all that dreary tribe of high-minded' women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come nocking towards the smell of 'progress' like bluebottles to a dead cat. The ordinary decent person, who is in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, is given the impression that there is no room for his kind in any Socialist party that means business. Worse, he is driven to the cynical conclusion that Socialism is a kind of doom which is probably coming but must be staved off as long as possible. Of course, as I have suggested already, it is not strictly fair to judge a movement by its adherents; but the point is that people invariably do so, and that the popular conception of Socialism is coloured by the conception of a Socialist as a dull or disagreeable person. 'Socialism' is pictured as a state of affairs in which our more vocal Socialists would feel thoroughly at home. This does great harm to the cause. The ordinary man may not flinch from a dictatorship of the proletariat, if you offer it tactfully; offer him a dictatorship of the prigs, and he gets ready to fight.

There is a widespread feeling that any civilization in which Socialism was a reality would bear the same relation to our own as a

brand-new bottle of colonial burgundy, bears to a few spoonfuls of first-class Beaujolais. We live, admittedly, amid the wreck of a civilization, but it has been a great civilization in its day, and in patches it still flourishes almost undisturbed. It still has its bouquet, so to speak; whereas the imagined Socialist future, like the colonial burgundy, tastes only of iron and water. Hence the fact, which is really a disastrous one, that artists of any consequence can never be persuaded into the Socialist fold. This is particularly the case with the writer whose political opinions are more directly and obviously connected with his work than those of, say, a painter. If one faces facts one must admit that nearly everything describable as Socialist literature is dull, tasteless, and bad. Consider the situation in England at the present moment. A whole generation has grown up more or less in familiarity with the idea of Socialism; and yet the higher-water mark, so to speak, of Socialist literature is W. H. Auden, a sort of gutless Kipling,[Orwell somewhat retracted this remark later. See 'Inside the Whale', England Your England, p. 120 (Seeker & Warburg Collected Edition).] and the even feebler poets who are associated with him. Every writer of consequence and every book worth reading is on the other side. I am willing to believe that it is otherwise in Russia — about which I know nothing, however — for presumably in post-revolutionary Russia the mere violence of events would tend to throw up a vigorous literature of sorts. But it is certain that in Western Europe Socialism has produced no literature worth having. A little while ago, when the issues were less clear, there were writers of some vitality who called themselves Socialists, but they were using the word as a vague label. Thus, if Ibsen and Zola described themselves as Socialists, it did not mean much more than that they were 'progressives', while in the case of Anatole France it meant merely that he was an anticlerical. The real Socialist writers, the propagandist writers, have always been dull, empty windbags — Shaw, Barbusse, Upton Sinclair, William Morris, Waldo Frank, etc., etc. I am not, of course, suggesting that Socialism is to be condemned because literary gents don't like it; I am not even suggesting that it ought necessarily to produce literature on its own account, though I do think it a bad sign that it has produced no songs worth singing. I am. merely pointing to the fact that writers of

genuine talent are usually indifferent to Socialism, and sometimes actively and mischievously hostile. And this is a disaster, not only for the writers themselves, but for the cause of Socialism, which has great need of them.

This, then, is the superficial aspect of the ordinary man's recoil from Socialism. I know the whole dreary argument very thoroughly, because I know it from both sides. Every-thing that I say here I have both said to ardent Socialists who were trying to convert me, and had said to me by bored non-Socialists whom I was trying to convert. The whole thing amounts to a kind of malaise produced by dislike of individual Socialists, especially of the cocksure Marx-quoting type. Is it childish to be influenced by that kind of thing? Is it silly? Is it even contemptible? It is all that, but the point is that it happens, and therefore it is important to keep it in mind.

However, there is a much more serious difficulty than the local and temporary objections which I discussed in the last chapter.

Faced by the fact that intelligent people are so often on the other side, the Socialist is apt to set it down to corrupt motives (conscious or unconscious), or to an ignorant belief that Socialism would not 'work', or to a mere dread of the horrors and discomforts of the revolutionary period before Socialism is established. Undoubtedly all these are important, but there are plenty of people who are influenced by none of them and are nevertheless hostile to Socialism. Their reason for recoiling from Socialism is spiritual, or 'ideological'. They object to it not on the ground that it would not 'work', but precisely because it would 'work' too well. What they are afraid of is not the things that are going to happen in their own lifetime, but the things that are going to happen in a remote future when Socialism is a reality.

I have very seldom met a convinced Socialist who could grasp that thinking people may be repelled by the objective towards which Socialism appears to be moving. The Marxist, especially, dismisses this kind of thing as bourgeois sentimentality. Marxists as a rule are not very good at reading the minds of their adversaries; if they were, the situation in Europe might be less desperate than it is at present. Possessing a technique which seems to explain everything, they do not often bother to discover what is going on inside other people's heads. Here, for instance, is an illustration of the kind of thing I mean. Discussing the widely held theory — which in one sense is certainly true — that Fascism is a product of Communism, Mr N. A. Holdaway, one of the ablest Marxist writers we possess, writes as follows:

The hoary legend of Communism leading to Fascism. . . . The element of truth in it is this: that the appearance of Communist activity warns the ruling class that democratic Labour Parties are no longer capable of holding the working class in check, and that capitalist dictatorship must assume another form if it is to survive.

You see here the defects of the method. Because he has detected

the underlying economic cause of Fascism, he tacitly assumes that the spiritual side of it is of no importance. Fascism is written off as a manoeuvre of the 'ruling class', which at bottom it is. But this in itself would only explain why Fascism appeals to capitalists. What about the millions who are not capitalists, who in a material sense have nothing to gain from Fascism and are often aware of it, and who, nevertheless, are Fascists? Obviously their approach has been purely along the ideological line. They could only be stampeded into Fascism because Communism attacked or seemed to attack certain things (patriotism, religion, etc.) which lay deeper than the economic motive; and in that sense it is perfectly true that Communism leads to Fascism. It is a pity that Marxists nearly always concentrate on letting economic cats out of ideological bags; it does in one sense reveal the truth, but with this penalty, that most of their propaganda misses its mark. It is the spiritual recoil from Socialism, especially as it manifests itself in sensitive people, that I want to discuss in this chapter. I shall have to analyse it at some length, because it is very widespread, very powerful, and, among Socialists, almost completely ignored.

The first thing to notice is that the idea of Socialism is bound up, more or less inextricably, with the idea of machine-production. Socialism is essentially an urban creed. It grew up more or less concurrently with industrialism, it has always had its roots in the town proletariat and the town intellectual, and it is doubtful whether it could ever have arisen in any but an industrial society. Granted industrialism, the idea of Socialism presents itself naturally, because private ownership is only tolerable when every individual (or family or other unit) is at least moderately self-supporting; but the effect of industrialism is to make it impossible for anyone to be self-supporting even for a moment. Industrialism, once it rises above a fairly low level, must lead to some form of collectivism. Not necessarily to Socialism, of course; conceivably it might lead to the Slave-State of which Fascism is a kind of prophecy. And the converse is also true. Machine-production suggests Socialism, but Socialism as a world-system implies machine-production, because it demands certain things not compatible with a primitive way of life. It demands, for instance, constant intercommunication and exchange of

goods between all parts of the earth; it demands some degree of centralized control; it demands an approximately equal standard of life for all human beings and probably a certain uniformity of education. We may take it, therefore, that any world in which Socialism was a reality would be at least as highly mechanized as the United States at this moment, probably much more so. In any case, no Socialist would think of denying this. The Socialist world is always pictured as a completely mechanized, immensely organized world, depending on the machine as the civilizations of antiquity depend on the slave.

So far so good, or so bad. Many, perhaps a majority, of thinking people are not in love with machine-civilization, but everyone who is not a fool knows that it is nonsense to talk at this moment about scrapping the machine. But the unfortunate thing is that Socialism, as usually presented, is bound up with the idea of mechanical progress, not merely as a necessary development but as an end in itself, almost as a kind of religion. This idea is implicit in, for instance, most of the propagandist stuff that is written about the rapid mechanical advance in Soviet Russia (the Dneiper dam, tractors, etc., etc.). Karel Capek hits it off well enough in the horrible ending of R.U.R., when the Robots, having slaughtered the last human being, announce their intention to 'build many houses' (just for the sake of building houses, you see). The kind of person who most readily accepts Socialism is also the kind of person who views mechanical progress, as such, with enthusiasm. And this is so much the case that Socialists are often unable to grasp that the opposite opinion exists. As a rule the most persuasive argument they can think of is to tell you that the present mechanization of the world is as nothing to what we shall see when Socialism is established. Where there is one aeroplane now, in those days there will be fifty! All the work that is now done by hand will then be done by machinery: everything that is now made of leather, wood, or stone will be made of rubber, glass, or steel; there will be no disorder, no loose ends, no wilder-nesses, no wild animals, no weeds, no disease, no poverty, no pain — and so on and so forth. The Socialist world is to be above all things an ordered world, an efficient world. But it is precisely from that vision of the future as a sort of glittering Wells-world that sensitive minds recoil. Please notice that

this essentially fat-bellied version of ‘progress’ is not an integral part of Socialist doctrine; but it has come to be thought of as one, with the result that the temperamental conservatism which is latent in all kinds of people is easily mobilized against Socialism.

Every sensitive person has moments when he is suspicious of machinery and to some extent of physical science. But it is important to sort out the various motives, which have differed greatly at different times, for hostility to science and machinery, and to disregard the jealousy of the modem literary gent who hates science because science has stolen literature’s thunder. The earliest full-length attack on science and machinery that I am acquainted with is in the third part of Gulliver’s Travels. But Swift’s attack, though brilliant as a tour de force, is irrelevant and even silly, because it is written from the standpoint — perhaps this seems a queer thing to say of the author of Gulliver’s Trawls — of a man who lacked imagination. To Swift, science was merely a kind of futile muckraking and the machines were non-sensical contraptions that would never work. His standard was that of practical usefulness, and he lacked the vision to see that an experiment which is not demonstrably useful at the moment may yield results in the future. Elsewhere in the book he names it as the best of all achievements ‘to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before’; not ‘seeing, apparently, that this is just what the machine can do. A little later the despised machines began working, physical science increased its scope, and there came the celebrated conflict between religion and science which agitated our grandfathers. That conflict is over and both sides have retreated and claimed a victory, but an anti-scientific bias still lingers in the minds of most religious believers. All through the nineteenth century protesting voices were raised against science and machinery (see Dickens’s Hard Times, for instance), but usually for the rather shallow reason that industrialism in its first stages was cruel and ugly. Samuel Butler’s attack on the machine in the well-known chapter of Erewhon is a different matter. But Butler himself lives in ‘a less desperate age than our own, an age in which it was still possible for a first-rate man to be a dilettante part of the time, and therefore the whole thing appeared to him as a kind of intellectual exercise. He saw clearly enough our abject dependence

on the machine, but instead of bothering to work out its consequences he preferred to exaggerate it for the sake of what was not much more than a joke. It is only in our own age, when mechanization has finally triumphed, that we can actually feel the tendency of the machine to make a fully human life impossible. There is probably no one capable of thinking and feeling who has not occasionally looked at a gas-pipe chair and reflected that the machine is the enemy of life. As a rule, however, this feeling is instinctive rather than reasoned.

People know that in some way or another 'progress' is a swindle, but they reach this conclusion by a kind of mental shorthand; my job here is to supply the logical steps that are usually left out. But first one must ask, what is the function of the machine? Obviously its primary function is to save work, and the type of person to whom machine-civilization is entirely acceptable seldom sees any reason for looking further. Here for instance is a person who claims, or rather screams, that he is thoroughly at home in the modem mechanized world. I am quoting from World Without Faith, by Mr John Beevers. This is what he says:

It is plain lunacy to say that the average L2 10s. to L4 a week man of today is a lower type than an eighteenth-century farm labourer. Or than the labourer or peasant of any exclusively agricultural community now or in the past. It just isn't true. It is so damn silly to cry out about the civilizing effects of work in the fields and farmyards as against that done in a big locomotive works or an automobile factory. Work is a nuisance. We work because we have to and all work is done to provide us with leisure and the means of spending that leisure as enjoyably as possible.

And again:

Man is going to have time enough and power enough to hunt for his own heaven on earth without worrying about the super-natural one. The earth will be so pleasant a place that the priest and the parson won't be left with much of a tale to tell. Half the stuffing is knocked out of them by one neat blow. Etc., etc., etc.

There is a whole chapter to this effect (Chapter 4 of Mr Beevers's book), and it is of some interest as an exhibition of machine-worship in its most completely vulgar, ignorant, and half-baked form. It is the

authentic voice of a large section of the modem world. Every aspirin-eater in the outer suburbs would echo it fervently. Notice the shrill wail of anger ('It just isn't troo-o-o!', etc.) with which Mr Beevers meets the suggestion that his grandfather may have been a better man than himself; and the still more horrible suggestion that if we returned to a simpler way of life he might have to toughen his muscles with a job of work. Work, you see, is done 'to provide us with leisure'. Leisure for what? Leisure to become more like Mr Beevers, presumably. Though as a matter of fact, from that line of talk about 'heaven on earth', you can make a fairly good guess at what he would like civilization to be; a sort of Lyons Comer House lasting in saecula saeculorum and getting bigger and noisier all the time. And in any book by anyone who feels at home in the machine-world — in any book by H. G. Wells, for instance — you will find passages of the same kind. How often have we not heard it, that glutinously uplifting stuff about 'the machines, our new race of slaves, which will set humanity free', etc., etc., etc. To these people, apparently, the only danger of the machine is its possible use for destructive purposes; as, for instance, aero-planes are used in war. Barring wars and unforeseen disasters, the future is envisaged as an ever more rapid march of mechanical progress; machines to save work, machines to save thought, machines to save pain, hygiene, efficiency, organization, more hygiene, more efficiency, more organization, more machines — until finally you land up in the by now familiar Wellsian Utopia, aptly caricatured by Huxley in Brave New World, the paradise of little fat men. Of course in their day-dreams of the future the little fat men are neither fat nor little; they are Men Like Gods. But why should they be? All mechanical progress is towards greater and greater efficiency; ultimately, therefore, towards a world in which nothing goes wrong. But in a world in which nothing went wrong, many of the qualities which Mr Wells regards as 'godlike' would be no more valuable than the animal faculty of moving the ears. The beings in Men Like Gods and The Dream are represented, for example, as brave, generous, and physically strong. But in a world from which physical danger had been banished — and obviously mechanical progress tends to eliminate danger — would physical courage be likely to survive?

Could it survive? And why should physical strength survive in a world where there was never the need for physical labour? As for such qualities as loyalty, generosity, etc., in a world where nothing went wrong, they would be not only irrelevant but probably unimaginable. The truth is that many of the qualities we admire in human beings can only function in opposition to some kind of disaster, pain, or difficulty; but the tendency of mechanical progress is to eliminate disaster, pain, and difficulty. In books like The Dream and Men Like Gods it is assumed that such qualities as strength, courage, generosity, etc., will be kept alive because they are comely qualities and necessary attributes of a full human being. Presumably, for instance, the inhabitants of Utopia would create artificial dangers in order to exercise their courage, and do dumb-bell exercises to harden muscles which they would never be obliged to use. And here you observe the huge contradiction which is usually present in the idea of progress. The tendency of mechanical progress is to make your environment safe and soft; and yet you are striving to keep yourself brave and hard. You are at the same moment furiously pressing forward and desperately holding back. It is as though a London stockbroker should go to his office in a suit of chain mail and insist on talking medieval Latin. So in the last analysis the champion of progress is also the champion of anachronisms.

Meanwhile I am assuming that the tendency of mechanical progress is to make life safe and soft. This may be disputed, because at any given moment the effect of some recent mechanical invention may appear to be the opposite. Take for instance the transition from horses to motor vehicles. At a first glance one might say, considering the enormous toll of road deaths, that the motor-car does not exactly tend to make life safer. Moreover it probably needs as much toughness to be a first-rate dirt-track rider as to be a broncho-buster or to ride in the Grand National. Nevertheless the tendency of all machinery is to become safer and easier to handle. The danger of accidents would disappear if we chose to tackle our road-planning problem seriously, as we shall do sooner or later; and meanwhile the motor-car has evolved to a point at which anyone who is not blind or paralytic can drive it after a few lessons. Even now it needs far less nerve and skill to drive a car ordinarily well than to ride a horse

ordinarily well; in twenty years' time it may need no nerve or skill at all. Therefore, one must say that, taking society as a whole, the result of the transition from horses to cars has been an increase in human softness. Presently somebody comes along with another invention, the aeroplane for instance, which does not at first sight appear to make life safer. The first men who went up in aeroplanes were superlatively brave, and even today it must need an exceptionally good nerve to be a pilot. But the same tendency as before is at work. The aeroplane, like the motor-car, will be made foolproof; a million engineers are working, almost unconsciously, in that direction. Finally — this is the objective, though it may never quite be reached — you will get an aeroplane whose pilot needs no more skill or courage than a baby needs in its perambulator. And all mechanical progress is and must be in this direction. A machine evolves by becoming more efficient, that is, more foolproof; hence the objective of mechanical progress is a foolproof world — which may or may not mean a world inhabited by fools. Mr Wells would probably retort that the world can never become fool-proof, because, however high a standard of efficiency you have reached, there is always some greater difficulty ahead. For example (this is Mr Wells's favourite idea — he has used it in goodness knows how many perorations), when you have got this planet of ours perfectly into trim, you start upon the enormous task of reaching and colonizing another. But this is merely to push the objective further into the future; the objective itself remains the same. Colonize another planet, and the game of mechanical progress begins anew; for the foolproof world you have substituted the foolproof solar system — the foolproof universe. In tying yourself to the ideal of mechanical efficiency, you tie yourself to the ideal of softness. But softness is repulsive; and thus all progress is seen to be a frantic struggle towards an objective which you hope and pray will never be reached. Now and again, but not often, you meet somebody who grasps that what is usually called progress also entails what is usually called degeneracy, and who is nevertheless in favour of progress. Hence the fact that in Mr Shaw's Utopia a statue was erected to Falstaff, as the first man who ever made a speech in favour of cowardice.

But the trouble goes immensely deeper than this. Hitherto I have

only pointed out the absurdity of aiming at mechanical progress and also at the preservation of qualities which mechanical progress makes unnecessary. The question one has got to consider is whether there is any human activity which would not be maimed by the dominance of the machine.

The function of the machine is to save work. In a fully mechanized world all the dull drudgery will be done by machinery, leaving us free for more interesting pursuits. So expressed, this sounds splendid. It makes one sick to see half a dozen men sweating their guts out to dig a trench for a water-pipe, when some easily devised machine would scoop the earth out in a couple of minutes. Why not let the machine do the work and the men go and do something else. But presently the question arises, what else are they to do? Supposedly they are set free from 'work' in order that they may do something which is not 'work'. But what is work and what is not work? Is it work to dig, to carpenter, to plant trees, to fell trees, to ride, to fish, to hunt, to feed chickens, to play the piano, to take photographs, to build a house, to cook, to sew, to trim hats, to mend motor bicycles? All of these things are work to somebody, and all of them are play to somebody. There are in fact very few activities which cannot be classed either as work or play according as you choose to regard them. The labourer set free from digging may want to spend his leisure, or part of it, in playing the piano, while the professional pianist may be only too glad to get out and dig at the potato patch. Hence the antithesis between work, as something intolerably tedious, and not-work, as something desirable, is false. The truth is that when a human being is riot eating, drinking, sleeping, making love, talking, playing games, or merely lounging about — and these things will not fill up a lifetime — he needs work and usually looks for it, though he may not call it work. Above the level of a third — or fourth-grade moron, life has got to be lived largely in terms of effort. For man is not, as the vulgarer hedonists seem to suppose, a kind of walking stomach; he has also got a hand, an eye, and a brain. Cease to use your hands, and you have lopped off a huge chunk of your conscious-ness. And now consider again those half-dozen men who were digging the trench for the water-pipe. A machine has set them free from digging, and they are going to amuse

themselves with something else — carpentering, for instance. But whatever they want to do, they will find that another machine has set them free from that. For in a fully mechanized world there would be no more need to carpenter, to cook, to mend motor bicycles, etc., than there would be to dig. There is scarcely anything, from catching a whale to carving a cherry stone, that could not conceivably be done by machinery. The machine would even encroach upon the activities we now class as 'art'; it is doing so already, via the camera and the radio. Mechanize the world as fully as it might be mechanized, and whichever way you turn there will be some machine cutting you off from the chance of working — that is, of living.

At a first glance this might not seem to matter. Why should you not get on with your 'creative work' and disregard the machines that would do it for you? But it is not so simple as it sounds. Here am I, working eight hours a day in an insurance office; in my spare time I want to do something 'creative', so I choose to do a bit of carpentering — to make myself a table, for instance. Notice that from the very start there is a touch of artificiality about the whole business, for the factories can turn me out a far better table than I can make for myself. But even when I get to work on my table, it is not possible for me to feel towards it as the cabinet-maker of a hundred years ago felt towards his table, still less as Robinson Crusoe felt towards his. For before I start, most of the work has already been done for me by machinery. The tools I use demand the minimum of skill. I can get, for instance, planes which will cut out any moulding; the cabinet-maker of a hundred years ago would have had to do the work with chisel and gouge, which demanded real skill of eye and hand. The boards I buy are ready planed and the legs are ready turned by the lathe. I can even go to the wood-shop and buy all the parts of the table ready-made and only needing to be fitted together; my work being reduced to driving in a few pegs and using a piece of sandpaper. And if this is so at present, in the mechanized future it will be enormously more so. With the tools and materials available then, there will be no possibility of mistake, hence no room for skill. Making a table will be easier and duller than peeling a potato. In such circumstances it is nonsense to talk of 'creative work'. In any case the arts of the hand (which have got to be transmitted by

apprenticeship) would long since have disappeared. Some of them have disappeared already, under the competition of the machine. Look round any country churchyard and see whether you can find a decently-cut tombstone later than 1820. The art, or rather the craft, of stonework has died out so completely that it would take centuries to revive it.

But it may be said, why not retain the machine and retain 'creative work'? Why not cultivate anachronisms as a spare-time hobby? Many people have played with this idea; it seems to solve with such beautiful ease the problems set by the machine. The citizen of Utopia, we are told, coming home from his daily two hours of turning a handle in the tomato-canning factory, will deliberately revert to a more primitive way of life and solace his creative instincts with a bit of fretwork, pottery-glazing, or handloom-weaving. And why is this picture an absurdity — as it is, of course? Because of a principle that is not always recognized, though always acted upon: that so long as the machine is there, one is under an obligation to use it. No one draws water from the well when he can turn on the tap. One sees a good illustration of this in the matter of travel. Everyone who has travelled by primitive methods in an undeveloped country knows that the difference between that kind of travel and modern travel in trains, cars, etc., is the difference between life and death. The nomad who walks or rides, with his baggage stowed on a camel or an ox-cart, may suffer every kind of discomfort, but at least he is living while he is travelling; whereas for the passenger in an express train or a luxury liner his journey is an interregnum, a kind of temporary death. And yet so long as the railways exist, one has got to travel by train — or by car or aeroplane. Here am I, forty miles from London. When I want to go up to London why do I not pack my luggage on to a mule and set out on foot, making a two days of it? Because, with the Green Line buses whizzing past me every ten minutes, such a journey would be intolerably irksome. In order that one may enjoy primitive methods of travel, it is necessary that no other method should be available. No human being ever wants to do anything in a more cumbrous way than is necessary. Hence the absurdity of that picture of Utopians saving their souls with fretwork. In a world where every-thing could be done by machinery,

everything would be done by machinery. Deliberately to revert to primitive methods to use archaic took, to put silly little difficulties in your own way, would be a piece of dilettantism, of pretty-pretty arty and craftiness. It would be like solemnly sitting down to eat your dinner with stone implements. Revert to handwork in a machine age, and you are back in Ye Olde Tea Shoppe or the Tudor villa with the sham beams tacked to the wall.

The tendency of mechanical progress, then, is to frustrate the human need for effort and creation. It makes unnecessary and even impossible the activities of the eye and the hand. The apostle of 'progress' will sometimes declare that this does not matter, but you can usually drive him into a comer by pointing out the horrible lengths to which the process can be carried. Why, for instance, use your hands at all — why use them even for blowing your nose or sharpening a pencil? Surely you could fix some kind of steel and rubber contraption to your shoulders and let your arms wither into stumps of skin and bone? And so with every organ and every faculty. There is really no reason why a human being should do more than eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and procreate; everything else could be done for him by machinery. Therefore the logical end of mechanical progress is to reduce the human being to something resembling a brain in a bottle. That is the goal towards which we are already moving, though, of course, we have no intention of getting there; just as a man who drinks a bottle of whisky a day does not actually intend to get cirrhosis of the liver. The implied objective of 'progress' is — not exactly, perhaps, the brain in the bottle, but at any rate some frightful subhuman depth of softness and helplessness. And the unfortunate thing is that at present the word 'progress' and the word 'Socialism' are linked in-separably in almost everyone's mind. The kind of person who hates machinery also takes it for granted to hate Socialism; the Socialist is always in favour of mechanization, rationalization, modernization — or at least thinks that he ought to be in favour of them. Quite recently, for instance, a prominent I.L.P.'er confessed to me with a sort of wistful shame — as though it were something faintly improper — that he was 'fond of horses'. Horses, you see, belong to the vanished agricultural past, and all sentiment for the past carries with it a vague smell of heresy. I do not believe

that this need necessarily be so, but undoubtedly it is so. And in itself it is quite enough to explain the alienation of decent minds from Socialism.

A generation ago every intelligent person was in some sense a revolutionary; nowadays it would be nearer the mark to say that every intelligent person is a reactionary. In this connexion it is worth comparing H. G. Wells's The Sleeper Awakes with Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, written thirty years later. Each is a pessimistic Utopia, a vision of a sort of prig's paradise in which all the dreams of the 'progressive' person come true. Considered merely as a piece of imaginative construction The Sleeper Awakes is, I think, much superior, but it suffers from vast contradictions because of the fact that Wells, as the arch-priest of 'progress', cannot write with any conviction against 'progress'. He draws a picture of a glittering, strangely sinister world in which the privileged classes live a life of shallow gutless hedonism, and the workers, reduced to a state of utter slavery and sub-human ignorance, toil like troglodytes in caverns underground. As soon as one examines this idea — it is further developed in a splendid short story in Stories of Space and Time — one sees its inconsistency. For in the immensely mechanized world that Wells is imagining, why should the workers have to work harder than at present? Obviously the tendency of the machine is to eliminate work, not to increase it. In the machine-world the workers might be enslaved, ill-treated, and even under-fed, but they certainly would not be condemned to ceaseless manual toil; because in that case what would be the function of the machine? You can have machines doing all the work or human beings doing all the work, but you can't have both. Those armies of underground workers, with their blue uniforms and their debased, half-human language, are only put in 'to make your flesh creep'. Wells wants to suggest that 'progress' might take a wrong turning; but the only evil he cares to imagine is inequality — one class grabbing all the wealth and power and oppressing the others, apparently out of pure spite. Give it quite a small twist, he seems to suggest, overthrow the privileged class — change over from world-capitalism to Socialism, in fact — and all will be well. The machine-civilization is to continue, but its products are to be shared out equally. The thought he dare not face is that the

machine itself may be the enemy. So in his more characteristic Utopias (The Dream, Men Like Gods, etc.), he returns to optimism and to a vision of humanity, 'liberated' by the machine, as a race of enlightened sunbathers whose sole topic of conversation is their own superiority to their ancestors. Brave New World belongs to a later time and to a generation which has seen through the swindle of 'progress'. It contains its own contradictions (the most important of them is pointed out in Mr John Strachey's The Coming Struggle for Power), but it is at least a memorable assault on the more fat-bellied type of perfectionism. Allowing for the exaggerations of caricature, it probably expresses what a majority of thinking people feel about machine-civilization.

The sensitive person's hostility to the machine is in one sense unrealistic, because of the obvious fact that the machine has come to stay. But as an attitude of mind there is a great deal to be said for it. The machine has got to be accepted, but it is probably better to accept it rather as one accepts a drug — that is, grudgingly and suspiciously. Like a drug, the machine is useful, dangerous, and habit-forming. The oftener one surrenders to it the tighter its grip becomes. You have only to look about you at this moment to realize with what sinister speed the machine is getting us into its power. To begin with, there is the frightful debauchery of taste that has already been effected by a century of mechanization. This is almost too obvious and too generally admitted to need pointing out. But as a single instance, take taste in its narrowest sense — the taste for decent food. In the highly mechanized countries, thanks to tinned food, cold storage, synthetic flavouring matters, etc., the palate is almost a dead organ. As you can see by looking at any greengrocer's shop, what the majority of English people mean by an apple is a lump of highly-coloured cotton wool from America or Australia; they will devour these things, apparently with pleasure, and let the English apples rot under the trees. It is the shiny, standardized, machine-made look of the American apple that appeals to them; the superior taste of the English apple is something they simply do not notice. Or look at the factory-made, foil-wrapped cheese and 'blended' butter in any grocer's; look at the hideous rows of tins which usurp more and more of the space in any food-shop, even a

dairy; look at a sixpenny Swiss roll or a twopenny ice-cream; look at the filthy chemical by-product that people will pour down their throats under the name of beer. Wherever you look you will see some slick machine-made article triumphing over the old-fashioned article that still tastes of something other than sawdust. And what applies to food applies also to furniture, houses, clothes, books, amusements, and everything else that makes up our environment. There are now millions of people, and they are increasing every year, to whom the blaring of a radio is not only a more accept-able but a more normal background to their thoughts than the lowing of cattle or the song of birds. The mechanization of the world could never proceed very far while taste, even the taste-buds of the tongue, remained uncorrupted, be-cause in that case most of the products of the machine would be simply unwanted. In a healthy world there would be no demand for tinned foods, aspirins, gramophones, gaspipe chairs, machine guns, daily newspapers, telephones, motor-cars, etc., etc.; and on the other hand there would be a constant demand for the things the machine cannot produce. But meanwhile the machine is here, and its corrupting effects are almost irresistible. One inveighs against it, but one goes on using it. Even a bare-arse savage, given the chance, will learn the vices of civilization within a few months. Mechanization leads to the decay of taste, the decay of taste leads to the demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanization, and so a vicious circle is established.

But in addition to this there is a tendency for the mechanization of the world to proceed as it were automatically, whether we want it or not. This is due to the fact that in modem Western man the faculty of mechanical invention has been fed and stimulated till it has reached almost the status of an instinct. People invent new machines and improve existing ones almost unconsciously, rather as a somnambulist will go on working in his sleep. In the past, when it was taken for granted that life on this planet is harsh or at any rate laborious, it Seemed the natural fate to go on using the clumsy implements of your forefathers, and only a few eccentric persons, centuries apart, proposed innovations; hence throughout enormous ages such things as the ox-cart, the plough, the sickle, etc., remained radically unchanged. It is on record that screws have been in use

since remote antiquity and yet that it was not till the middle of the nineteenth century that anyone thought of making screws with points on them, for several thousand years they remained flat-ended and holes had to be drilled for them before they could be inserted. In our own epoch such a thing would be unthinkable. For almost every modem Western man has his inventive faculty to some extent developed; the Western man invents machines as naturally as the Polynesian islander swims. Give a Western man a job of work and he immediately begins devising a machine that would do it for him; give him a machine and he thinks of ways of improving it. I understand this tendency well enough, for in an ineffectual sort of way I have that type of mind myself. I have not either the patience or the mechanical skill to devise any machine that would work, but I am perpetually seeing, as it were, the ghosts of possible machines that might save me the trouble of using my brain or muscles. A person with a more definite mechanical turn would probably construct some of them and put them into operation. But under our present economic system, whether he constructed them — or rather, whether anyone else had the benefit of them — would depend upon whether they were commercially valuable. The Socialists are right, therefore, when they claim that the rate of mechanical progress will be much more rapid once Socialism is established. Given a mechanical civilization the process of invention and improvement will always continue, but the tendency of capitalism is to slow it down, because under capitalism any invention which does not promise fairly immediate profits is neglected; some, indeed, which threaten to reduce profits are suppressed almost as ruthlessly as the flexible glass mentioned by Petronius.[For example: Some years ago someone invented a gramophone needle that would last for decades. One of the big gramophone companies bought up the patent rights, and that was the last that was ever beard of it.] Establish Socialism — remove the profit principle — and the inventor will have a free hand. The mechanization of the world, already rapid enough, would be or at any rate could be enormously accelerated.

And this prospect is a slightly sinister one, because it is obvious even now that the process of mechanization is out of control. It is happening merely because humanity has got the habit. A chemist

perfects a new method of synthesizing rubber, or a mechanic devises a new pattern of gudgeon-pin. Why? Not for any clearly understood purpose, but simply from the impulse to invent and improve, which has now become instinctive. Put a pacifist to work in a bomb-factory and in two months he will be devising a new type of bomb. Hence the appearance of such diabolical things as poison gases, which are not expected even by their inventors to be beneficial to humanity. Our attitude towards such things as poison gases ought to be the attitude of the king of Brobdingnag towards gunpowder; but because we live in a mechanical and scientific age we are infected with the notion that, whatever else happens, 'progress' must continue and knowledge must never be suppressed. Verbally, no doubt, we would agree that machinery is made for man and not man for machinery; in practice any attempt to check the development of the machine appears to us an attack on knowledge and therefore a kind of blasphemy. And even if the whole of humanity suddenly revolted against the machine and decided to escape to a simpler way of life, the escape would still be immensely difficult. It would not do, as in Butler's Erewhon, to smash every machine invented after a certain date; we should also have to smash the habit of mind that would, almost involuntarily, devise fresh machines as soon as the old ones were smashed. And in all of us there is at least a tinge of that habit of mind. In every country in the world the large army of scientists and technicians, with the rest of us panting at their heels, are marching along the road of 'progress' with the blind persistence of a column of ants. Comparatively few people want it to happen, plenty of people actively want it not to happen, and yet it is happening. The process of mechanization has itself become a machine, a huge glittering vehicle whirling us we are not certain where, but probably towards the padded Wells-world and the brain in the bottle.

This, then, is the case against the machine. Whether it is a sound or unsound case hardly matters. The point is that these or very Similar arguments would be echoed by every person who is hostile to machine-civilization. And unfortunately, because of that nexus of thought, 'Socialism-progress-machinery-Russia-tractor-hygiene-machinery-progress', which exists in almost everyone's mind, it is usually the same person who is hostile to Socialism. The kind of

person who hates central heating and gaspipe chairs is also the kind of person who, when you mention Socialism, murmurs something about' beehive state' and moves away with a pained expression. So far as my observation goes, very few Socialists grasp why this is so, or even that it is so. Get the more vocal type of Socialist into a comer, repeat to him the substance of what I have said in this chapter, and see what kind of answer you get. As a matter of fact you will get several answers; I am so familiar with them that I know them almost by heart.

In the first place he will tell you that it is impossible to 'go back' (or to 'put back the hand of progress' — as though the hand of progress hadn't been pretty violently put back several times in human history!), and will then accuse you of being a medievalist and begin to descant upon the horrors of the Middle Ages, leprosy, the Inquisition, etc. As a matter of fact, most attacks upon the Middle Ages and the past generally by apologists of modernity are beside the point, because their essential trick is to project a modern man, with his squeamishness and his high standards of comfort, into an age when such things were unheard of. But notice that in any case this is not an answer. For a dislike of the mechanized future does not imply the smallest reverence for any period of the past. D. H. Lawrence, wiser than the medievalist, chose to idealize the Etruscans about whom we know conveniently little. But there is no need to idealize even the Etruscans or the Pelasgians, or the Aztecs, or the Sumerians, or any other vanished and romantic people. When one pictures a desirable civilization, one pictures it merely as an objective; there is no need to pretend that it has ever existed in space and time. Press this point home, explain that you wish to aim at making life simpler and harder instead of softer and more complex, and the Socialist will usually assume that you want to revert to a 'state of nature' — meaning some stinking palaeolithic cave: as though there were nothing between a flint scraper and the steel mills of Sheffield, or between a skin coracle and the Queen Mary.

Finally, however, you will get an answer which is rather more to the point and which runs roughly as follows: 'Yes, what you are saying is all very well in its way. No doubt it would be very noble to harden ourselves and do without aspirins and central heating and so

forth. But the point is, you see, that nobody seriously wants it. It would mean going back to an agricultural way of life, which means beastly hard work and isn't at all the same thing as playing at gardening. I don't want hard work, you don't want hard work — nobody wants it who knows what it means. You only talk as you do because you've never done a day's work in your life,' etc., etc.

Now this in a sense is true. It amounts to saying, 'We're soft — for God's sake let's stay soft!' which at least is realistic. As I have pointed out already, the machine has got us in its grip and to escape will be immensely difficult. Nevertheless this answer is really an evasion, because it fails to make dear what we mean when we say that we 'want' this or that. I am a degenerate modem semi-intellectual who would die if I did not get my early morning cup of tea and my New Statesman every Friday. Clearly I do not, in a sense, 'want' to return to a simpler, harder, probably agricultural way of life. In the same sense I don't 'want' to cut down my drinking, to pay my debts, to take enough exercise, to be faithful to my wife, etc., etc. But in another and more permanent sense I do want these things, and perhaps in the same sense I want a civilization in which 'progress' is not definable as making the world safe for little fat men. These that I have outlined are practically the only arguments that I have been able to get from Socialists — thinking, book-trained Socialists — when I have tried to explain to them just how they are driving away possible adherents. Of course there is also the old argument that Socialism is going to arrive anyway, whether people like it or not, because of that trouble-saving thing, 'historic necessity'. But 'historic necessity', or rather the belief in it, has failed to survive Hitler.

Meanwhile the thinking person, by intellect usually left-wing but by temperament often right-wing, hovers at the gate of the Socialist fold. He is no doubt aware that he ought to be a Socialist. But he observes first the dullness of individual Socialists, then the apparent flabbiness of Socialist ideals, and veers away. Till quite recently it was natural to veer towards indinerentism. Ten years ago, even five years ago, the typical literary gent wrote books on baroque architecture and had a soul above politics. But that attitude is becoming difficult and even unfashionable. The times are growing harsher, the issues are clearer, the belief that nothing, will ever

change (i.e. that your dividends will always be safe) is less prevalent. The fence on which the literary gent sits, once as comfortable as the plush cushion of a cathedral stall, is now pinching his bottom intolerably; more and more he shows a disposition to drop off on one side or the other. It is interesting to notice how many of our leading writers, who a dozen years ago were art for art's saking for all they were worth and would have considered it too vulgar for words even to vote at a general election, are now taking a definite political standpoint; while most of the younger writers, at least those of them who are not mere footlers, have been 'political' from the start. I believe that when the pinch comes there is a terrible danger that the main movement of the intelligentsia will be towards Fascism. Just how soon the pinch will come it is difficult to say; it depends, probably, upon events in Europe; but it may be that within two years or even a year we shall have reached the decisive moment. That will also be the moment when every person with any brains or any decency will know in his bones that he ought to be on the Socialist side. But he will not necessarily come there of his own accord; there are too many ancient prejudices standing in the way. He will have to be persuaded, and by methods that imply an understanding of his viewpoint. Socialists cannot afford to waste any more time in preaching to the converted. Their job now is to make Socialists as rapidly as possible; instead of which, all too often, they are making Fascists.

When I speak of Fascism in England, I am not necessarily thinking of Mosley and his pimpled followers. English Fascism, when it arrives, is likely to be of a sedate and subtle kind (presumably, at any rate at first, it won't be called Fascism), and it is doubtful whether a Gilbert and Sullivan heavy dragoon of Mosley's stamp would ever be much more than a joke to the majority of English people; though even Mosley will bear watching, for experience shows (vide the careers of Hitler, Napoleon III) that to a political climber it is sometimes an advantage not to be taken too seriously at the beginning of his career. But what I am thinking of at this moment is the Fascist attitude of mind, which beyond any doubt is gaining ground among people who ought to know better. Fascism as it appears in the intellectual is a sort of mirror-image — not

actually of Socialism but of a plausible travesty of Socialism. It boils down to a determination to do the opposite of whatever the mythical Socialist does. If you present Socialism in a bad and misleading light — if you let people imagine that it does not mean much more than pouring European civilization down the sink at the command of Marxist prigs — you risk driving the intellectual into Fascism. You frighten him into a sort of angry defensive attitude in which he simply refuses to listen to the Socialist case. Some such attitude is already quite clearly discernible in writers like Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Roy Gampbell, etc., in most of the Roman Catholic writers and many of the Douglas Credit group, in certain popular novelists, and even, if one looks below the surface, in so-superior conservative highbrows like Eliot and his countless followers. If you want some unmistakable illustrations of the growth of Fascist feeling in England, have a look at some of the innumerable letters that were written to the Press during the Abyssinian war, approving the Italian action, and also the howl of glee that went up from. both Catholic and Anglican pulpits (see the Daily Mail of 17 August 1936) over the Fascist rising in Spain.

In order to combat Fascism it is necessary to understand it, which involves admitting that it contains some good as well as much evil. In practice, of course, it is merely an infamous tyranny, and its methods of attaining and holding power are such that even its most ardent apologists prefer to talk about something else. But the underlying feeling of Fascism, the feeling that first draws people into the Fascist camp, may be less contemptible. It is not always, as the Saturday Review would lead one to suppose, a squealing terror of the Bolshevik bogey-man. Everyone who has given the movement so much as a glance knows that the rank-and-file Fascist is often quite a well-meaning person — quite genuinely anxious, for instance, to better the lot of the unemployed. But more important than this is the fact that Fascism draws its strength from the good as well as the bad varieties of conservatism. To anyone with a feeling for tradition and for discipline it comes with its appeal ready-made. Probably it is very easy, when you have had a bellyful of the more tactless kind of Socialist propaganda, to see Fascism as the last line defence of all that is good in European civilization. Even the Fascist bully at his

symbolic worst, with rubber truncheon in one hand and castor oil bottle in the other, does not necessarily feel himself a bully; more probably he feels like Roland in the pass at Roncevaux, defending Christendom against the barbarian. We have got to admit that if Fascism is everywhere advancing, this is largely the fault of Socialists themselves. Partly it is due to the mistaken Communist tactic of sabotaging democracy, i.e. sawing off the branch you are sitting on; but still more to the fact that Socialists have, so to speak, presented their case wrong side foremost. They have never made it sufficiently clear that the essential aims of Socialism are justice and liberty. With their eyes glued to economic facts, they have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul, and explicitly or implicitly they have set up the goal of a materialistic Utopia. As a result Fascism has been able to play upon every instinct that revolts against hedonism and a cheap conception of 'progress'. It has been able to pose as the upholder of the European tradition, and to appeal to Christian belief, to patriotism, and to the military virtues. It is far worse than useless to write Fascism off as 'mass sadism', or some easy phrase of that kind. If you pretend that it is merely an aberration which will presently pass off of its own accord, you are dreaming a dream from which you will awake when somebody coshes you with a rubber truncheon. The only possible course is to examine the Fascist case, grasp that there is something to be said for it, and then make it clear to the world that whatever good Fascism contains is also implicit in Socialism.

At present the situation is desperate. Even if nothing worse befalls us, there are the conditions which I described in the earlier part of this book and which are not going to improve under our present economic system. Still more urgent is the danger of Fascist domination in Europe. And unless Socialist doctrine, in an effective form, can be diffused widely and very quickly, there is no certainty that Fascism will ever be overthrown. For Socialism is the only real enemy that Fascism has to face. The capitalist-imperialist governments, even though they themselves are about to be plundered, will not fight with any conviction against Fascism as such. Our rulers, those of them who understand the issue, would probably prefer to hand over every square inch of the British Empire

to Italy, Germany, and Japan than to see Socialism triumphant. It was easy to laugh at Fascism when we imagined that it was based on hysterical nationalism, because it seemed obvious that the Fascist states, each regarding itself as the chosen people and patriotic contra mundum, would clash with one another. But nothing of the kind is happening. Fascism is now an international movement, which means not only that the Fascist nations can combine for purposes of loot, but that they are groping, perhaps only half consciously as yet, towards a world-system. For the vision of the totalitarian state there is being substituted the vision of the totalitarian world. As I pointed out earlier, the advance of machine-technique must lead ultimately to some form of collectivism, but that form need not necessarily be equalitarian; that is, it need not be Socialism. Pace the economists, it is quite easy to imagine a world-society, economically collectivist — that is, with the profit principle eliminated — but with all political, military, and educational power in the hands of a small caste of rulers and their bravos. That or something like it is the objective of Fascism. And that, of course, is the slave-state, or rather the slave-world; it would probably be a stable form of society, and the chances are, considering the enormous wealth of the world if scientifically exploited, that the slaves would be well-fed and contented. It is usual to speak of the Fascist objective as the 'beehive state', which does a grave injustice to bees. A world of rabbits ruled by stoats would be nearer the mark. It is against this beastly possibility that we have got to combine.

The only thing for which we can combine is the underlying ideal of Socialism; justice and liberty. But it is hardly strong enough to call this ideal 'underlying'. It is almost completely forgotten. It has been buried beneath layer after layer of doctrinaire priggishness, party squabbles, and half-baked 'progressivism' until it is like a diamond hidden under a mountain of dung. The job of the Socialist is to get it out again. Justice and liberty! Those are the words that have got to ring like a bugle across the world. For a long time past, certainly for the last ten years, the devil has had all the best tunes. We have reached a stage when the very word 'Socialism' calls up, on the one hand, a picture of aeroplanes, tractors, and huge glittering factories of glass and concrete; on the other, a picture of vegetarians

with wilting beards, of Bolshevik commissars (half gangster, half gramophone), of earnest ladies in sandals, shock-headed Marxists chewing polysyllables, escaped Quakers, birth-control fanatics, and Labour Party backstairs-crawlers. Socialism, at least in this island, does not smell any longer of revolution and the overthrow of tyrants; it smells of crankishness, machine-worship, and the stupid cult of Russia. Unless you can remove that smell, and very rapidly, Fascism may win.

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And finally, is there anything one can do about it?

In the first part of this book I illustrated, by a few brief sidelights, the kind of mess we are in; in this second part I have been trying to explain why, in my opinion, so many normal decent people are repelled by the only remedy, namely by Socialism. Obviously the most urgent need of the next few years is to capture those normal decent ones before Fascism plays its trump card. I do not want to raise here the question of parties and political expedients. More important than any party label (though doubtless the mere menace of Fascism will presently bring some kind of Popular Front into existence) is the diffusion of Socialist doctrine in an effective form. People have got to be made ready to act as Socialists. There are, I believe, countless people who, without being aware of it, are in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, and who could be won over almost with-out a struggle if only one could find the word that would move them. Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty, everyone who has a genuine hatred of tyranny and war, is on the Socialist side, potentially. My job here, therefore, is to suggest — necessarily in very general terms — how a reconciliation might be effected between Socialism and its more intelligent enemies.

First, as to the enemies themselves — I mean all those people who grasp that capitalism is evil but who are conscious of a sort of queasy, shuddering sensation when Socialism is mentioned. As I have pointed out, this is traceable to two main causes. One is the personal inferiority of many individual Socialists; the other is the fact that Socialism is too often coupled with a fat-bellied, godless conception of 'progress' which revolts anyone with a feeling for tradition or the rudiments of an aesthetic sense. Let me take the second point first.

The distaste for 'progress' and machine-civilization which is so common among sensitive people is only defensible as an attitude of mind. It is not valid as a reason for rejecting Socialism, because it presupposes an alternative which does not exist. When you say, 'I object to mechanization and standardization — therefore I object to

Socialism', you are saying in effect, 'I am free to do without the machine if I choose', which is nonsense. We are all dependent upon the machine, and if the machines stopped working most of us would die. You may hate the machine-civilization, probably you are right to hate it, but for the present there can be no question of accepting or rejecting it. The machine-civilization is here, and it can only be criticized from the inside, because all of us are inside it. It is only romantic fools who natter themselves that they have escaped, like the literary gent in his Tudor cottage with bathroom h. and c., and the he-man who goes off to live a 'primitive' life in the jungle with a Mannlicher rifle and four wagon-loads of tinned food. And almost certainly the machine-civilization will continue to triumph. There is no reason to think that it will destroy itself or stop functioning of its own accord. For some time past it has been fashionable to say that war is presently going to 'wreck civilization' altogether; but, though the next full-sized war will certainly be horrible enough to make all previous ones seem a joke, it is immensely unlikely that it will put a stop to mechanical progress. It is true that a very vulnerable country like England, and perhaps the whole of western Europe, could be reduced to chaos by a few thousand well-placed bombs, but no war is at present thinkable which could wipe out industrialization in all countries simultaneously. We may take it that the return to a simpler, free, less mechanized way of life, however desirable it may be, is not going to happen. This is not fatalism, it is merely acceptance of facts. It is meaningless to oppose Socialism on the ground that you object to the beehive State, for the beehive State is here. The choice is not, as yet, between a human and an inhuman world. It is simply between Socialism and Fascism, which at its very best is Socialism with the virtues left out.

The job of the thinking person, therefore, is not to reject Socialism but to make up his mind to humanize it. Once Socialism is in a way to being established, those who can see through the swindle of 'progress' will probably find themselves resisting. In fact, it is their special function to do so. In the machine-world they have got to be a sort of permanent opposition, which is not the same thing as being an obstructionist or a traitor. But in this I am speaking of the future. For the moment the only possible course for any decent person, however

much of a Tory or an anarchist by temperament, is to work for the establishment of Socialism. Nothing else can save us from the misery of the present or the nightmare of the future. To oppose Socialism now, when twenty million Englishmen are underfed and Fascism has conquered half Europe, is suicidal. It is like starting a civil war when the Goths are crossing the frontier.

Therefore it is all the more important to get rid of that mere nervous prejudice against Socialism which is not founded on any serious objection. As I have pointed out already, many people who are not repelled by Socialism are repelled by Socialists. Socialism, as now presented, is unattractive largely because it appears, at any rate from the outside, to be the plaything of cranks, doctrinaires, parlour Bolsheviks, and so forth. But it is worth remembering that this is only so because the cranks, doctrinaires, etc., have been allowed to get there first J if the movement were invaded by better brains and more common decency, the objectionable types would cease to dominate it. For the present one must just set one's teeth and ignore them; they will loom much smaller when the movement has been humanized. Besides, they are irrelevant. We have got to fight for justice and liberty, and Socialism does mean justice and liberty when the nonsense is stripped off it. It is only the essentials that are worth remembering. To recoil from Socialism because so many individual Socialists are inferior people is as absurd as refusing to travel by train because you dislike the ticket-collector's face.

And secondly, as to the Socialist himself — more especially the vocal, tract-writing type of Socialist.

We are at a moment when it is desperately necessary for left-wingers of all complexions to drop their differences and hang together. Indeed this is already happening to a small extent. Obviously, then, the more intransigent kind of Socialist has now got to ally himself with people who are not in perfect agreement with him. As a rule he is rightly unwilling to do so, because he sees the very real danger of watering the whole Socialist movement down to some kind of pale-pink humbug even more ineffectual than the parliamentary Labour Party. At the moment, for instance, there is great danger that the Popular Front which Fascism will presumably bring into existence will not be genuinely Socialist in character, but

will simply be a manoeuvre against German and Italian (not English) Fascism. Thus the need to unite against Fascism might draw the Socialist into alliance with his very worst enemies. But the principle to go upon is this: that you are never in danger of allying yourself with the wrong people provided that you keep the essentials of your movement in the foreground. And what are the essentials of Socialism? What is the mark of a real Socialist? I suggest that the real Socialist is one who wishes — not merely conceives it as desirable, but actively wishes — to see tyranny overthrown. But I fancy that the majority of orthodox Marxists would not accept that definition, or would only accept it very grudgingly. Sometimes, when I listen to these people talking, and still more when I read their books, I get the impression that, to them, the whole Socialist movement is no more than a kind of exciting heresy-hunt — a leaping to and fro of frenzied witch-doctors to the beat of tom-toms and the tune of 'Fee fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of a right-wing deviationist!' It is because of this kind of thing that it is so much easier to feel yourself a Socialist when you are among working-class people. The working-class Socialist, like the working-class Catholic, 's weak on doctrine and can hardly open his mouth without uttering a heresy, but he has the heart of the matter in him. He does grasp the central fact that Socialism means the overthrow of tyranny, and the 'Marseillaise', if it were translated for his benefit, would appeal to him more deeply than any learned treatise on dialectical materialism. At this moment it is waste of time to insist that acceptance of Socialism means acceptance of the philosophic side of Marxism, plus adulation of Russia. The Socialist movement has not time to be a league of dialectical materialists; it has got to be a league of the oppressed against the oppressors. You have got to attract the man who means business, and you have got to drive away the mealy-mouthed Liberal who wants foreign Fascism destroyed in order that he may go on drawing his dividends peacefully — the type of humbug who passes resolutions 'against Fascism and Communism', i.e. against rats and rat-poison. Socialism means the overthrow of tyranny, at home as well as abroad. So long as you keep that fact well to the front, you will never be in much doubt as to who are your real supporters. As for minor differences — and the profoundest

philosophical difference is unimportant compared with saving the twenty million Englishmen whose bones are rotting from malnutrition — the time to argue about them is afterwards.

I do not think the Socialist need make any sacrifice of essentials, but certainly he will have to make a great sacrifice of externals. It would help enormously, for instance, if the smell of crankishness which still clings to the Socialist movement could be dispelled. If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaller, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly! But that, I am afraid, is not going to happen. What is possible, however, is for the more intelligent kind of Socialist to stop alienating possible supporters in silly and quite irrelevant ways. There are so many minor priggishness which could so easily be dropped. Take for instance the dreary attitude of the typical Marxist towards literature. Out of the many that come into my mind, I will give just one example. It sounds trivial, but it isn't. In the old Worker's Weekly (one of the forerunners of the Daily Worker) there used to be a column of literary chat of the 'Books on the Editor's Table' type. For several weeks miming there had been a certain amount of talk about Shakespeare; whereupon an incensed reader wrote to say, 'Dear Comrade, we don't want to hear about these bourgeois writers like Shakespeare. Can't you give us something a bit more proletarian?' etc., etc. The editor's reply was simple. 'If you will turn to the index of Marx's Capital,' he wrote, 'you will find that Shakespeare is mentioned several times.' And please notice that this was enough to silence the objector. Once Shakespeare had received the benediction of Marx, he became respectable. That is the mentality that drives ordinary sensible people away from the Socialist movement. You do not need to care about Shakespeare to be repelled by that kind of thing. Again, there is the horrible jargon that nearly all Socialists think it necessary to employ. When the ordinary person hears phrases like 'bourgeois ideology' and 'proletarian solidarity' and 'expropriation of the expropriators', he is not inspired by them, he is merely disgusted. Even the single word 'Comrade' has done its dirty little bit towards discrediting the Socialist movement. How many a waverer has halted on the brink,

gone perhaps to some public meeting and watched self-conscious Socialists dutifully addressing one another as 'Comrade', and then slid away, disillusioned, into the nearest four-ale bar! And his instinct is sound; for where is the sense of sticking on to yourself a ridiculous label which even after long practice can hardly be mentioned without a gulp of shame? It is fatal to let the ordinary inquirer get away with the idea that being a Socialist means wearing sandals and burbling about dialectical materialism. You have got to make it clear that there is room in the Socialist movement for human beings, or the game is up.

And this raises a great difficulty. It means that the issue of class, as distinct from mere economic status, has got to be faced more realistically than it is being faced at present.

I devoted three chapters to discussing the class-difficulty. The principal fact that will have emerged, I think, is that though the English class-system has outlived its usefulness, it has outlived it and shows no signs of dying. It greatly confuses the issue to assume, as the orthodox Marxist so often does (see for instance Mr Alee Brown's in some ways interesting book. The Fate of the Middle Classes), that social status is determined solely by income. Economically, no doubt, there are only two classes, the rich and the poor, but socially there is a whole hierarchy of classes, and the manners and traditions learned by each class in childhood are not only very different but — this is the essential point — generally persist from birth to death. 'Hence the anomalous individuals that you find in every class of society. You find writers like Wells and Bennett who have grown immensely rich and have yet preserved intact their lower-middle-class Nonconformist prejudices; you find millionaires who cannot pronounce their aitches; you find petty shopkeepers whose income is far lower than that of the bricklayer and who, nevertheless, consider themselves (and are considered) the bricklayer's social superiors; you find board-school boys ruling Indian provinces and public-school men touting vacuum cleaners. If social stratification corresponded precisely to economic stratification, the public-school man would assume a cockney accent the day his income dropped below L200 a year. But does he? On the contrary, he immediately becomes twenty times more Public School than before.

He clings to the Old School Tie as to a life-line. And even the aitchless millionaire, though sometimes he goes to an elocutionist and leams a B.B.C. accent, seldom succeeds in disguising himself as completely as he would like to. It is in fact very difficult to escape, culturally, from the class into which you have been born.

As prosperity declines, social anomalies grow commoner. You don't get more aitchless millionaires, but you do get more and more public-school men touting vacuum cleaners and more and more small shopkeepers driven into the workhouse. Large sections of the middle class are being gradually proletarianized; but the important point is that they do not, at any rate in the first generation, adopt a proletarian outlook. Here am I, for instance, with a bourgeois upbringing and a working-class income. Which class do I belong to? Economically I belong to the working class, but it is almost impossible for me to think of myself as anything but a member of the bourgeoisie. And supposing I had to take sides, whom should I side with, the upper class which is trying to squeeze me out of existence, or the working class whose manners are not my manners? It is probable that I personally, in any important issue, would side with the working class. But what about the tens or hundreds of thousands of others who are in approximately the same position? And what about that far larger class, running into millions this time — the office-workers and black-coated employees of all kinds — whose traditions are less definitely middle class but who would certainly not thank you if you called them proletarians? All of these people have the same interests and the same enemies as the working class. All are being robbed and bullied by the same system. Yet how many of them realize it? When the pinch came nearly all of them would side with their oppressors and against those who ought to be their allies. It is quite easy to imagine a middle class crushed down to the worst depths of poverty and still remaining bitterly anti-working-class in sentiment; this being, of course, a ready-made Fascist Party.

Obviously the Socialist movement has got to capture the exploited middle class before it is too late; above all it must capture the office-workers, who are so numerous and, if they knew how to combine, so powerful. Equally obviously it has so far failed to do so. The very last person in whom you can hope to find revolutionary opinions is a

clerk or a commercial traveller. Why? Very largely, I think, because of the 'proletarian' cant with which Socialist propaganda is mixed up. In order to symbolize the class war, there has been set up the more or less mythical figure of a 'proletarian', a muscular but downtrodden man in greasy overalls, in contradistinction to a 'capitalist', a fat, wicked man in a top hat and fur coat. It is tacitly assumed that there is no one in between; the truth being, of course, that in a country like England about a quarter of the population is in between. If you are going to harp on the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', it is an elementary precaution to start by explaining who the proletariat are. But because of the Socialist tendency to idealize the manual worker as such, this has never been made sufficiently clear. How many of the wretched shivering army of clerks and shopwalkers, who in some ways are actually worse off than a miner or a dock-hand, think of themselves as proletarians? A proletarian — so they have been taught to think — means a man without a collar. So that when you try to move them by talking about 'class war', you only succeed in scaring them; they forget their incomes and remember their accents, and fly to the defence of the class that is exploiting them.

Socialists have a big job ahead of them here. They have got to demonstrate, beyond possibility of doubt, just where the line of cleavage between exploiter and exploited comes. Once again it is a question of sticking to essentials; and the essential point here is that all people with small, insecure incomes are in the same boat and ought to be fighting on the same side. Probably we could do with a little less talk about' capitalist' and 'proletarian' and a little more about the robbers and the robbed. But at any rate we must drop that misleading habit of pretending that the only proletarians are manual labourers. It has got to be brought home to the clerk, the engineer, the commercial traveller, the middle-class man who has 'come down in the world', the village grocer, the lower-grade civil servant, and all other doubtful cases that they are the proletariat, and that Socialism means a fair deal for them as well as for the navvy and the factory-hand. They must not be allowed to think that the battle is between those who pronounce their aitches and those who don't; for if they think that, they will join in on the side of the aitches.

I am implying that different classes must be persuaded to act together without, for the moment, being asked to drop their class-differences. And that sounds dangerous. It sounds rather too like the Duke of York's summer camp and that dismal line of talk about class-cooperation and putting our shoulders to the wheel, which is eyewash or Fascism, or both. There can be no cooperation between classes whose real interests are opposed. The capitalist cannot cooperate with the proletarian. The cat cannot cooperate with the mouse; and if the cat does suggest cooperation and the mouse is fool enough to agree, in a very little while the mouse will be disappearing down the cat's throat. But it is always possible to cooperate so long as it is upon a basis of common interests. The people who have got to act together are all those who cringe to the boss and all those who shudder when they think of the rent. This means that the small-holder has got to ally himself with the factory-hand, the typist with the coal-miner, the schoolmaster with the garage mechanic. There is some hope of getting them to do so if they can be made to understand where their interest lies. But this will not happen if their social prejudices, which in some of them are at least as strong as any economic consideration, arc needlessly irritated. There is, after all, a real difference of manners and traditions between a bank clerk and a dock labourer, and the bank clerk's feeling of superiority is very deeply rooted. Later on he will have to get rid of it, but this is not a good moment for asking him. to do so. Therefore it would be a very great advantage if that rather meaningless and mechanical bourgeois-baiting, which is a part of nearly all Socialist propaganda, could be dropped for the time being. Throughout left-wing thought and writing — and the whole way through it, from the leading articles in the Daily Worker to the comic columns in the News Chronicle — there runs an anti-genteel tradition, a persistent and often very stupid gibing at genteel mannerisms and genteel loyalties (or, in Communist jargon, 'bourgeois values'). It is largely hum-bug, coming as it does from bourgeois-baiters who are bourgeois themselves, but it does great harm, because it allows a minor issue to block a major one. It directs attention away from the central fact that poverty is poverty, whether the tool you work with is a pick-axe or a fountain-pen.

Once again, here am I, with my middle-class origins and my

income of about three pounds a week from all sources. For what I am worth it would be better to get me in on the Socialist side than to turn me into a Fascist. But if you are constantly bullying me about my 'bourgeois ideology', if you give me to understand that in some subtle way I. am an inferior person because I have never worked with my hands, you will only succeed in antagonizing me. For you are telling me either that I am inherently useless or that I ought to alter myself in some way that is beyond my power. I cannot proletarianize my accent or certain of my tastes and beliefs, and I would not if I could. Why should I? I don't ask anybody else to speak my dialect; why should anybody else ask me to speak his? It would be far better to take those miserable class-stigmata for granted and emphasize them as little as possible. They are comparable to a race-difference, and experience shows that one can cooperate with foreigners, even with foreigners whom one dislikes, when it is really necessary. Economically, I am in the same boat with the miner, the navvy, and the farm-hand; remind me of that and I will fight at their side. But culturally I am different from the miner, the navvy, and the farm-hand: lay the emphasis on that and you may arm me against them. If I were a solitary anomaly I should not matter, but what is true of myself is true of countless others. Every bank clerk dreaming of the sack, every shop-keeper teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, is in essentially the same position. These are the sinking middle class, and most of them are clinging to their gentility under the impression that it keeps them afloat. It is not good policy to start by telling them to throw away the life-belt. There is a quite obvious danger that in the next few years large sections of the middle class will make a sudden and violent swing to the Right. In doing so they may become formidable. The weakness of the middle class hitherto has lain in the fact that they have never learned to combine; but if you frighten them into combining against you, you may find that you have raised up a devil. We had a brief glimpse of this possibility in the General Strike.

To sum up: There is no chance of righting the conditions I described in the earlier chapters of this book, or of saving England from Fascism, unless we can bring an effective Socialist party into existence. It will have to be a party with genuinely revolutionary intentions, and it will have to be numerically strong enough to act.

We can only get it if we offer an objective which fairly ordinary people will recognize as desirable. Beyond all else, therefore, we need intelligent propaganda. Less about 'class consciousness', 'expropriation of the expropriators', 'bourgeois ideology', and 'proletarian solidarity', not to mention the sacred sisters, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; and more about justice, liberty, and the plight of the unemployed. And less about mechanical progress, tractors, the Dnieper dam, and the latest salmon-canning factory in Moscow; that kind of thing is not an integral part of Socialist doctrine, and it drives away many people whom the Socialist cause needs, including most of those who can hold a pen. All that is needed is to hammer two facts home into the public consciousness. One, that the interests of all exploited people are the same; the other, that Socialism is compatible with common decency.

As for the terribly difficult issue of class-distinctions, the only possible policy for the moment is to go easy and not frighten more people than can be helped. And above all, no more of those muscular-curate efforts at class-breaking. If you belong to the bourgeoisie, don't be too eager to bound forward and embrace your proletarian brothers; they may not like it, and if they show that they don't like it you will probably find that your class-prejudices are not so dead as you imagined. And if you belong to the proletariat, by birth or in the sight of God, don't sneer too automatically at the Old School Tie; it covers loyalties which can be useful to you if you know how to handle them.

Yet I believe there is some hope that when Socialism is a living issue, a thing that large numbers of Englishmen genuinely care about, the class-difficulty may solve itself more rapidly than now seems thinkable. In the next few years we shall either get that effective Socialist party that we need, or we shall not get it. If we do not get it, then Fascism is coming; probably a slimy Anglicized form of Fascism, with cultured policemen instead of Nazi gorillas and the lion and the unicorn instead of the swastika. But if we do get it there will be a struggle, conceivably a physical one, for our plutocracy will not sit quiet under a genuinely revolutionary government. And when the widely separate classes who, necessarily, would form any real Socialist party have fought side by side, they may feel differently

about one another. And then perhaps this misery of class-prejudice will fade away, and we of the sinking middle class — the private schoolmaster, the half-starved free-lance journalist, the colonel's spinster daughter with L75 a year, the jobless Cambridge graduate, the ship's officer without a ship, the clerks, the civil servants, the commercial travellers, and the thrice-bankrupt drapers in the country towns — may sink without further struggles into the working class where we belong, and probably when we get there it will not be so dreadful as we feared, for, after all, we have nothing to lose but our aitches.

HOMAGE TO CATALONIA

Homage to Catalonia was published on the 25th of April 1938 by Secker and Warburg in Britain, but did not appear in print in America until 1952. The work relates Orwell's experience fighting Franco's Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. Orwell spent December 1936 until June 1937 in Catalonia and Aragon recording what it was like to fight at the front and experience the comradeship and divisions of the Republican movement. In the early section of the text he describes the social and political atmosphere in Barcelona where he witnesses a positive socialist spirit that has broken down class divisions. However, after a few weeks at the front Orwell began to notice tension and factions between the Republican groups. Orwell had joined the POUM (Worker's Party of Marxist Unification) and not the larger Soviet supported International Brigades because he needed a British leftist organisation provide documents for him. He was denied endorsement by the leader of the British Communist Party that caused him to have to gain support from the Independent Labour Party, who were affiliated with POUM. In the two appendices Orwell describes the differences between the left-wing factions and is critical of the way the foreign press covered the events of the war.

The time Orwell spent on the front line caused him to fully believe in socialism while awakening a loathing for Soviet communism, which would dominate his most famous novels. He noted in his essay 'Why I Write' in 1946 that it was after the Spanish Civil War every serious piece of work he produced was written against totalitarianism or for democratic socialism. When Orwell returned to Barcelona at the end of April he saw the infighting of the Republicans before the Soviet backed 'Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia' branded POUM a fascist organisation and began purges similar to those occurring against Stalin's opponents or former comrades in the U.S.S.R. Victor Gollancz, who had previously published Orwell's work, refused *Homage to Catalonia* as it was critical of Stalinist communism that was still viewed reverentially

amongst the British left during this period; Gollancz remained a staunch communist until the betrayal of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939. *Homage to Catalonia* is now considered to be one of the most important memoirs on the Spanish Civil War.

The Worker's Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) with whom Orwell fought

A tribute to Orwell in Barcelona

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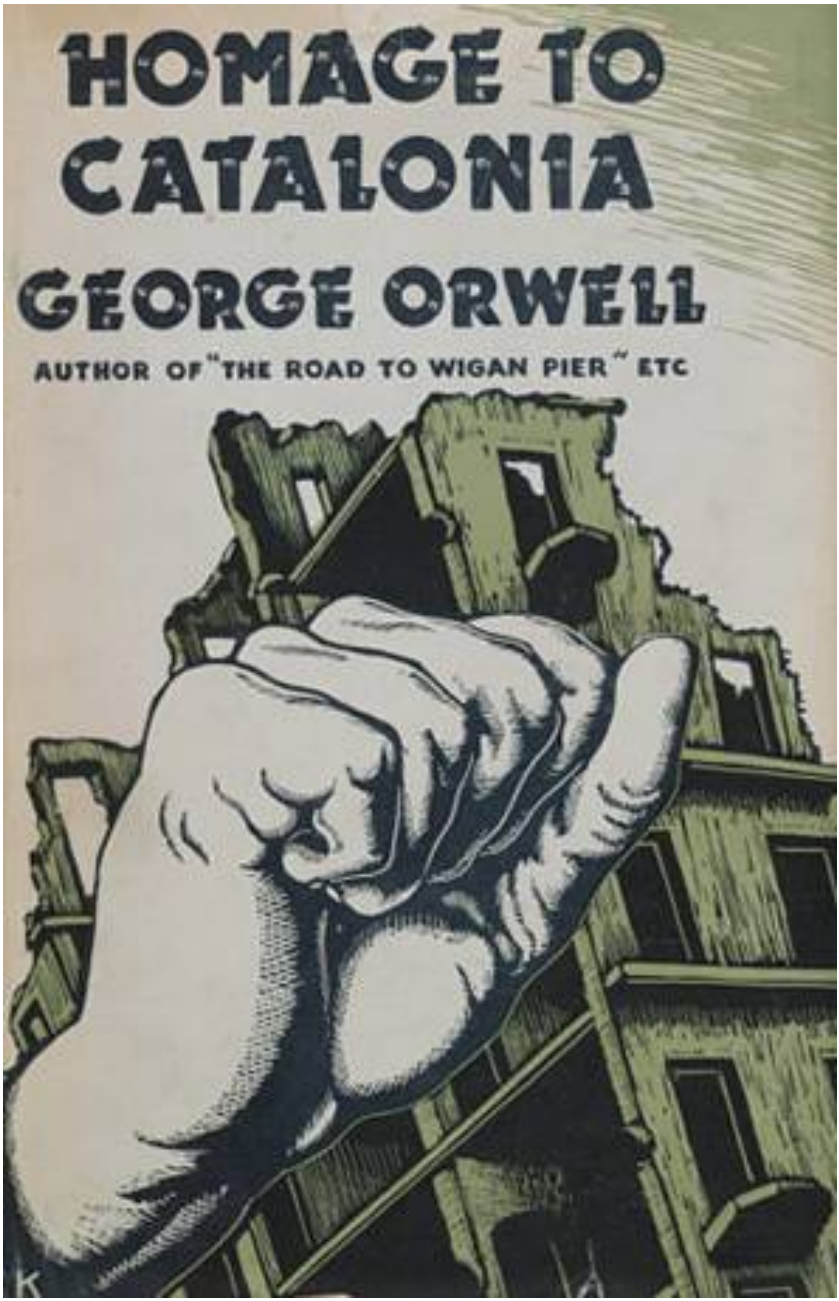


The first edition

Chapter 1

IN the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, the day before I joined the militia, I saw an Italian militiaman standing in front of the officers' table.

He was a tough-looking youth of twenty-five or six, with reddish-yellow hair and powerful shoulders. His peaked leather cap was pulled fiercely over one eye. He was standing in profile to me, his chin on his breast, gazing with a puzzled frown at a map which one of the officers had open on the table. Something in his face deeply moved me. It was the face of a man who would commit murder and throw away his life for a friend — the kind efface you would expect in an Anarchist, though as likely as not he was a Communist. There were both candour and ferocity in it; also the pathetic reverence that illiterate people have for their supposed superiors. Obviously he could not make head or tail of the map; obviously he regarded map-reading as a stupendous intellectual feat. I hardly know why, but I have seldom seen anyone — any man, I mean — to whom I have taken such an immediate liking. While they were talking round the table some remark brought it out that I was a foreigner. The Italian raised his head and said quickly:

'Italiano?'

I answered in my bad Spanish: 'No, Ingles. Y tu?'

'Italiano.'

As we went out he stepped across the room and gripped my hand very hard. Queer, the affection you can feel for a stranger! It was as though his spirit and mine had momentarily succeeded in bridging the gulf of language and tradition and meeting in utter intimacy. I hoped he liked me as well as I liked him. But I also knew that to retain my first impression of him I must not see him again; and needless to say I never did see him again. One was always making contacts of that kind in Spain.

I mention this Italian militiaman because he has stuck vividly in my memory. With his shabby uniform and fierce pathetic face he typifies for me the special atmosphere of that time. He is bound up with all my memories of that period of the war — the red flags in

Barcelona, the gaunt trains full of shabby soldiers creeping to the front, the grey war-stricken towns farther up the line, the muddy, ice-cold trenches in the mountains.

This was in late December 1936, less than seven months ago as I write, and yet it is a period that has already receded into enormous distance. Later events have obliterated it much more completely than they have obliterated 1935, or 1905, for that matter. I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do. The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Senior' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' and 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'. Tipping was forbidden by law; almost my first experience was receiving a lecture from a hotel manager for trying to tip a lift-boy. There were no private motor-cars, they had all been commandeered, and all the trams and taxis and much of the other transport were painted red and black. The revolutionary posters were everywhere, flaming from the walls in clean reds and blues that made the few remaining advertisements look like daubs of mud. Down the Ramblas, the wide central artery

of the town where crowds of people streamed constantly to and fro, the loudspeakers were bellowing revolutionary songs all day and far into the night. And it was the aspect of the crowds that was the queerest thing of all. In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no 'well-dressed' people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls, or some variant of the militia uniform. All this was queer and moving. There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. Also I believed that things were as they appeared, that this was really a workers' State and that the entire bourgeoisie had either fled, been killed, or voluntarily come over to the workers' side; I did not realize that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being.

Together with all this there was something of the evil atmosphere of war. The town had a gaunt untidy look, roads and buildings were in poor repair, the streets at night were dimly lit for fear of air — raids, the shops were mostly shabby and half-empty. Meat was scarce and milk practically unobtainable, there was a shortage of coal, sugar, and petrol, and a really serious shortage of bread. Even at this period the bread-queues were often hundreds of yards long. Yet so far as one could judge the people were contented and hopeful. There was no unemployment, and the price of living was still extremely low; you saw very few conspicuously destitute people, and no beggars except the gipsies. Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine. In the barbers' shops were Anarchist notices (the barbers were mostly Anarchists) solemnly explaining that barbers were no longer slaves. In the streets were coloured posters appealing to prostitutes to stop being prostitutes. To anyone from the hard-boiled, sneering civilization of the English — speaking races there was something rather pathetic in the literalness with which these idealistic Spaniards took the hackneyed phrases of revolution. At that time revolutionary

ballads of the naivest kind, all about proletarian brotherhood and the wickedness of Mussolini, were being sold on the streets for a few centimes each. I have often seen an illiterate militiaman buy one of these ballads, laboriously spell out the words, and then, when he had got the hang of it, begin singing it to an appropriate tune.

All this time I was at the Lenin Barracks, ostensibly in training for the front. When I joined the militia I had been told that I should be sent to the front the next day, but in fact I had to wait while a fresh centuria was got ready. The workers' militias, hurriedly raised by the trade unions at the beginning of the war, had not yet been organized on an ordinary army basis. The units of command were the 'section', of about thirty men, the centuria, of about a hundred men, and the 'column', which in practice meant any large number of men. The Lenin Barracks was a block of splendid stone buildings with a riding — school and enormous cobbled courtyards; it had been a cavalry barracks and had been captured during the July fighting. My centuria slept in one of the stables, under the stone mangers where the names of the cavalry chargers were still inscribed. All the horses had been seized and sent to the front, but the whole place still smelt of horse-piss and rotten oats. I was at the barracks about a week. Chiefly I remember the horsy smells, the quavering bugle-calls (all our buglers were amateurs — I first learned the Spanish bugle-calls by listening to them outside the Fascist lines), the tramp-tramp of hobnailed boots in the barrack yard, the long morning parades in the wintry sunshine, the wild games of football, fifty a side, in the gravelled riding — school. There were perhaps a thousand men at the barracks, and a score or so of women, apart from the militiamen's wives who did the cooking. There were still women serving in the militias, though not very many. In the early battles they had fought side by side with the men as a matter of course. It is a thing that seems natural in time of revolution. Ideas were changing already, however. The militiamen had to be kept out of the riding-school while the women were drilling there because they laughed at the women and put them off. A few months earlier no one would have seen anything comic in a woman handling a gun.

The whole barracks was in the state of filth and chaos to which the militia reduced every building they occupied and which seems to be

one of the by-products of revolution. In every comer you came upon piles of smashed furniture, broken saddles, brass cavalry-helmets, empty sabre-scabbards, and decaying food. There was frightful wastage of food, especially bread. From my barrack-room alone a basketful of bread was thrown away at every meal — a disgraceful thing when the civilian population was short of it. We ate at long trestle-tables out of permanently greasy tin pannikins, and drank out of a dreadful thing called a porron. A porron is a sort of glass bottle with a pointed spout from which a thin jet of wine spurts out whenever you tip it up; you can thus drink from a distance, without touching it with your lips, and it can be passed from hand to hand. I went on strike and demanded a drinking-cup as soon as I saw a porron in use. To my eye the things were altogether too like bed-bottles, especially when they were filled with white wine.

By degrees they were issuing the recruits with uniforms, and because this was Spain everything was issued piecemeal, so that it was never quite certain who had received what, and various of the things we most needed, such as belts and cartridge-boxes, were not issued till the last moment, when the train was actually waiting to take us to the front. I have spoken of the militia 'uniform', which probably gives a wrong impression. It was not exactly a uniform. Perhaps a 'multiform' would be the proper name for it. Everyone's clothes followed the same general plan, but they were never quite the same in any two cases. Practically everyone in the army wore corduroy knee-breeches, but there the uniformity ended. Some wore puttees, others corduroy gaiters, others leather leggings or high boots. Everyone wore a zipper jacket, but some of the jackets were of leather, others of wool and of every conceivable colour. The kinds of cap were about as numerous as their wearers. It was usual to adorn the front of your cap with a party badge, and in addition nearly every man. wore a red or red and black handkerchief round his throat. A militia column at that time was an extraordinary-looking rabble. But the clothes had to be issued as this or that factory rushed them out, and they were not bad clothes considering the circumstances. The shirts and socks were wretched cotton things, however, quite useless against cold. I hate to think of what the militiamen must have gone through in the earlier months before anything was organized. I

remember coming upon a newspaper of only about two months earlier in which one of the P.O.U.M. leaders, after a visit to the front, said that he would try to see to it that 'every militiaman had a blanket'. A phrase to make you shudder if you have ever slept in a trench.

On my second day at the barracks there began what was comically called 'instruction'. At the beginning there were frightful scenes of chaos. The recruits were mostly boys of sixteen or seventeen from the back streets of Barcelona, full of revolutionary ardour but completely ignorant of the meaning of war. It was impossible even to get them to stand in line. Discipline did not exist; if a man disliked an order he would step out of the ranks and argue fiercely with the officer. The lieutenant who instructed us was a stout, fresh-faced, pleasant young man who had previously been a Regular Army officer, and still looked like one, with his smart carriage and spick-and-span uniform. Curiously enough he was a sincere and ardent Socialist. Even more than the men themselves he insisted upon complete social equality between all ranks. I remember his pained surprise when an ignorant recruit addressed him as 'Senor'. 'What! Senor? Who is that calling me Senor? Are we not all comrades?' I doubt whether it made his job any easier. Meanwhile the raw recruits were getting no military training that could be of the slightest use to them. I had been told that foreigners were not obliged to attend 'instruction' (the Spaniards, I noticed, had a pathetic belief that all foreigners knew more of military matters than themselves), but naturally I turned out with the others. I was very anxious to learn how to use a machine-gun; it was a weapon I had never had a chance to handle. To my dismay I found that we were taught nothing about the use of weapons. The so-called instruction was simply parade-ground drill of the most antiquated, stupid kind; right turn, left turn, about turn, marching at attention in column of threes and all the rest of that useless nonsense which I had learned when I was fifteen years old. It was an extraordinary form for the training of a guerilla army to take. Obviously if you have only a few days in which to train a soldier, you must teach him the things he will most need; how to take cover, how to advance across open ground, how to mount guards and build a parapet — above all, how to use his weapons. Yet this mob of

eager children, who were going to be thrown into the front line in a few days' time, were not even taught how to fire a rifle or pull the pin out of a bomb. At the time I did not grasp that this was because there were no weapons to be had. In the P.O.U.M. militia the shortage of rifles was so desperate that fresh troops reaching the front always had to take their rifles from the troops they relieved in the line. In the whole of the Lenin Barracks there were, I believe, no rifles except those used by the sentries.

After a few days, though still a complete rabble by any ordinary standard, we were considered fit to be seen in public, and in the mornings we were marched out to the public gardens on the hill beyond the Plaza de Espana. This was the common drill-ground of all the party militias, besides the Carabineros and the first contingents of the newly formed Popular Army. Up in the public gardens it was a strange and heartening sight. Down every path and alley-way, amid the formal flower-beds, squads and companies of men marched stiffly to and fro, throwing out their chests and trying desperately to look like soldiers. All of them were unarmed and none completely in uniform, though on most of them the militia uniform was breaking out in patches here and there. The procedure was always very much the same. For three hours we strutted to and fro (the Spanish marching step is very short and rapid), then we halted, broke the ranks, and flocked thirstily to a little grocer's shop which was half-way down the hill and was doing a roaring trade in cheap wine. Everyone was very friendly to me. As an Englishman I was something of a curiosity, and the Carabinero officers made much of me and stood me drinks. Meanwhile, whenever I could get our lieutenant into a corner, I was clamouring to be instructed in the use of a machine-gun. I used to drag my Hugo's dictionary out of my pocket and start on him in my villainous Spanish:

'To se manejar fusil. Mo se manejar ametralladora. Quiero apprender ametralladora. Quando vamos apprender ametralladora?'

The answer was always a harassed smile and a promise that there should be machine-gun instruction manana. Needless to say manana never came. Several days passed and the recruits learned to march in step and spring to attention almost smartly, but if they knew which end of a rifle the bullet came out of, that was all they knew. One day

an armed Carabinero strolled up to us when we were halting and allowed us to examine his rifle. It turned out that in the whole of my section no one except myself even knew how to load the rifle, much less how to take aim.

All this time I was having the usual struggles with the Spanish language. Apart from myself there was only one Englishman at the barracks, and nobody even among the officers spoke a word of French. Things were not made easier for me by the fact that when my companions spoke to one another they generally spoke in Catalan. The only way I could get along was to carry everywhere a small dictionary which I whipped out of my pocket in moments of crisis. But I would sooner be a foreigner in Spain than in most countries. How easy it is to make friends in Spain I Within a day or two there was a score of militiamen who called me by my Christian name, showed me the ropes, and overwhelmed me with hospitality. I am not writing a book of propaganda and I do not want to idealize the P.O.U.M. militia. The whole militia — system had serious faults, and the men themselves were a mixed lot, for by this time voluntary recruitment was falling off and many of the best men were already at the front or dead. There was always among us a certain percentage who were completely useless. Boys of fifteen were being brought up for enlistment by their parents, quite openly for the sake of the ten pesetas a day which was the militiaman's wage; also for the sake of the bread which the militia received in plenty and could smuggle home to their parents. But I defy anyone to be thrown as I was among the Spanish working class — I ought perhaps to say the Catalan working class, for apart from a few Aragonese and Andalusians I mixed only with Catalans — and not be struck by their essential decency; above all, their straightforwardness and generosity. A Spaniard's generosity, in the ordinary sense of the word, is at times almost embarrassing. If you ask him for a cigarette he will force the whole packet upon you. And beyond this there is generosity in a deeper sense, a real largeness of spirit, which I have met with again and again in the most unpromising circumstances. Some of the journalists and other foreigners who travelled in Spain during the war have declared that in secret the Spaniards were bitterly jealous of foreign aid. All I can say is that I never observed

anything of the kind. I remember that a few days before I left the barracks a group of men returned on leave from the front. They were talking excitedly about their experiences and were full of enthusiasm for some French troops who had been next to them at Huesca. The French were very brave, they said; adding enthusiastically: 'Mas valientes que nosotros'— 'Braver than we are!' Of course I demurred, whereupon they explained that the French knew more of the art of war — were more expert with bombs, machine-guns, and so forth. Yet the remark was significant. An Englishman would cut his hand off sooner than say a thing like that.

Every foreigner who served in the militia spent his first few weeks in learning to love the Spaniards and in being exasperated by certain of their characteristics. In the front line my own exasperation sometimes reached the pitch of fury. The Spaniards are good at many things, but not at making war. All foreigners alike are appalled by their inefficiency, above all their maddening unpunctuality. The one Spanish word that no foreigner can avoid learning is manana— 'tomorrow' (literally, 'the morning'). Whenever it is conceivably possible, the business of today is put off until manana. This is so notorious that even the Spaniards themselves make jokes about it. In Spain nothing, from a meal to a battle, ever happens at the appointed time. As a general rule things happen too late, but just occasionally — just so that you shan't even be able to depend on their happening late — they happen too early. A train which is due to leave at eight will normally leave at any time between nine and ten, but perhaps once a week, thanks to some private whim of the engine-driver, it leaves at half past seven. Such things can be a little trying. In theory I rather admire the Spaniards for not sharing our Northern time-neurosis; but unfortunately I share it myself.

After endless rumours, mananas, and delays we were suddenly ordered to the front at two hours' notice, when much of our equipment was still unissued. There were terrible tumults in the quartermaster's store; in the end numbers of men had to leave without their full equipment. The barracks had promptly filled with women who seemed to have sprung up from the ground and were helping their men-folk to roll their blankets and pack their kit-bags. It was rather humiliating that I had to be shown how to put on my new

leather cartridge-boxes by a Spanish girl, the wife of Williams, the other English militiaman. She was a gentle, dark-eyed, intensely feminine creature who looked as though her life — work was to rock a cradle, but who as a matter of fact had fought bravely in the street-battles of July. At this time she was carrying a baby which was born just ten months after the outbreak of war and had perhaps been begotten behind a barricade.

The train was due to leave at eight, and it was about ten past eight when the harassed, sweating officers managed to marshal us in the barrack square. I remember very vividly the torchlit scene — the uproar and excitement, the red flags flapping in the torchlight, the massed ranks of militiamen with their knapsacks on their backs and their rolled blankets worn bandolier-wise across the shoulder; and the shouting and the clatter of boots and tin pannikins, and then a tremendous and finally successful hissing for silence; and then some political commissar standing beneath a huge rolling red banner and making us a speech in Catalan. Finally they marched us to the station, taking the longest route, three or four miles, so as to show us to the whole town. In the Ramblas they halted us while a borrowed band played some revolutionary tune or other. Once again the conquering-hero stuff — shouting and enthusiasm, red flags and red and black flags everywhere, friendly crowds thronging the pavement to have a look at us, women waving from the windows. How natural it all seemed then; how remote and improbable now! The train was packed so tight with men that there was barely room even on the floor, let alone on the seats. At the last moment Williams's wife came rushing down the platform and gave us a bottle of wine and a foot of that bright red sausage which tastes of soap and gives you diarrhoea. The train crawled out of Catalonia and on to the plateau of Aragon at the normal wartime speed of something under twenty kilometres an hour.

Chapter 2

BARBASTRO, though a long way from the front line, looked bleak and chipped. Swarms of militiamen in shabby uniforms wandered up and down the streets, trying to keep warm. On a ruinous wall I came upon a poster dating from the previous year and announcing that 'six handsome bulls' would be killed in the arena on such and such a date. How forlorn its faded colours looked! Where were the handsome bulls and the handsome bull-fighters now? It appeared that even in Barcelona there were hardly any bullfights nowadays; for some reason all the best matadors were Fascists.

They sent my company by lorry to Sietamo, then westward to Alcubierre, which was just behind the line fronting Zaragoza. Sietamo had been fought over three times before the Anarchists finally took it in October, and parts of it were smashed to pieces by shell-fire and most of the houses pockmarked by rifle-bullets. We were 1500 feet above sea-level now. It was beastly cold, with dense mists that came swirling up from nowhere. Between Sietamo and Alcubierre the lorry — driver lost his way (this was one of the regular features of the war) and we were wandering for hours in the mist. It was late at night when we reached Alcubierre. Somebody shepherded us through morasses of mud into a mule-stable where we dug ourselves down into the chaff and promptly fell asleep. Chaff is not bad to sleep in when it is clean, not so good as hay but better than straw. It was only in the morning light that I discovered that the chaff was full of breadcrusts, torn newspapers, bones, dead rats, and jagged milk tins.

We were near the front line now, near enough to smell the characteristic smell of war — in my experience a smell of excrement and decaying food. Alcubierre had never been shelled and was in a better state than most of the villages immediately behind the line. Yet I believe that even in peacetime you could not travel in that part of Spain without being struck by the peculiar squalid misery of the Aragonese villages. They are built like fortresses, a mass of mean little houses of mud and stone huddling round the church, and even in spring you see hardly a flower anywhere; the houses have no

gardens, only back-yards where ragged fowls skate over the beds of mule-dung. It was vile weather, with alternate mist and rain. The narrow earth roads had been churned into a sea of mud, in places two feet deep, through which the lorries struggled with racing wheels and the peasants led their clumsy carts which were pulled by strings of mules, sometimes as many as six in a string, always pulling tandem. The constant come-and-go of troops had reduced the village to a state of unspeakable filth. It did not possess and never had possessed such a thing as a lavatory or a drain of any kind, and there was not a square yard anywhere where you could tread without watching your step. The church had long been used as a latrine; so had all the fields for a quarter of a mile round. I never think of my first two months at war without thinking of wintry stubble fields whose edges are crusted with dung.

Two days passed and no rifles were issued to us. When you had been to the Comite de Guerra and inspected the row of holes in the wall — holes made by rifle-volleys, various Fascists having been executed there — you had seen all the sights that Alcubierre contained. Up in the front line things were obviously quiet; very few wounded were coming in. The chief excitement was the arrival of Fascist deserters, who were brought under guard from the front line. Many of the troops opposite us on this part of the line were not Fascists at all, merely wretched conscripts who had been doing their military service at the time when war broke out and were only too anxious to escape. Occasionally small batches of them took the risk of slipping across to our lines. No doubt more would have done so if their relatives had not been in Fascist territory. These deserters were the first 'real' Fascists I had ever seen. It struck me that they were indistinguishable from ourselves, except that they wore khaki overalls. They were always ravenously hungry when they arrived — natural enough after a day or two of dodging about in no man's land, but it was always triumphantly pointed to as a proof that the Fascist troops were starving. I watched one of them being fed in a peasant's house. It was somehow rather a pitiful sight. A tall boy of twenty, deeply windburnt, with his clothes in rags, crouched over the fire shovelling a pannikinful of stew into himself at desperate speed; and all the while his eyes flitted nervously round the ring of militiamen

who stood watching him. I think he still half-believed that we were bloodthirsty 'Reds' and were going to shoot him as soon as he had finished his meal; the armed man who guarded him kept stroking his shoulder and making reassuring noises. On one memorable day fifteen deserters arrived in a single batch. They were led through the village in triumph with a man riding in front of them on a white horse. I managed to take a rather blurry photograph which was stolen from me later.

On our third morning in Alcubierre the rifles arrived. A sergeant with a coarse dark-yellow face was handing them out in the mule-stable. I got a shock of dismay when I saw the thing they gave me. It was a German Mauser dated 1896 — more than forty years old! It was rusty, the bolt was stiff, the wooden barrel-guard was split; one glance down the muzzle showed that it was corroded and past praying for. Most of the rifles were equally bad, some of them even worse, and no attempt was made to give the best weapons to the men who knew how to use them. The best rifle of the lot, only ten years old, was given to a half — witted little beast of fifteen, known to everyone as the maricoon (Nancy-boy). The sergeant gave us five minutes' 'instruction', which consisted in explaining how you loaded a rifle and how you took the bolt to pieces. Many of the militiamen had never had a gun in their hands before, and very few, I imagine, knew what the sights were for. Cartridges were handed out, fifty to a man, and then the ranks were formed and we strapped our kits on our backs and set out for the front line, about three miles away.

The centuria, eighty men and several dogs, wound raggedly up the road. Every militia column had at least one dog attached to it as a mascot. One wretched brute that marched with us had had P.O.U.M. branded on it in huge letters and slunk along as though conscious that there was something wrong with its appearance. At the head of the column, beside the red flag, Georges Kopp, the stout Belgian commandante, was riding a black horse; a little way ahead a youth from the brigand-like militia cavalry pranced to and fro, galloping up every piece of rising ground and posing himself in picturesque attitudes at the summit. The splendid horses of the Spanish cavalry had been captured in large numbers during the revolution and handed over to the militia, who, of course, were busy riding them to death.

The road wound between yellow infertile fields, untouched since last year's harvest. Ahead of us was the low sierra that lies between Alcubierre and Zaragoza. We were getting near the front line now, near the bombs, the machine-guns, and the mud. In secret I was frightened. I knew the line was quiet at present, but unlike most of the men about me I was old enough to remember the Great War, though not old enough to have fought in it. War, to me, meant roaring projectiles and skipping shards of steel; above all it meant mud, lice, hunger, and cold. It is curious, but I dreaded the cold much more than I dreaded the enemy. The thought of it had been haunting me all the time I was in Barcelona; I had even lain awake at nights thinking of the cold in the trenches, the stand-to's in the grisly dawns, the long hours on sentry-go with a frosted rifle, the icy mud that would slop over my boot-tops. I admit, too, that I felt a kind of horror as I looked at the people I was marching among. You cannot possibly conceive what a rabble we looked. We straggled along with far less cohesion than a flock of sheep; before we had gone two miles the rear of the column was out of sight. And quite half of the so-called men were children — but I mean literally children, of sixteen years old at the very most. Yet they were all happy and excited at the prospect of getting to the front at last. As we neared the line the boys round the red flag in front began to utter shouts of 'Visca P.O.U.M.!' 'Fascistas — maricones!' and so forth — shouts which were meant to be war-like and menacing, but which, from those childish throats, sounded as pathetic as the cries of kittens. It seemed dreadful that the defenders of the Republic should be this mob of ragged children carrying worn-out rifles which they did not know how to use. I remember wondering what would happen if a Fascist aeroplane passed our way whether the airman would even bother to dive down and give us a burst from his machine — gun. Surely even from the air he could see that we were not real soldiers?

As the road struck into the sierra we branched off to the right and climbed a narrow mule-track that wound round the mountain-side. The hills in that part of Spain are of a queer formation, horseshoe-shaped with flattish tops and very steep sides running down into immense ravines. On the higher slopes nothing grows except stunted shrubs and heath, with the white bones of the limestone sticking out

everywhere. The front line here was not a continuous line of trenches, which would have been impossible in such mountainous country; it was simply a chain of fortified posts, always known as ‘positions’, perched on each hill-top. In the distance you could see our ‘position’ at the crown of the horseshoe; a ragged barricade of sand-bags, a red flag fluttering, the smoke of dug-out fires. A little nearer, and you could smell a sickening sweetish stink that lived in my nostrils for weeks afterwards. Into the cleft immediately behind the position all the refuse of months had been tipped — a deep festering bed of breadcrusts, excrement, and rusty tins.

The company we were relieving were getting their kits together. They had been three months in the line; their uniforms were caked with mud, their boots falling to pieces, their faces mostly bearded. The captain commanding the position, Levinski by name, but known to everyone as Benjamin, and by birth a Polish Jew, but speaking French as his native language, crawled out of his dug-out and greeted us. He was a short youth of about twenty-five, with stiff black hair and a pale eager face which at this period of the war was always very dirty. A few stray bullets were cracking high overhead. The position was a semi — circular enclosure about fifty yards across, with a parapet that was partly sand-bags and partly lumps of limestone. There were thirty or forty dug-outs running into the ground like rat-holes. Williams, myself, and Williams’s Spanish brother-in-law made a swift dive for the nearest unoccupied dug-out that looked habitable. Somewhere in front an occasional rifle banged, making queer rolling echoes among the stony hills. We had just dumped our kits and were crawling out of the dug-out when there was another bang and one of the children of our company rushed back from the parapet with his face pouring blood. He had fired his rifle and had somehow managed to blow out the bolt; his scalp was torn to ribbons by the splinters of the burst cartridge — case. It was our first casualty, and, characteristically, self — inflicted.

In the afternoon we did our first guard and Benjamin showed us round the position. In front of the parapet there ran a system of narrow trenches hewn out of the rock, with extremely primitive loopholes made of piles of limestone. There were twelve sentries, placed at various points in the trench and behind the inner parapet. In

front of the trench was the barbed wire, and then the hillside slid down into a seemingly bottomless ravine; opposite were naked hills, in places mere cliffs of rock, all grey and wintry, with no life anywhere, not even a bird. I peered cautiously through a loophole, trying to find the Fascist trench.

'Where are the enemy?'

Benjamin waved his hand expansively. 'Over zere.' (Benjamin spoke English — terrible English.)

'But where?'

According to my ideas of trench warfare the Fascists would be fifty or a hundred yards away. I could see nothing — seemingly their trenches were very well concealed. Then with a shock of dismay I saw where Benjamin was pointing; on the opposite hill-top, beyond the ravine, seven hundred metres away at the very least, the tiny outline of a parapet and a red-and-yellow flag — the Fascist position. I was indescribably disappointed. We were nowhere near them! At that range our rifles were completely useless. But at this moment there was a shout of excitement. Two Fascists, greyish figurines in the distance, were scrambling up the naked hill-side opposite. Benjamin grabbed the nearest man's rifle, took aim, and pulled the trigger. Click! A dud cartridge; I thought it a bad omen.

The new sentries were no sooner in the trench than they began firing a terrific fusillade at nothing in particular. I could see the Fascists, tiny as ants, dodging to and fro behind their parapet, and sometimes a black dot which was a head would pause for a moment, impudently exposed. It was obviously no use firing. But presently the sentry on my left, leaving his post in the typical Spanish fashion, sidled up to me and began urging me to fire. I tried to explain that at that range and with these rifles you could not hit a man except by accident. But he was only a child, and he kept motioning with his rifle towards one of the dots, grinning as eagerly as a dog that expects a pebble to be thrown. Finally I put my sights up to seven hundred and let fly. The dot disappeared. I hope it went near enough to make him jump. It was the first time in my life that I had fired a gun at a human being.

Now that I had seen the front I was profoundly disgusted. They called this war! And we were hardly even in touch with the enemy! I

made no attempt to keep my head below the level of the trench. A little while later, however, a bullet shot past my ear with a vicious crack and banged into the parados behind. Alas! I ducked. All my life I had sworn that I would not duck the first time a bullet passed over me; but the movement appears to be instinctive, and almost everybody does it at least once.

Chapter 3

IN trench warfare five things are important: firewood, food, tobacco, candles, and the enemy. In winter on the Zaragoza front they were important in that order, with the enemy a bad last. Except at night, when a surprise — attack was always conceivable, nobody bothered about the enemy. They were simply remote black insects whom one occasionally saw hopping to and fro. The real preoccupation of both armies was trying to keep warm.

I ought to say in passing that all the time I was in Spain I saw very little fighting. I was on the Aragon front from January to May, and between January and late March little or nothing happened on that front, except at Teruel. In March there was heavy fighting round Huesca, but I personally played only a minor part in it. Later, in June, there was the disastrous attack on Huesca in which several thousand men were killed in a single day, but I had been wounded and disabled before that happened. The things that one normally thinks of as the horrors of war seldom happened to me. No aeroplane ever dropped a bomb anywhere near me, I do not think a shell ever exploded within fifty yards of me, and I was only in hand-to-hand fighting once (once is once too often, I may say). Of course I was often under heavy machine-gun fire, but usually at longish. ranges. Even at Huesca you were generally safe enough if you took reasonable precautions.

Up here, in the hills round Zaragoza, it was simply the mingled boredom and discomfort of stationary warfare. A life as uneventful as a city clerk's, and almost as regular. Sentry-go, patrols, digging; digging, patrols, sentry-go. On every hill-top. Fascist or Loyalist, a knot of ragged, dirty men shivering round their flag and trying to keep warm. And all day and night the meaningless bullets wandering across the empty valleys and only by some rare improbable chance getting home on a human body.

Often I used to gaze round the wintry landscape and marvel at the futility of it all. The inconclusiveness of such a kind of war! Earlier, about October, there had been savage fighting for all these hills; then, because the lack of men and arms, especially artillery, made any

large-scale operation impossible, each army had dug itself in and settled down on the hill-tops it had won. Over to our right there was a small outpost, also P.O.U.M., and on the spur to our left, at seven o'clock of us, a P.S.U.C. position faced a taller spur with several small Fascist posts dotted on its peaks. The so-called line zigzagged to and fro in a pattern that would have been quite unintelligible if every position had not flown a flag. The P.O.U.M. and P.S.U.C. flags were red, those of the Anarchists red and black; the Fascists generally flew the monarchist flag (red-yellow-red), but occasionally they flew the flag of the Republic (red-yellow-purple). The scenery was stupendous, if you could forget that every mountain — top was occupied by troops and was therefore littered with tin cans and crusted with dung. To the right of us the sierra bent south — eastwards and made way for the wide, veined valley that stretched across to Huesca. In the middle of the plain a few tiny cubes sprawled like a throw of dice; this was the town of Robres, which was in Loyalist possession. Often in the mornings the valley was hidden under seas of cloud, out of which the hills rose flat and blue, giving the landscape a strange resemblance to a photographic negative. Beyond Huesca there were more hills of the same formation as our own, streaked with a pattern of snow which altered day by day. In the far distance the monstrous peaks of the Pyrenees, where the snow never melts, seemed to float upon nothing. Even down in the plain everything looked dead and bare. The hills opposite us were grey and wrinkled like the skins of elephants. Almost always the sky was empty of birds. I do not think I have ever seen a country where there were so few birds. The only birds one saw at any time were a kind of magpie, and the coveys of partridges that startled one at night with their sudden whirring, and, very rarely, the flights of eagles that drifted slowly over, generally followed by rifle-shots which they did not deign to notice.

At night and in misty weather, patrols were sent out in the valley between ourselves and the Fascists. The job was not popular, it was too cold and too easy to get lost, and I soon found that I could get leave to go out on patrol as often as I wished. In the huge jagged ravines there were no paths or tracks of any kind; you could only find your way about by making successive journeys and noting fresh

landmarks each time. As the bullet flies the nearest Fascist post was seven hundred metres from our own, but it was a mile and a half by the only practicable route. It was rather fun wandering about the dark valleys with the stray bullets flying high overhead like redshanks whistling. Better than night-time were the heavy mists, which often lasted all day and which had a habit of clinging round the hill-tops and leaving the valleys clear. When you were anywhere near the Fascist lines you had to creep at a snail's pace; it was very difficult to move quietly on those hill-sides, among the crackling shrubs and tinkling limestones. It was only at the third or fourth attempt that I managed to find my way to the Fascist lines. The mist was very thick, and I crept up to the barbed wire to listen. I could hear the Fascists talking and singing inside. Then to my alarm I heard several of them coming down the hill towards me. I cowered behind a bush that suddenly seemed very small, and tried to cock my rifle without noise. However, they branched off and did not come within sight of me. Behind the bush where I was hiding I came upon various relics of the earlier fighting — a pile of empty cartridge-cases, a leather cap with a bullet-hole in it, and a red flag, obviously one-of our own. I took it back to the position, where it was unsentimentally torn up for cleaning-rags.

I had been made a corporal, or cabo, as it was called, as soon as we reached the front, and was in command of a guard of twelve men. It was no sinecure, especially at first. The centuria was an untrained mob composed mostly of boys in their teens. Here and there in the militia you came across children as young as eleven or twelve, usually refugees from Fascist territory who had been enlisted as militiamen as the easiest way of providing for them. As a rule they were employed on light work in the rear, but sometimes they managed to worm their way to the front line, where they were a public menace. I remember one little brute throwing a hand-grenade into the dug-out fire 'for a joke'. At Monte Pocero I do not think there was anyone younger than fifteen, but the average age must have been well under twenty. Boys of this age ought never to be used in the front line, because they cannot stand the lack of sleep which is inseparable from trench warfare. At the beginning it was almost impossible to keep our position properly guarded at night. The

wretched children of my section could only be roused by dragging them out of their dug-outs feet foremost, and as soon as your back was turned they left their posts and slipped into shelter; or they would even, in spite of the frightful cold, lean up against the wall of the trench and fall fast asleep. Luckily the enemy were very unenterprising. There were nights when it seemed to me that our position could be stormed by twenty Boy Scouts armed with airguns, or twenty Girl Guides armed with battledores, for that matter.

At this time and until much later the Catalan militias were still on the same basis as they had been at the beginning of the war. In the early days of Franco's revolt the militias had been hurriedly raised by the various trade unions and political parties; each was essentially a political organization, owing allegiance to its party as much as to the central Government. When the Popular Army, which was a 'non-political' army organized on more or less ordinary lines, was raised at the beginning of 1937, the party militias were theoretically incorporated in it. But for a long time the only changes that occurred were on paper; the new Popular Army troops did not reach the Aragon front in any numbers till June, and until that time the militia-system remained unchanged. The essential point of the system was social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality. If you wanted to slap the general commanding the division on the back and ask him for a cigarette, you could do so, and no one thought it curious. In theory at any rate each militia was a democracy and not a hierarchy. It was understood that orders had to be obeyed, but it was also understood that when you gave an order you gave it as comrade to comrade and not as superior to inferior. There were officers and N.C.O.S. but there was no military rank in the ordinary sense; no titles, no badges, no heel-clicking and saluting. They had attempted to produce within the militias a sort of temporary working model of the classless society. Of course there was no perfect equality, but there was a nearer approach to it than I had ever seen or than I would have thought conceivable in time of war.

But I admit that at first sight the state of affairs at the front horrified me. How on earth could the war be won by an army of this

type? It was what everyone was saying at the time, and though it was true it was also unreasonable. For in the circumstances the militias could not have been much better than they were. A modern mechanized army does not spring up out of the ground, and if the Government had waited until it had trained troops at its disposal, Franco wouKt-never have been resisted. Later it became the fashion to decry the militias, and therefore to pretend that the faults which were due to lack of training and weapons were the result of the equalitarian system. Actually, a newly raised draft 'of militia was an undisciplined mob not because the officers called the private 'Comrade' but because raw troops are always an undisciplined mob. In practice the democratic 'revolutionary' type of discipline is more reliable than might be expected. In a workers' army discipline is theoretically voluntary. It is based on class-loyalty, whereas the discipline of a bourgeois conscript army is based ultimately on fear. (The Popular Army that replaced the militias was midway between the two types.) In the militias the bullying and abuse that go on in an ordinary army would never have been tolerated for a moment. The normal military punishments existed, but they were only invoked for very serious offences. When a man refused to obey an order you did not immediately get him punished; you first appealed to him in the name of comradeship. Cynical people with no experience of handling men will say instantly that this would never 'work', but as a matter of fact it does 'work' in the long run. The discipline of even the worst drafts of militia visibly improved as time went on. In January the job of keeping a dozen raw recruits up to the mark almost turned my hair grey. In May for a short while I was acting-lieutenant in command of about thirty men, English and Spanish. We had all been under fire for months, and I never had the slightest difficulty in getting an order obeyed or in getting men to volunteer for a dangerous job. 'Revolutionary' discipline depends on political consciousness — on an understanding of why orders must be obeyed; it takes time to diffuse this, but it also takes time to drill a man into an automaton on the barrack-square. The journalists who sneered at the militia-system seldom remembered that the militias had to hold the line while the Popular Army was training in the rear. And it is a tribute to the strength of 'revolutionary' discipline that the

militias stayed in the field-at all. For until about June 1937 there was nothing to keep them there, except class loyalty. Individual deserters could be shot — were shot, occasionally — but if a thousand men had decided to walk out of the line together there was no force to stop them. A conscript army in the same circumstances — with its battle-police removed — would have melted away. Yet the militias held the line, though God knows they won very few victories, and even individual desertions were not common. In four or five months in the P.O.U.M. militia I only heard of four men deserting, and two of those were fairly certainly spies who had enlisted to obtain information. At the beginning the apparent chaos, the general lack of training, the fact that you often had to argue for five minutes before you could get an order obeyed, appalled and infuriated me. I had British Army ideas, and certainly the Spanish militias were very unlike the British Army. But considering the circumstances they were better troops than one had any right to expect.

Meanwhile, firewood — always firewood. Throughout that period there is probably no entry in my diary that does not mention firewood, or rather the lack of it. We were between two and three thousand feet above sea-level, it was mid winter and the cold was unspeakable. The temperature was not exceptionally low, on many nights it did not even freeze, and the wintry sun often shone for an hour in the middle of the day; but even if it was not really cold, I assure you that it seemed so. Sometimes there were shrieking winds that tore your cap off and twisted your hair in all directions, sometimes there were mists that poured into the trench like a liquid and seemed to penetrate your bones; frequently it rained, and even a quarter of an hour's rain was enough to make conditions intolerable. The thin skin of earth over the limestone turned promptly into a slippery grease, and as you were always walking on a slope it was impossible to keep your footing. On dark nights I have often fallen half a dozen times in twenty yards; and this was dangerous, because it meant that the lock of one's rifle became jammed with mud. For days together clothes, boots, blankets, and rifles were more or less coated with mud. I had brought as many thick clothes as I could carry, but many of the men were terribly underclad. For the whole garrison, about a hundred men, there were only twelve great-coats,

which had to be handed from sentry to sentry, and most of the men had only one blanket. One icy night I made a list in my diary of the clothes I was wearing. It is of some interest as showing the amount of clothes the human body can carry. I was wearing a thick vest and pants, a flannel shirt, two pull-overs, a woollen jacket, a pigskin jacket, corduroy breeches, puttees, thick socks, boots, a stout trench-coat, a muffler, lined leather gloves, and a woollen cap. Nevertheless I was shivering like a jelly. But I admit I am unusually sensitive to cold.

Firewood was the one thing that really mattered. The point about the firewood was that there was practically no firewood to be had. Our miserable mountain had not even at its best much vegetation, and for months it had been ranged over by freezing militiamen, with the result that everything thicker than one's finger had long since been burnt. When we were not eating, sleeping, on guard, or on fatigue-duty we were in the valley behind the position, scrounging for fuel. All my memories of that time are memories of scrambling up and down the almost perpendicular slopes, over the jagged limestone that knocked one's boots to pieces, pouncing eagerly on tiny twigs of wood. Three people searching for a couple of hours could collect enough fuel to keep the dug-out fire alight for about an hour. The eagerness of our search for firewood turned us all into botanists. We classified according to their burning qualities every plant that grew on the mountain-side; the various heaths and grasses that were good to start a fire with but burnt out in a few minutes, the wild rosemary and the tiny whin bushes that would burn when the fire was well alight, the stunted oak tree, smaller than a gooseberry bush, that was practically unburnable. There was a kind of dried-up reed that was very good for starting fires with, but these grew only on the hill-top to the left of the position, and you had to go under fire to get them. If the Fascist machine-gunners saw you they gave you a drum of ammunition all to yourself. Generally their aim was high and the bullets sang overhead like birds, but sometime they crackled and chipped the limestone uncomfortably close, whereupon you flung yourself on your face. You went on gathering reeds, however; nothing mattered in comparison with firewood.

Beside the cold the other discomforts seemed petty. Of course all

of us were permanently dirty. Our water, like our food, came on mule-back from Alcubierre, and each man's share worked out at about a quart a day. It was beastly water, hardly more transparent than milk. Theoretically it was for drinking only, but I always stole a pannikinful for washing in the mornings. I used to wash one day and shave the next; there was never enough water for both. The position stank abominably, and outside the little enclosure of the barricade there was excrement everywhere. Some of the militiamen habitually defecated in the trench, a disgusting thing when one had to walk round it in the darkness. But the dirt never worried me. Dirt is a thing people make too much fuss about. It is astonishing how quickly you get used to doing without a handkerchief and to eating out of the tin pannikin in which you also wash. Nor was sleeping in one's clothes any hardship after a day or two. It was of course impossible to take one's clothes and especially one's boots off at night; one had to be ready to turn out instantly in case of an attack. In eighty nights I only took my clothes off three times, though I did occasionally manage to get them off in the daytime. It was too cold for lice as yet, but rats and mice abounded. It is often said that you don't find rats and mice in the same place, but you do when there is enough food for them.

In other ways we were not badly off. The food was good enough and there was plenty of wine. Cigarettes were still being issued at the rate of a packet a day, matches were issued every other day, and there was even an issue of candles. They were very thin candles, like those on a Christmas cake, and were popularly supposed to have been looted from churches. Every dug-out was issued daily with three inches of candle, which would bum for about twenty minutes. At that time it was still possible to buy candles, and I had brought several pounds of them with me. Later on the famine of matches and candles made life a misery. You do not realize the importance of these things until you lack them. In a night-alarm, for instance, when everyone in the dug — out is scrambling for his rifle and treading on everybody else's face, being able to strike a light may make the difference between life and death. Every militiaman possessed a tinder-lighter and several yards of yellow wick. Next to his rifle it was his most important possession. The tinder-lighters had the great advantage that they could be struck in a wind, but they would only

smoulder, so that they were no use for lighting a fire. When the match famine was at its worst our only way of producing a flame was to pull the bullet out of a cartridge and touch the cordite off with a tinder-lighter.

It was an extraordinary life that we were living — an extraordinary way to be at war, if you could call it war. The whole militia chafed against the inaction and clamoured constantly to know why we were not allowed to attack. But it was perfectly obvious that there would be no battle for a long while yet, unless the enemy started it. Georges Kopp, on his periodical tours of inspection, was quite frank with us. 'This is not a war,' he used to say, 'it is a comic opera with an occasional death.' As a matter of fact the stagnation on the Aragon front had political causes of which I knew nothing at that time; but the purely military difficulties — quite apart from the lack of reserves of men — were obvious to anybody.

To begin with, there was the nature of the country. The front line, ours and the Fascists', lay in positions of immense natural strength, which as a rule could only be approached from one side. Provided a few trenches have been dug, such places cannot be taken by infantry, except in overwhelming numbers. In our own position or most of those round us a dozen men with two machine-guns could have held off a battalion. Perched on the hill-tops as we were, we should have made lovely marks for artillery; but there was no artillery. Sometimes I used to gaze round the landscape and long — oh, how passionately! — for a couple of batteries of guns. One could have destroyed the enemy positions one after another as easily as smashing nuts with a hammer. But on our side the guns simply did not exist. The Fascists did occasionally manage to bring a gun or two from Zaragoza and fire a very few shells, so few that they never even found the range and the shells plunged harmlessly into the empty ravines. Against machine-guns and without artillery there are only three things you can do: dig yourself in at a safe distance — four hundred yards, say — advance across the open and be massacred, or make small-scale night-attacks that will not alter the general situation. Practically the alternatives are stagnation or suicide.

And beyond this there was the complete lack of war materials of every description. It needs an effort to realize how badly the militias

were armed at this time. Any public school O.T.C. in England is far more like a modern army than we were. The badness of our weapons was so astonishing that it is worth recording in detail.

For this sector of the front the entire artillery consisted of four trench-mortars with fifteen rounds for each gun. Of course they were far too precious to be fired and the mortars were kept in Alcubierre. There were machine-guns at the rate of approximately one to fifty men; they were oldish guns, but fairly accurate up to three or four hundred yards. Beyond this we had only rifles, and the majority of the rifles were scrap-iron. There were three types of rifle in use. The first was the long Mauser. These were seldom less than twenty years old, their sights were about as much use as a broken speedometer, and in most of them the rifling was hopelessly corroded; about one rifle in ten was not bad, however. Then there was the short Mauser, or mousqueton, really a cavalry weapon. These were more popular than the others because they were lighter to carry and less nuisance in a trench, also because they were comparatively new and looked efficient. Actually they were almost useless. They were made out of reassembled parts, no bolt belonged to its rifle, and three-quarters of them could be counted on to jam after five shots. There were also a few Winchester rifles. These were nice to shoot with, but they were wildly inaccurate, and as their cartridges had no clips they could only be fired one shot at a time. Ammunition was so scarce that each man entering the line was only issued with fifty rounds, and most of it was exceedingly bad. The Spanish-made cartridges were all refills and would jam even the best rifles. The Mexican cartridges were better and were therefore reserved for the machine-guns. Best of all was the German-made ammunition, but as this came only from prisoners and deserters there was not much of it. I always kept a clip of German or Mexican ammunition in my pocket for use in an emergency. But in practice when the emergency came I seldom fired my rifle; I was too frightened of the beastly thing jamming and too anxious to reserve at any rate one round that would go off.

We had no tin hats, no bayonets, hardly any revolvers or pistols, and not more than one bomb between five or ten men. The bomb in use at this time was a frightful object known as the ‘F.A.I. bomb’, it having been produced by the Anarchists in the early days of the war.

It was on the principle of a Mills bomb, but the lever was held down not by a pin but a piece of tape. You broke the tape and then got rid of the bomb with the utmost possible speed. It was said of these bombs that they were 'impartial'; they killed the man they were thrown at and the man who threw them. There were several other types, even more primitive but probably a little less dangerous — to the thrower, I mean. It was not till late March that I saw a bomb worth throwing.

And apart from weapons there was a shortage of all the minor necessities of war. We had no maps or charts, for instance. Spain has never been fully surveyed, and the only detailed maps of this area were the old military ones, which were almost all in the possession of the Fascists. We had no range-finders, no telescopes, no periscopes, no field-glasses except for a few privately-owned pairs, no flares or Very lights, no wire-cutters, no armourers' tools, hardly even any cleaning materials. The Spaniards seemed never to have heard of a pull-through and looked on in surprise when I constructed one. When you wanted your rifle cleaned you took it to the sergeant, who possessed a long brass ramrod which was invariably bent and therefore scratched the rifling. There was not even any gun oil. You greased your rifle with olive oil, when you could get hold of it; at different times I have greased mine with vaseline, with cold cream, and even with bacon-fat. Moreover, there were no lanterns or electric torches — at this time there was not, I believe, such a thing as an electric torch throughout the whole of our sector of the front, and you could not buy one nearer than Barcelona, and only with difficulty even there.

As time went on, and the desultory rifle-fire rattled among the hills, I began to wonder with increasing scepticism whether anything would ever happen to bring a bit of life, or rather a bit of death, into this cock-eyed war. It was pneumonia that we were fighting against, not against men. When the trenches are more than five hundred yards apart no one gets hit except by accident. Of course there were casualties, but the majority of them were self-inflicted. If I remember rightly, the first five men I saw wounded in Spain were all wounded by our own weapons — I don't mean intentionally, but owing to accident or carelessness. Our worn-out rifles were a danger in

themselves. Some of them had a nasty trick of going off if the butt was tapped on the ground; I saw a man shoot himself through the hand owing to this. And in the darkness the raw recruits were always firing at one another. One evening when it was barely even dusk a sentry let fly at me from a distance of twenty yards; but he missed me by a yard — goodness knows how many times the Spanish standard of marksmanship has saved my life. Another time I had gone out on patrol in the mist and had carefully warned the guard commander beforehand. But in coming back I stumbled against a bush, the startled sentry called out that the Fascists were coming, and I had the pleasure of hearing the guard commander order everyone to open rapid fire in my direction. Of course I lay down and the bullets went harmlessly over me. Nothing will convince a Spaniard, at least a young Spaniard, that fire-arms are dangerous. Once, rather later than this, I was photographing some machine-gunners with their gun, which was pointed directly towards me.

'Don't fire,' I said half-jokingly as I focused the camera.

'Oh no, we won't fire.'

The next moment there was a frightful roar and a stream of bullets tore past my face so close that my cheek was stung by grains of cordite. It was unintentional, but the machine-gunners considered it a great joke. Yet only a few days earlier they had seen a mule-driver accidentally shot by a political delegate who was playing the fool with an automatic pistol and had put five bullets in the mule-driver's lungs.

The difficult passwords which the army was using at this time were a minor source of danger. They were those tiresome double passwords in which one word has to be answered by another. Usually they were of an elevating and revolutionary nature, such as Cultura — progreso, or Seremos — invencibles, and it was often impossible to get illiterate sentries to remember these highfalutin' words. One night, I remember, the password was Cataluna — eroica, and a moonfaced peasant lad named Jaime Domenech approached me, greatly puzzled, and asked me to explain.

'Eroica — what does eroica mean?'

I told him that it meant the same as valiente. A little while later he was stumbling up the trench in the darkness, and the sentry

challenged him:

‘Alto! Cataluna!’

‘Valiente!’ yelled Jaime, certain that he was saying the right thing.

Bang!

However, the sentry missed him. In this war everyone always did miss everyone else, when it was humanly possible.

Chapter 4

WHEN I had been about three weeks in the line a contingent of twenty or thirty men, sent out from England by the I.L.P., arrived at Alcubierre, and in order to keep the English on this front together Williams and I were sent to join them. Our new position was at Monte Oscuro, several miles farther west and within sight of Zaragoza.

The position was perched on a sort of razor-back of limestone with dug-outs driven horizontally into the cliff like sand-martins' nests. They went into the ground for prodigious distances, and inside they were pitch dark and so low that you could not even kneel in them, let alone stand. On the peaks to the left of us there were two more P.O.U.M. positions, one of them an object of fascination to every man in the line, because there were three militiawomen there who did the cooking. These women were not exactly beautiful, but it was found necessary to put the position out of bounds to men of other companies. Five hundred yards to our right there was a P.S.U.C. post at the bend of the Alcubierre road. It was just here that the road changed hands. At night you could watch the lamps of our supply-lorries winding out from Alcubierre and, simultaneously, those of the Fascists coming from Zaragoza. You could see Zaragoza itself, a thin string of lights like the lighted portholes of a ship, twelve miles south-westward. The Government troops had gazed at it from that distance since August 1936, and they are gazing at it still.

There were about thirty of ourselves, including one Spaniard (Ramon, Williams's brother-in-law), and there were a dozen Spanish machine — gunners. Apart from the one or two inevitable nuisances — for, as everyone knows, war attracts riff-raff — the English were an exceptionally good crowd, both physically and mentally. Perhaps the best of the bunch was Bob Smillie — the grandson of the famous miners' leader — who afterwards died such an evil and meaningless death in Valencia. It says a lot for the Spanish character that the English and the Spaniards always got on well together, in spite of the language difficulty. All Spaniards, we discovered, knew two English expressions. One was 'O.K., baby', the other was a word used by the

Barcelona whores in their dealings with English sailors, and I am afraid the compositors would not print it.

Once again there was nothing happening all along the line: only the random crack of bullets and, very rarely, the crash of a Fascist mortar that sent everyone running to the top trench to see which hill the shells were bursting on. The enemy was somewhat closer to us here, perhaps three or four hundred yards away.Their nearest position was exactly opposite ours, with a machine-gun nest whose loopholes constantly tempted one to waste cartridges. The Fascists seldom bothered with rifle-shots, but sent bursts of accurate machine-gun fire at anyone who exposed himself. Nevertheless it was ten days or more before we had our first casualty. The troops opposite us were Spaniards, but according to the deserters there were a few German N.C.O.S. among them. At some time in the past there had also been Moors there — poor devils, how they must have felt the cold! — for out in no man's land there was a dead Moor who was one of the sights of the locality. A mile or two to the left of us the line ceased to be continuous and there was a tract of country, lower-lying and thickly wooded, which belonged neither to the Fascists nor ourselves. Both we and they used to make daylight patrols there. It was not bad fun in a Boy Scoutish way, though I never saw a Fascist patrol nearer than several hundred yards. By a lot of crawling on your belly you could work your way partly through the Fascist lines and could even see the farm-house flying the monarchist flag, which was the local Fascist headquarters. Occasionally we gave it a rifle-volley and then slipped into cover before the machine-guns could locate us. I hope we broke a few windows, but it was a good eight hundred metres away, and with our rifles you could not make sure of hitting even a house at that range.

The weather was mostly clear and cold; sometimes sunny at midday, but always cold. Here and there in the soil of the hill-sides you found the green beaks of wild crocuses or irises poking through; evidently spring was coming, but coming very slowly. The nights were colder than ever. Coming off guard in the small hours we used to rake together what was left of the cook-house fire and then stand in the red-hot embers. It was bad for your boots, but it was very good for your feet. But there were mornings when the sight of the dawn

among the mountain — tops made it almost worth while to be out of bed at godless hours. I hate mountains, even from a spectacular point of view. But sometimes the dawn breaking behind the hill-tops in our rear, the first narrow streaks of gold, like swords slitting the darkness, and then the growing light and the seas of carmine cloud stretching away into inconceivable distances, were worth watching even when you had been up all night, when your legs were numb from the knees down, and you were sullenly reflecting that there was no hope of food for another three hours. I saw the dawn oftener during this campaign than during the rest of my life put together — or during the part that is to come, I hope.

We were short-handed here, which meant longer guards and more fatigues. I was beginning to suffer a little from the lack of sleep which is inevitable even in the quietest kind of war. Apart from guard-duties and patrols there were constant night-alarms and stand — to's, and in any case you can't sleep properly in a beastly hole in the ground with your feet aching with the cold. In my first three or four months in the line I do not suppose I had more than a dozen periods of twenty-four hours that were completely without sleep; on the other hand I certainly did not have a dozen nights of full sleep. Twenty or thirty hours' sleep in a week was quite a normal amount. The effects of this were not so bad as might be expected; one grew very stupid, and the job of climbing up and down the hills grew harder instead of easier, but one felt well and one was constantly hungry — heavens, how hungry! All food seemed good, even the eternal haricot beans which everyone in Spain finally learned to hate the sight of. Our water, what there was of it, came from miles away, on the backs of mules or little persecuted donkeys. For some reason the Aragon peasants treated their mules well but their donkeys abominably. If a donkey refused to go it was quite usual to kick him in the testicles. The issue of candles had ceased, and matches were running short. The Spaniards taught us how to make olive oil lamps out of a condensed milk tin, a cartridge-clip, and a bit of rag. When you had any olive oil, which was not often, these things would burn with a smoky flicker, about a quarter candle power, just enough to find your rifle by.

There seemed no hope of any real fighting. When we left Monte

Pocero I had counted my cartridges and found that in nearly three weeks I had fired just three shots at the enemy. They say it takes a thousand bullets to kill a man, and at this rate it would be twenty years before I killed my first Fascist. At Monte Oscuro the lines were closer and one fired oftener, but I am reasonably certain that I never hit anyone. As a matter of fact, on this front and at this period of the war the real weapon was not the rifle but the megaphone. Being unable to kill your enemy you shouted at him instead. This method of warfare is so extraordinary that it needs explaining.

Wherever the lines were within hailing distance of one another there was always a good deal of shouting from trench to trench. From ourselves: 'Fascistas — maricones!' From the Fascists: ''Viva Espana! Viva Franco!' — or, when they knew that there were English opposite them: 'Go home, you English! We don't want foreigners here!' On the Government side, in the party militias, the shouting of propaganda to undermine the enemy morale had been developed into a regular technique. In every suitable position men, usually machine-gunners, were told off for shouting-duty and provided with megaphones. Generally they shouted a set-piece, full of revolutionary sentiments which explained to the Fascist soldiers that they were merely the hirelings of international capitalism, that they were fighting against their own class, etc., etc., and urged them to come over to our side. This was repeated over and over by relays of men; sometimes it continued almost the whole night. There is very little doubt that it had its effect; everyone agreed that the trickle of Fascist deserters was partly caused by it. If one comes to think of it, when some poor devil of a sentry — very likely a Socialist or Anarchist trade union member who has been conscripted against his will — is freezing at his post, the slogan 'Don't fight against your own class!' ringing again and again through the darkness is bound to make an impression on him. It might make just the difference between deserting and not deserting. Of course such a proceeding does not fit in with the English conception of war. I admit I was amazed and scandalized when I first saw it done. The idea of trying to convert your enemy instead of shooting him! I now think that from any point of view it was a legitimate manoeuvre. In ordinary trench warfare, when there is no artillery, it is extremely difficult to inflict

casualties on the enemy without receiving an equal number yourself. If you can immobilize a certain number of men by making them desert, so much the better; deserters are actually more useful to you than corpses, because they can give information. But at the beginning it dismayed all of us; it made us fed that the Spaniards were not taking this war of theirs sufficiently seriously. The man who did the shouting at the P.S.U.C. post down on our right was an artist at the job. Sometimes, instead of shouting revolutionary slogans he simply told the Fascists how much better we were fed than they were. His account of the Government rations was apt to be a little imaginative.' Buttered toast!' — you could hear his voice echoing across the lonely valley— 'We're just sitting down to buttered toast over here! Lovely slices of buttered toast!' I do not doubt that, like the rest of us, he had not seen butter for weeks or months past, but in the icy night the news of buttered toast probably set many a Fascist mouth watering. It even made mine water, though I knew he was lying.

One day in February we saw a Fascist aeroplane approaching. As usual, a machine-gun was dragged into the open and its barrel cocked up, and everyone lay on his back to get a good aim. Our isolated positions were not worth bombing, and as a rule the few Fascist aeroplanes that passed our way circled round to avoid machine-gun fire. This time the aeroplane came straight over, too high up to be worth shooting at, and out of it came tumbling not bombs but white glittering things that turned over and over in the air. A few fluttered down into the position. They were copies of a Fascist newspaper, the Heraldo de Aragon, announcing the fall of Malaga.

That night the Fascists made a sort of abortive attack. I was just getting down into kip, half dead with sleep, when there was a heavy stream of bullets overhead and someone shouted into the dug-out: 'They're attacking!' I grabbed my rifle and slithered up to my post, which was at the top of the position, beside the machine-gun. There was utter darkness and diabolical noise. The fire of, I think five machine-guns was pouring upon us, and there was a series of heavy crashes caused by the Fascists flinging bombs over their own parapet in the most idiotic manner. It was intensely dark. Down in the valley to the left of us I could see the greenish flash of rifles where a small party of Fascists, probably a patrol, were chipping in. The bullets

were flying round us in the darkness, crack-zip-crack. A few shells came whistling over, but they fell nowhere near us and (as usual in this war) most of them failed to explode. I had a bad moment when yet another machine-gun opened fire from the hill-top in our rear — actually a gun that had been brought up to support us, but at the time it looked as though we were surrounded. .Presently our own machine-gun jammed, as it always did jam with those vile cartridges, and the ramrod was lost in the impenetrable darkness. Apparently there was nothing that one could do except stand still and be shot at. The Spanish machine-gunners disdained to take cover, in fact exposed themselves deliberately, so I had to do likewise. Petty though it was, the whole experience was very interesting. It was the first time that I had been properly speaking under fire, and to my humiliation I found that I was horribly frightened. You always, I notice, feel the same when you are under heavy fire — not so much afraid of being hit as afraid because you don't know where you will be hit. You are wondering all the while just where the bullet will nip you, and it gives your whole body a most unpleasant sensitiveness.

After an hour or two the firing slowed down and died away. Meanwhile we had had only one casualty. The Fascists had advanced a couple of machine-guns into no man's land, but they had kept a safe distance and made no attempt to storm our parapet. They were in fact not attacking, merely wasting cartridges and making a cheerful noise to celebrate the fall of Malaga. The chief importance of the affair was that it taught me to read the war news in the papers with a more disbelieving eye. A day or two later the newspapers and the radio published reports of a tremendous attack with cavalry and tanks (up a perpendicular hill — side!) which had been beaten off by the heroic English.

When the Fascists told us that Malaga had fallen we set it down as a lie, but next day there were more convincing rumours, and it must have been a day or two later that it was admitted officially. By degrees the whole disgraceful story leaked out — how the town had been evacuated without firing a shot, and how the fury of the Italians had fallen not upon the troops, who were gone, but upon the wretched civilian population, some of whom were pursued and machine-gunned for a hundred miles. The news sent a sort of chill all

along the line, for, whatever the truth may have been, every man in the militia believed that the loss of Malaga was due to treachery. It was the first talk I had heard of treachery or divided aims. It set up in my mind the first vague doubts about this war in which, hitherto, the rights and wrongs had seemed so beautifully simple.

In mid February we left Monte Oscuro and were sent, together with all the P.O.U.M. troops in this sector, to make a part of the army besieging Huesca. It was a fifty-mile lorry journey across the wintry plain, where the clipped vines were not yet budding and the blades of the winter barley were just poking through the lumpy soil. Four kilometres from our new trenches Huesca glittered small and clear like a city of dolls' houses. Months earlier, when Sietamo was taken, the general commanding the Government troops had said gaily: 'Tomorrow we'll have coffee in Huesca.' It turned out that he was mistaken. There had been bloody attacks, but the town did not fall, and 'Tomorrow we'll have coffee in Huesca' had become a standing joke throughout the army. If I ever go back to Spain I shall make a point of having a cup of coffee in Huesca.

Chapter 5

ON the eastern side of Huesca, until late March, nothing happened — almost literally nothing. We were twelve hundred metres from the enemy. When the Fascists were driven back into Huesca the Republican Army troops who held this part of the line had not been over-zealous in their advance, so that the line formed a kind of pocket. Later it would have to be advanced — a ticklish job under fire — but for the present the enemy might as well have been nonexistent; our sole preoccupation was keeping warm and getting enough to eat. As a matter of fact there were things in this period that interested me greatly, and I will describe some of them later. But I shall be keeping nearer to the order of events if I try here to give some account of the internal political situation on the Government side.

At the beginning I had ignored the political side of the war, and it was only about this time that it began to force itself upon my attention. If you are not interested in the horrors of party politics, please skip; I am trying to keep the political parts of this narrative in separate chapters for precisely that purpose. But at the same time it would be quite impossible to write about the Spanish war from a purely military angle. It was above all things a political war. No event in it, at any rate during the first year, is intelligible unless one has some grasp of the inter-party struggle that was going on behind the Government lines.

When I came to Spain, and for some time afterwards, I was not only uninterested in the political situation but unaware of it. I knew there was a war on, but I had no notion what kind of a war. If you had asked me why I had joined the militia I should have answered: 'To fight against Fascism,' and if you had asked me what I was fighting for, I should have answered: 'Common decency.' I had accepted the News Chronicle-New Statesman version of the war as the defence of civilization against a maniacal outbreak by an army of Colonel Blimps in the pay of Hitler. The revolutionary atmosphere of Barcelona had attracted me deeply, but I had made no attempt to understand it. As for the kaleidoscope of political parties and trade

unions, with their tiresome names — P.S.U.C., P.O.U.M., F.A.I., C.N.T., U.G.T., J.C.I., J.S.U., A.I.T. — they merely exasperated me. It looked at first sight as though Spain were suffering from a plague of initials. I knew that I was serving in something called the P.O.U.M. (I had only joined the P.O.U.M. militia rather than any other because I happened to arrive in Barcelona with I.L.P. papers), but I did not realize that there were serious differences between the political parties. At Monte Pocero, when they pointed to the position on our left and said:

'Those are the Socialists' (meaning the P.S.U.C.), I was puzzled and said: 'Aren't we all Socialists?' I thought it idiotic that people fighting for their lives should have separate parties; my attitude always was, 'Why can't we drop all this political nonsense and get on with the war?' This of course was the correct' anti-Fascist' attitude which had been carefully disseminated by the English newspapers, largely in order to prevent people from grasping the real nature of the struggle. But in Spain, especially in Catalonia, it was an attitude that no one could or did keep up indefinitely. Everyone, however unwillingly, took sides sooner or later. For even if one cared nothing for the political parties and their conflicting 'lines', it was too obvious that one's own destiny was involved. As a militiaman one was a soldier against Franco, but one was also a pawn in an enormous struggle that was being fought out between two political theories. When I scrounged for firewood on the mountainside and wondered whether this was really a war or whether the News Chronicle had made it up, when I dodged the Communist machine-guns in the Barcelona riots, when I finally fled from Spain with the police one jump behind me — all these things happened to me in that particular way because I was serving in the P.O.U.M. militia and not in the P.S.U.C. So great is the difference between two sets of initials!

To understand the alignment on the Government side one has got to remember how the war started. When the fighting broke out on 18 July it is probable that every anti-Fascist in Europe felt a thrill of hope. For here at last, apparently, was democracy standing up to Fascism. For years past the so-called democratic countries had been surrendering to Fascism at every step. The Japanese had been allowed to do as they liked in Manchuria. Hitler had walked into

power and proceeded to massacre political opponents of all shades. Mussolini had bombed the Abyssinians while fifty-three nations (I think it was fifty-three) made pious noises 'off'. But when Franco tried to overthrow a mildly Left-wing Government the Spanish people, against all expectation, had risen against him. It seemed — possibly it was — the turning of the tide.

But there were several points that escaped general notice. To begin with, Franco was not strictly comparable with Hitler or Mussolini. His rising was a military mutiny backed up by the aristocracy and the Church, and in the main, especially at the beginning, it was an attempt not so much to impose Fascism as to restore feudalism. This meant that Franco had against him not only the working class but also various sections of the liberal bourgeoisie — the very people who are the supporters of Fascism when it appears in a more modern form. More important than this was the fact that the Spanish working class did not, as we might conceivably do in England, resist Franco in the name of 'democracy' and the status quo', their resistance was accompanied by — one might almost say it consisted of — a definite revolutionary outbreak. Land was seized by the peasants; many factories and most of the transport were seized by the trade unions; churches were wrecked and the priests driven out or killed. The Daily Mail, amid the cheers of the Catholic clergy, was able to represent Franco as a patriot delivering his country from hordes of fiendish 'Reds'.

For the first few months of the war Franco's real opponent was not so much the Government as the trade unions. As soon as the rising broke out the organized town workers replied by calling a general strike and then by demanding — and, after a struggle, getting — arms from the public arsenals. If they had not acted spontaneously and more or less independently it is quite conceivable that Franco would never have been resisted. There can, of course, be no certainty about this, but there is at least reason for thinking it. The Government had made little or no attempt to forestall the rising, which had been foreseen for a long time past, and when the trouble started its attitude was weak and hesitant, so much so, indeed, that Spain had three premiers in a single day. Moreover, the one step that could save the immediate situation, the arming of the workers, was

only taken unwillingly and in response to violent popular clamour. However, the arms were distributed, and in the big towns of eastern Spain the Fascists were defeated by a huge effort, mainly of the working class, aided by some of the armed forces (Assault Guards, etc.) who had remained loyal. It was the kind of effort that could probably only be made by people who were fighting with a revolutionary intention — i.e. believed that they were fighting for something better than the status quo. In the various centres of revolt it is thought that three thousand people died in the streets in a single day. Men and women armed only with sticks of dynamite rushed across the open squares and stormed stone buildings held by trained soldiers with machine-guns. Machine-gun nests that the Fascists had placed at strategic spots were smashed by rushing taxis at them at sixty miles an hour. Even if one had heard nothing of the seizure of the land by the peasants, the setting up of local Soviets, etc., it would be hard to believe that the Anarchists and Socialists who were the backbone of the resistance were doing this kind of thing for the preservation of capitalist democracy, which especially in the Anarchist view was no more than a centralized swindling machine.

1 Quiroga, Barrios, and Giral. The first two refused to distribute arms to the trade unions.

Meanwhile the workers had weapons in their hands, and at this stage they refrained from giving them up. (Even a year later it was computed that the Anarcho-Syndicalists in Catalonia possessed 30,000 rifles.) The estates of the big pro-Fascist landlords were in many places seized by the peasants. Along with the collectivization of industry and transport there was an attempt to set up the rough beginnings of a workers' government by means of local committees, workers' patrols to replace the old pro-capitalist police forces, workers' militias based on the trade unions, and so forth. Of course the process was not uniform, and it went further in Catalonia than elsewhere. There were areas where the institutions of local government remained almost untouched, and others where they existed side by side with revolutionary committees. In a few places independent Anarchist communes were set up, and some of them remained in being till about a year later, when they were forcibly suppressed by the Government. In Catalonia, for the first few

months, most of the actual power was in the hands of the Anarcho-syndicalists, who controlled most of the key industries. The thing that had happened in Spain was, in fact, not merely a civil war, but the beginning of a revolution. It is this fact that the anti-Fascist press outside Spain has made it its special business to obscure. The issue has been narrowed down to 'Fascism versus democracy' and the revolutionary aspect concealed as much as possible. In England, where the Press is more centralized and the public more easily deceived than elsewhere, only two versions of the Spanish war have had any publicity to speak of: the Right-wing version of Christian patriots versus Bolsheviks dripping with blood, and the Left-wing version of gentlemanly republicans quelling a military revolt. The central issue has been successfully covered up.

There were several reasons for this. To begin with, appalling lies about atrocities were being circulated by the pro-Fascist press, and well-meaning propagandists undoubtedly thought that they were aiding the Spanish Government by denying that Spain had 'gone Red'. But the main reason was this: that, except for the small revolutionary groups which exist in all countries, the whole world was determined, upon preventing revolution in Spain. In particular the Communist Party, with Soviet Russia behind it, had thrown its whole weight against the revolution. It was the Communist thesis that revolution at this stage would be fatal and that what was to be aimed at in Spain was not workers' control, but bourgeois democracy. It hardly needs pointing out why 'liberal' capitalist opinion took the same line. Foreign capital was heavily invested in Spain. The Barcelona Traction Company, for instance, represented ten millions of British capital; and meanwhile the trade unions had seized all the transport in Catalonia. If the revolution went forward there would be no compensation, or very little; if the capitalist republic prevailed, foreign investments would be safe. And since the revolution had got to be crushed, it greatly simplified things to pretend that no revolution had happened. In this way the real significance of every event could be covered up; every shift of power from the trade unions to the central Government could be represented as a necessary step in military reorganization. The situation produced was curious in the extreme. Outside Spain few people grasped that

there was a revolution; inside Spain nobody doubted it. Even the P.S.U.C. newspapers. Communist-controlled and more or less committed to an anti-revolutionary policy, talked about 'our glorious revolution'. And meanwhile the Communist press in foreign countries was shouting that there was no sign of revolution anywhere; the seizure of factories, setting up of workers' committees, etc., had not happened — or, alternatively, had happened, but 'had no political significance'. According to the Daily Worker (6 August 1936) those who said that the Spanish people were fighting for social revolution, or for anything other than bourgeois democracy, were' downright lying scoundrels'. On the other hand, Juan Lopez, a member of the Valencia Government, declared in February 1937 that 'the Spanish people are shedding their blood, not for the democratic Republic and its paper Constitution, but for . . . a revolution'. So it would appear that the downright lying scoundrels included members of the Government for which we were bidden to fight. Some of the foreign anti-Fascist papers even descended to the pitiful lie of pretending that churches were only attacked when they were used as Fascist fortresses. Actually churches were pillaged everywhere and as a matter of course, because it was perfectly well understood that the Spanish Church was part of the capitalist racket. In six months in Spain I only saw two undamaged churches, and until about July 1937 no churches were allowed to reopen and hold services, except for one or two Protestant churches in Madrid.

But, after all, it was only the beginning of a revolution, not the complete thing. Even when the workers, certainly in Catalonia and possibly elsewhere, had the power to do so, they did not overthrow or completely replace the Government. Obviously they could not do so when Franco was hammering at the gate and sections of the middle class were on their side. The country was in a transitional state that was capable either of developing in the direction of Socialism or of reverting to an ordinary capitalist republic. The peasants had most of the land, and they were likely to keep it, unless Franco won; all large industries had been collectivized, but whether they remained collectivized, or whether capitalism was reintroduced, would depend finally upon which group gained control. At the beginning both the Central Government and the Generalite de

Cataluna (the semi-autonomous Catalan Government) could definitely be said to represent the working class. The Government was headed by Caballero, a Left-wing Socialist, and contained ministers representing the U.G.T. (Socialist trade unions) and the C.N.T. (Syndicalist unions controlled by the Anarchists). The Catalan Generalite was for a while virtually superseded by an anti-Fascist Defence Committee consisting mainly of delegates from the trade unions. Later the Defence Committee was dissolved and the Generalite was reconstituted so as to represent the unions and the various Left-wing parties. But every subsequent reshuffling of the Government was a move towards the Right. First the P.O.U.M. was expelled from the Generalite; six months later Caballero was replaced by the Right-wing Socialist Negrin; shortly afterwards the C.N.T. was eliminated from the Government; then the U.G.T.; then the C.N.T. was turned out of the Generalite; finally, a year after the outbreak of war and revolution, there remained a Government composed entirely of Right-wing Socialists, Liberals, and Communists.

2 Comite Central de Milicias Antifascistas. Delegates were chosen in proportion to the membership of their organizations. Nine delegates represented the trade unions, three the Catalan Liberal parties, and two the various Marxist parties (P.O.U.M., Communists, and others).

The general swing to the Right dates from about October-November 1936, when the U.S.S.R. began to supply arms to the Government and power began to pass from the Anarchists to the Communists. Except Russia and Mexico no country had had the decency to come to the rescue of the Government, and Mexico, for obvious reasons, could not supply arms in large quantities. Consequently the Russians were in a position to dictate terms. There is very little doubt that these terms were, in substance, ‘Prevent revolution or you get no weapons’, and that the first move against the revolutionary elements, the expulsion of the P.O.U.M. from the Catalan Generalite, was done under orders from the U.S.S.R. It has been denied that any direct pressure was exerted by the Russian Government, but the point is not of great importance, for the Communist parties of all countries can be taken as carrying out

Russian policy, and it is not denied that the Communist Party was the chief mover first against the P.O.U.M., later against the Anarchists and against Caballero's section of the Socialists, and, in general, against a revolutionary policy. Once the U.S.S.R. had intervened the triumph of the Communist Party was assured. To begin with, gratitude to Russia for the arms and the fact that the Communist Party, especially since the arrival of the International Brigades, looked capable of winning the war, immensely raised the Communist prestige. Secondly, the Russian arms were supplied via the Communist Party and the parties allied to them, who saw to it that as few as possible got to their political opponents. Thirdly, by proclaiming a non-revolutionary policy the Communists were able to gather in all those whom the extremists had scared. It was easy, for instance, to rally the wealthier peasants against the collectivization policy of the Anarchists. There was an enormous growth in the membership of the party, and the influx was largely from the middle class — shopkeepers, officials, army officers, well-to-do peasants, etc., etc. The war was essentially a triangular struggle. The fight against Franco had to continue, but the simultaneous aim of the Government was to recover such power as remained in the hands of the trade unions. It was done by a series of small moves — a policy of pin-pricks, as somebody called it — and on the whole very cleverly. There was no general and obvious counter-revolutionary move, and until May 1937 it was scarcely necessary to use force. The workers could always be brought to heel by an argument that is almost too obvious to need stating: 'Unless you do this, that, and the other we shall lose the war.' In every case, needless to say, it appeared that the thing demanded by military necessity was the surrender of something that the workers had won for themselves in 1936. But the argument could hardly fail, because to lose the war was the last thing that the revolutionary parties wanted; if the war was lost democracy and revolution. Socialism and Anarchism, became meaningless words. The Anarchists, the only revolutionary party that was big enough to matter, were obliged to give way on point after point. The process of collectivization was checked, the local committees were got rid of, the workers patrols were abolished and the pre-war police forces, largely reinforced and very heavily

armed, were restored, and various key industries which had been under the control of the trade unions were taken over by the Government (the seizure of the Barcelona Telephone Exchange, which led to the May fighting, was one incident in this process); finally, most important of all, the workers' militias, based on the trade unions, were gradually broken up and redistributed among the new Popular Army, a 'non-political' army on semi-bourgeois lines, with a differential pay rate, a privileged officer-caste, etc., etc. In the special circumstances this was the really decisive step; it happened later in Catalonia than elsewhere because it was there that the revolutionary parties were strongest. Obviously the only guarantee that the workers could have of retaining their winnings was to keep some of the armed forces under their own control. As usual, the breaking-up of the militias was done in the name of military efficiency; and no one denied that a thorough military reorganization was needed. It would, however, have been quite possible to reorganize the militias and make them more efficient while keeping them under direct control of the trade unions; the main purpose of the change was to make sure that the Anarchists did not possess an army of their own. Moreover, the democratic spirit of the militias made them breeding-grounds for revolutionary ideas. The Communists were well aware of this, and inveighed ceaselessly and bitterly against the P.O.U.M. and Anarchist principle of equal pay for all ranks. A general 'bourgeoisification', a deliberate destruction of the equalitarian spirit of the first few months of the revolution, was taking place. All happened so swiftly that people making successive visits to Spain at intervals of a few months have declared that they seemed scarcely to be visiting the same country; what had seemed on the surface and for a brief instant to be a workers' State was changing before one's eyes into an ordinary bourgeois republic with the normal division into rich and poor. By the autumn of 1937 the 'Socialist' Negrin was declaring in public speeches that 'we respect private property', and members of the Cortes who at the beginning of the war had had to fly the country because of their suspected Fascist sympathies were returning to Spain. The whole process is easy to understand if one remembers that it proceeds from the temporary alliance that Fascism, in certain forms, forces upon the bourgeois and

the worker. This alliance, known as the Popular Front, is in essential an alliance of enemies, and it seems probable that it must always end by one partner swallowing the other. The only unexpected feature in the Spanish situation — and outside Spain it has caused an immense amount of misunderstanding — is that among the parties on the Government side the Communists stood not upon the extreme Left, but upon the extreme Right. In reality this should cause no surprise, because the tactics of the Communist Party elsewhere, especially in France, have made it clear that Official Communism must be regarded, at any rate for the time being, as an anti-revolutionary force. The whole of Comintern policy is now subordinated (excusably, considering the world situation) to the defence of U.S.S.R., which depends upon a system of military alliances. In particular, the U.S.S.R. is in alliance with France, a capitalist-imperialist country. The alliance is of little use to Russia unless French capitalism is strong, therefore Communist policy in France has got to be anti-revolutionary. This means not only that French Communists now march behind the tricolour and sing the Marseillaise, but, what is more important, that they have had to drop all effective agitation in the French colonies. It is less than three years since Thorez, the Secretary of the French Communist Party, was declaring that the French workers would never be bamboozled into fighting against their German comrades; he is now one of the loudest-lunged patriots in France. The clue to the behaviour of the Communist Party in any country is the military relation of that country, actual or potential, towards the U.S.S.R. In England, for instance, the position is still uncertain, hence the English Communist Party is still hostile to the National Government, and, ostensibly, opposed to rearmament. If, however, Great Britain enters into an alliance or military understanding with the U.S.S.R., the English Communist, like the French Communist, will have no choice but to become a good patriot and imperialist; there are premonitory signs of this already. In Spain the Communist 'line' was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that France, Russia's ally, would strongly object to a revolutionary neighbour and would raise heaven and earth to prevent the liberation of Spanish Morocco. The Daily Mail, with its tales of red revolution financed by Moscow, was even more

wildly wrong than usual. In reality it was the Communists above all others who prevented revolution in Spain. Later, when the Right-wing forces were in full control, the Communists showed themselves willing to go a great deal further than the Liberals in hunting down the revolutionary leaders.

3 This was why there were so few Russian arms on the Aragon front, where the troops were predominantly Anarchist. Until April 1937 the only Russian weapon I saw — with the exception of some aeroplanes which may or may not have been Russian — was a solitary sub-machine — gun.

4 In the Chamber of Deputies, March 1935.

5 For the best account of the interplay between the parties on the Government side, see Franz Borkenau's The Spanish Cockpit. This is by a long way the ablest book that has yet appeared on the Spanish war.

I have tried to sketch the general course of the Spanish revolution during its first year, because this makes it easier to understand the situation at any given moment. But I do not want to suggest that in February I held all of the opinions that are implied in what I have said above. To begin with, the things that most enlightened me had not yet happened, and in any case my sympathies were in some ways different from what they are now. This was partly because the political side of the war bored me and I naturally reacted against the viewpoint of which I heard most — i.e. the P.O.U.M.–I.L.P. viewpoint. The Englishmen I was among were mostly I.L.P. members, with a few C.P. members among them, and most of them were much better educated politically than myself. For weeks on end, during the dull period when nothing was happening round Huesca, I found myself in the middle of a political discussion that practically never ended. In the draughty evil-smelling barn of the farm-house where we were billeted, in the stuffy blackness of dug-outs, behind the parapet in the freezing midnight hours, the conflicting party 'lines' were debated over and over. Among the Spaniards it was the same, and most of the newspapers we saw made the inter-party feud their chief feature. One would have had to be deaf or an imbecile not to pick up some idea of what the various parties stood for.

From the point of view of political theory there were only three

parties that mattered, the P.S.U.C., the P.O.U.M., and the C.N.T.–F.A.I., loosely described as the Anarchists. I take the P.S.U.C. first, as being the most important; it was the party that finally triumphed, and even at this time it was visibly in the ascendant.

It is necessary to explain that when one speaks of the P.S.U.C. 'line' one really means the Communist Party 'line'. The P.S.U.C. (Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluna) was the Socialist Party of Catalonia; it had been formed at the beginning of the war by the fusion of various Marxist parties, including the Catalan Communist Party, but it was now entirely under Communist control and was affiliated to the Third International. Elsewhere in Spain no formal unification between Socialists and Communists had taken place, but the Communist viewpoint and the Right-wing Socialist viewpoint could everywhere be regarded as identical. Roughly speaking, the P.S.U.C. was the political organ of the U.G.T. (Union General de Trabajadores), the Socialist trade unions. The membership of these unions throughout Spain now numbered about a million and a half. They contained many sections of the manual workers, but since the outbreak of war they had also been swollen by a large influx of middle-class members, for in the early 'revolutionary' days people of all kinds had found it useful to join either the U.G.T. or the C.N.T. The two blocks of unions overlapped, but of the two the C.N.T. was more definitely a working-class organization. The P.S.U.C. was therefore a party partly of the workers and partly of the small bourgeoisie — the shopkeepers, the officials, and the wealthier peasants.

The P.S.U.C. 'line' which was preached in the Communist and pro — Communist press throughout the world, was approximately this:

'At present nothing matters except winning the war; without victory in the war all else is meaningless. Therefore this is not the moment to talk of pressing forward with the revolution. We can't afford to alienate the peasants by forcing Collectivization upon them, and we can't afford to frighten away the middle classes who were fighting on our side. Above all for the sake of efficiency we must do away with revolutionary chaos. We must have a strong central government in place of local committees, and we must have a

properly trained and fully militarized army under a unified command. Clinging on to fragments of workers' control and parroting revolutionary phrases is worse than useless; it is not merely obstructive, but even counterrevolutionary, because it leads to divisions which can be used against us by the Fascists. At this stage we are not fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat, we are fighting for parliamentary democracy. Whoever tries to turn the civil war into a social revolution is playing into the hands of the Fascists and is in effect, if not in intention, a traitor.'

The P.O.U.M. 'line' differed from this on every point except, of course, the importance of winning the war. The P.O.U.M. (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista) was one of those dissident Communist parties which have appeared in many countries in the last few years as a result of the opposition to 'Stalinism'; i.e. to the change, real or apparent, in Communist policy. It was made up partly of ex-Communists and partly of an earlier party, the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc. Numerically it was a small party, with not much influence outside Catalonia, and chiefly important because it contained an unusually high proportion of politically conscious members. In Catalonia its chief stronghold was Lerida. It did not represent any block of trade unions. The P.O.U.M. militiamen were mostly C.N.T. members, but the actual party-members generally belonged to the U.G.T. It was, however, only in the C.N.T. that the P.O.U.M. had any influence. The P.O.U.M. 'line' was approximately this:

6 The figures for the P.O.U.M. membership are given as: July 1936, 10,000; December 1936, 70,000; June 1937, 40,000. But these are from P.O.U.M. sources; a hostile estimate would probably divide them by four. The only thing one can say with any certainty about the membership of the Spanish political parties is that every party over — estimates its own numbers.

'It is nonsense to talk of opposing Fascism by bourgeois "democracy". Bourgeois "democracy" is only another name for capitalism, and so is Fascism; to fight against Fascism on behalf of "democracy" is to fight against one form of capitalism on behalf of a second which is liable to turn into the first at any moment. The only real alternative to Fascism is workers' control. If you set up any less

goal than this, you will either hand the victory to Franco, or, at best, let in Fascism by the back door. Meanwhile the workers must cling to every scrap of what they have won; if they yield anything to the semi — bourgeois Government they can depend upon being cheated. The workers' militias and police-forces must be preserved in their present form and every effort to "bourgeoisify" them must be resisted. If the workers do not control the armed forces, the armed forces will control the workers. The war and the revolution are inseparable.'

The Anarchist viewpoint is less easily defined. In any case the loose term 'Anarchists' is used to cover a multitude of people of very varying opinions. The huge block of unions making up the C.N.T. (Confederacion Nacional de Trabajadores), with round about two million members in all, had for its political organ the F.A.I. (Federacion Anarquista Iberica), an actual Anarchist organization. But even the members of the F.A.I., though always tinged, as perhaps most Spaniards are, with the Anarchist philosophy, were not necessarily Anarchists in the purest sense. Especially since the beginning of the war they had moved more in the direction of ordinary Socialism, because circumstances had forced them to take part in centralized administration and even to break all their principles by entering the Government. Nevertheless they differed fundamentally from the Communists in so much that, like the P.O.U.M., they aimed at workers' control and not a parliamentary democracy. They accepted the P.O.U.M. slogan: 'The war and the revolution are inseparable', though they were less dogmatic about it. Roughly speaking, the C.N.T.–F.A.I. stood for: (i) Direct control over industry by the workers engaged in each industry, e.g. transport, the textile factories, etc.; (2) Government by local committees and resistance to all forms of centralized authoritarianism; (3) Uncompromising hostility to the bourgeoisie and the Church. The last point, though the least precise, was the most important. The Anarchists were the opposite of the majority of so-called revolutionaries in so much that though their principles were rather vague their hatred of privilege and injustice was perfectly genuine. Philosophically, Communism and Anarchism are poles apart. Practically — i.e. in the form of society aimed at — the difference is

mainly one of emphasis, but it is quite irreconcilable. The Communist's emphasis is always on centralism and efficiency, the Anarchist's on liberty and equality. Anarchism is deeply rooted in Spain and is likely to outlive Communism when the Russian influence is withdrawn. During the first two months of the war it was the Anarchists more than anyone else who had saved the situation, and much later than this the Anarchist militia, in spite of their indiscipline, were notoriously the best fighters among the purely Spanish forces. From about February 1937 onwards the Anarchists and the P.O.U.M. could to some extent be lumped together. If the Anarchists, the P.O.U.M., and the Left wing of the Socialists had had the sense to combine at the start and press a realistic policy, the history of the war might have been different. But in the early period, when the revolutionary parties seemed to have the game in their hands, this was impossible. Between the Anarchists and the Socialists there were ancient jealousies, the P.O.U.M., as Marxists, were sceptical of Anarchism, while from the pure Anarchist standpoint the 'Trotskyism' of the P.O.U.M. was not much preferable to the 'Stalinism' of the Communists. Nevertheless the Communist tactics tended to drive the two parties together. When the P.O.U.M. joined in the disastrous fighting in Barcelona in May, it was mainly from an instinct to stand by the C.N.T., and later, when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed, the Anarchists were the only people who dared to raise a voice in its defence.

So, roughly speaking, the alignment of forces was this. On the one side the C.N.T.–F.A.I., the P.O.U.M., and a section of the Socialists, standing for workers' control: on the other side the Right-wing Socialists, Liberals, and Communists, standing for centralized government and a militarized army.

It is easy to see why, at this time, I preferred the Communist viewpoint to that of the P.O.U.M. The Communists had a definite practical policy, an obviously better policy from the point of view of the common sense which looks only a few months ahead. And certainly the day-to-day policy of the P.O.U.M., their propaganda and so forth, was unspeakably bad; it must have been so, or they would have been able to attract a bigger mass-following. What clinched everything was that the Communists — so it seemed to me

— were getting on with the war while we and the Anarchists were standing still. This was the general feeling at the time. The Communists had gained power and a vast increase of membership partly by appealing to the middle classes against the revolutionaries, but partly also because they were the only people who looked capable of winning the war. The Russian arms and the magnificent defence of Madrid by troops mainly under Communist control had made the Communists the heroes of Spain. As someone put it, every Russian aeroplane that flew over our heads was Communist propaganda. The revolutionary purism of the P.O.U.M., though I saw its logic, seemed to me rather futile. After all, the one thing that mattered was to win the war.

Meanwhile there was the diabolical inter-party feud that was going on in the newspapers, in pamphlets, on posters, in books — everywhere. At this time the newspapers I saw most often were the P.O.U.M. papers La Batalla and Adelante, and their ceaseless carping against the 'counter-revolutionary' P.S.U.C. struck me as priggish and tiresome. Later, when I studied the P.S.U.C. and Communist press more closely, I realized that the P.O.U.M. were almost blameless compared with their adversaries. Apart from anything else, they had much smaller opportunities. Unlike the Communists, they had no footing in any press outside their own country, and inside Spain they were at an immense disadvantage because the press censorship was mainly under Communist control, which meant that the P.O.U.M. papers were liable to be suppressed or fined if they said anything damaging. It is also fair to the P.O.U.M. to say that though they might preach endless sermons on revolution and quote Lenin ad nauseam, they did not usually indulge in personal libel. Also they kept their polemics mainly to newspaper articles. Their large coloured posters, designed for a wider public (posters are important in Spain, with its large illiterate population), did not attack rival parties, but were simply anti — Fascist or abstractedly revolutionary; so were the songs the militiamen sang. The Communist attacks were quite a different matter. I shall have to deal with some of these later in this book. Here I can only give a brief indication of the Communist line of attack.

On the surface the quarrel between the Communists and the

P.O.U.M. was one of tactics. The P.O.U.M. was for immediate revolution, the Communists not. So far so good; there was much to be said on both sides. Further, the Communists contended that the P.O.U.M. propaganda divided and weakened the Government forces and thus endangered the war; again, though finally I do not agree, a good case could be made out for this. But here the peculiarity of Communist tactics came in. Tentatively at first, then more loudly, they began to assert that the P.O.U.M. was splitting the Government forces not by bad judgement but by deliberate design. The P.O.U.M. was declared to be no more than a gang of disguised Fascists, in the pay of Franco and Hitler, who were pressing a pseudo-revolutionary policy as a way of aiding the Fascist cause. The P.O.U.M. was a 'Trotskyist' organization and 'Franco's Fifth Column'. This implied that scores of thousands of working-class people, including eight or ten thousand soldiers who were freezing in the front-line trenches and hundreds of foreigners who had come to Spain to fight against Fascism, often sacrificing their livelihood and their nationality by doing so, were simply traitors in the pay of the enemy. And this story was spread all over Spain by means of posters, etc., and repeated over and over in the Communist and pro-Communist press of the whole world. I could fill half a dozen books with quotations if I chose to collect them.

This, then, was what they were saying about us: we were Trotskyists, Fascists, traitors, murderers, cowards, spies, and so forth. I admit it was not pleasant, especially when one thought of some of the people who were responsible for it. It is not a nice thing to see a Spanish boy of fifteen carried down the line on a stretcher, with a dazed white face looking out from among the blankets, and to think of the sleek persons in London and Paris who are writing pamphlets to prove that this boy is a Fascist in disguise. One of the most horrible features of war is that all the war-propaganda, all the screaming and lies and hatred, comes invariably from people who are not fighting. The P.S.U.C. militiamen whom I knew in the line, the Communists from the International Brigade whom I met from time to time, never called me a Trotskyist or a traitor; they left that kind of thing to the journalists in the rear. The people who wrote pamphlets against us and vilified us in the newspapers all remained safe at

home, or at worst in the newspaper offices of Valencia, hundreds of miles from the bullets and the mud. And apart from the libels of the inter-party feud, all the usual war-stuff, the tub-thumping, the heroics, the vilification of the enemy — all these were done, as usual, by people who were not fighting and who in many cases would have run a hundred miles sooner than fight. One of the dreariest effects of this war has been to teach me that the Left-wing press is every bit as spurious and dishonest as that of the Right. I do earnestly feel that on our side — the Government side — this war was different from ordinary, imperialistic wars; but from the nature of the war-propaganda you would never have guessed it. The fighting had barely started when the newspapers of the Right and Left dived simultaneously into the same cesspool of abuse. We all remember the Daily Mail's poster: 'REDS CRUCIFY NUNS', while to the Daily Worker Franco's Foreign Legion was 'composed of murderers, white-slavers, dope-fiends, and the offal of every European country'. As late as October 1937 the New Statesman was treating us to tales of Fascist barricades made of the bodies of living children (a most unhandy thing to make barricades with), and Mr Arthur Bryant was declaring that 'the sawing-off of a Conservative tradesman's legs' was 'a commonplace' in Loyalist Spain. The people who write that kind of stuff never fight; possibly they believe that to write it is a substitute for fighting. It is the same in all wars; the soldiers do the fighting, the journalists do the shouting, and no true patriot ever gets near a front-line trench, except on the briefest of propaganda-tours. Sometimes it is a comfort to me to think that the aeroplane is altering the conditions of war. Perhaps when the next great war comes we may see that sight unprecedented in all history, a jingo with a bullet-hole in him.

7 I should like to make an exception of the Manchester Guardian. In connexion with this book I have had to go through the files of a good many English papers. Of our larger papers, the Manchester Guardian is the only one that leaves me with an increased respect for its honesty.

As far as the journalistic part of it went, this war was a racket like all other wars. But there was this difference, that whereas the journalists usually reserve their most murderous invective for the

enemy, in this case, as time went on, the Communists and the P.O.U.M. came to write more bitterly about one another than about the Fascists. Nevertheless at the time I could not bring myself to take it very seriously. The inter-party feud was annoying and even disgusting, but it appeared to me as a domestic squabble. I did not believe that it would alter anything or that there was any really irreconcilable difference of policy. I grasped that the Communists and Liberals had set their faces against allowing the revolution to go forward; I did not grasp that they might be capable of swinging it back.

There was a good reason for this. All this time I was at the front, and at the front the social and political atmosphere did not change. I had left Barcelona in early January and I did not go on leave till late April; and all this time — indeed, till later — in the strip of Aragon controlled by Anarchist and P.O.U.M. troops, the same conditions persisted, at least outwardly. The revolutionary atmosphere remained as I had first known it. General and private, peasant and militiaman, still met as equals; everyone drew the same pay, wore the same clothes, ate the same food, and called everyone else 'thou' and 'comrade'; there was no boss-class, no menial-class, no beggars, no prostitutes, no lawyers, no priests, no boot-licking, no cap-touching. I was breathing the air of equality, and I was simple enough to imagine that it existed all over Spain. I did not realize that more or less by chance I was isolated among the most revolutionary section of the Spanish working class.

So, when my more politically educated comrades told me that one could not take a purely military attitude towards the war, and that the choice lay between revolution and Fascism, I was inclined to laugh at them. On the whole I accepted the Communist viewpoint, which boiled down to saying: 'We can't talk of revolution till we've won the war', and not the P.O.U.M. viewpoint, which boiled down to saying: 'We must go forward or we shall go back.' When later on I decided that the P.O.U.M. were right, or at any rate righter than the Communists, it was not altogether upon a point of theory. On paper the Communist case was a good one; the trouble was that their actual behaviour made it difficult to believe that they were advancing it in good faith. The often-repeated slogan: 'The war first and the

revolution afterwards', though devoutly believed in by the average P.S.U.C. militiaman, who honestly thought that the revolution could continue when the war had been won, was eyewash. The thing for which the Communists were working was not to postpone the Spanish revolution till a more suitable time, but to make sure that it never happened. This became more and more obvious as time went on, as power was twisted more and more out of working-class hands, and as more and more revolutionaries of every shade were flung into jail. Every move was made in the name of military necessity, because this pretext was, so to speak, ready-made, but the effect was to drive the workers back from an advantageous position and into a position in which, when the war was over, they would find it impossible to resist the reintroduction of capitalism. Please notice that I am saying nothing against the rank-and-file Communists, least of all against the thousands of Communists who died heroically round Madrid. But those were not the men who were directing party policy. As for the people higher up, it is inconceivable that they were not acting with their eyes open.

But, finally, the war was worth winning even if the revolution was lost. And in the end I came to doubt whether, in the long run, the Communist policy made for victory. Very few people seem to have reflected that a different policy might be appropriate at different periods of the war. The Anarchists probably saved the situation in the first two months, but they were incapable of organizing resistance beyond a certain point; the Communists probably saved the situation in October-December, but to win the war outright was a different matter. In England the Communist war-policy has been accepted without question, because very few criticisms of it have been allowed to get into print and because its general line — do away with revolutionary chaos, speed up production, militarize the army — sounds realistic and efficient. It is worth pointing out its inherent weakness.

In order to check every revolutionary tendency and make the war as much like an ordinary war as possible, it became necessary to throw away the strategic opportunities that actually existed. I have described how we were armed, or not armed, on the Aragon front. There is very little doubt that arms were deliberately withheld lest

too many of them should get into the hands of the Anarchists, who would afterwards use them for a revolutionary purpose; consequently the big Aragon offensive which would have made Franco draw back from Bilbao, and possibly from Madrid, never happened. But this was comparatively a small matter. What was more important was that once the war had been narrowed down to a 'war for democracy' it became impossible to make any large-scale appeal for working-class aid abroad. If we face facts we must admit that the working class of the world has regarded the Spanish war with detachment. Tens of thousands of individuals came to fight, but the tens of millions behind them remained apathetic. During the first year of the war the entire British public is thought to have subscribed to various 'aid Spain' funds about a quarter of a million pounds — probably less than half of what they spend in a single week on going to the pictures. The way in which the working class in the democratic countries could really have helped her Spanish comrades was by industrial action — strikes and boycotts. No such thing ever even began to happen. The Labour and Communist leaders everywhere declared that it was unthinkable; and no doubt they were right, so long as they were also shouting at the tops of their voices that' red' Spain was not 'red'. Since 1914-18 'war for democracy' has had a sinister sound. For years past the Communists themselves had been teaching the militant workers in all countries that 'democracy' was a polite name for capitalism. To say first 'Democracy is a swindle', and then 'Fight for democracy!' is not good tactics. If, with the huge prestige of Soviet Russia behind them, they had appealed to the workers of the world in the name not of 'democratic Spain', but of 'revolutionary Spain', it is hard to believe that they would not have got a response.

But what was most important of all, with a non-revolutionary policy it was difficult, if not impossible, to strike at Franco's rear. By the summer of 1937 Franco was controlling a larger population than the Government — much larger, if one counts in the colonies — with about the same number of troops. As everyone knows, with a hostile population at your back it is impossible to keep an army in the field without an equally large army to guard your communications, suppress sabotage, etc. Obviously, therefore, there was no real

popular movement in Franco's rear. It was inconceivable that the people in his territory, at any rate the town-workers and the poorer peasants, liked or wanted Franco, but with every swing to the Right the Government's superiority became less apparent. What clinches everything is the case of Morocco. Why was there no rising in Morocco? Franco was trying to set up an infamous dictatorship, and the Moors actually preferred him to the Popular Front Government! The palpable truth is that no attempt was made to foment a rising in Morocco, because to do so would have meant putting a revolutionary construction on the war. The first necessity, to convince the Moors of the Government's good faith, would have been to proclaim Morocco liberated. And we can imagine how pleased the French would have been by that! The best strategic opportunity of the war was flung away in the vain hope of placating French and British capitalism. The whole tendency of the Communist policy was to reduce the war to an ordinary, non-revolutionary war in which the Government was heavily handicapped. For a war of that kind has got to be won by mechanical means, i.e. ultimately, by limitless supplies of weapons; and the Government's chief donor of weapons, the U.S.S.R., was at a great disadvantage, geographically, compared with Italy and Germany. Perhaps the P.O.U.M. and Anarchist slogan: 'The war and the revolution are inseparable', was less visionary than it sounds.

I have given my reasons for thinking that the Communist anti — revolutionary policy was mistaken, but so far as its effect upon the war goes I do not hope that my judgement is right. A thousand times I hope that it is wrong. I would wish to see this war won by any means whatever. And of course we cannot tell yet what may happen. The Government may swing to the Left again, the Moors may revolt of their own accord, England may decide to buy Italy out, the war may be won by straightforward military means — there is no knowing. I let the above opinions stand, and time will show how far I am right or wrong.

But in February 193^ I did not see things quite in this light. I was sick of the inaction on the Aragon front and chiefly conscious that I had not done my fair share of the fighting. I used to think of the recruiting poster in Barcelona which demanded accusingly of passers — by: 'What haveyoy done for democracy?' and feel that I could

only answer:' I have drawn my rations.' When I joined the militia I had promised myself to kill one Fascist — after all, if each of us killed one they would soon be extinct — and I had killed nobody yet, had hardly had the chance to do so. And of course I wanted to go to Madrid. Everyone in the army, whatever his political opinions, always wanted to go to Madrid. This would probably mean exchanging into the International Column, for the P.O.U.M. had now very few troops at Madrid and the Anarchists not so many as formerly.

For the present, of course, one had to stay in the line, but I told everyone that when we went on leave I should, if possible, exchange into the International Column, which meant putting myself under Communist control. Various people tried to dissuade me, but no one attempted to interfere. It is fair to say that there was very little heresy-hunting in the P.O.U.M., perhaps not enough, considering their special circumstances; short of being a pro-Fascist no one was penalized for holding the wrong political opinions. I spent much of my time in the militia in bitterly criticizing the P.O.U.M. 'line', but I never got into trouble for it. There was not even any pressure upon one to become a political member of the party, though I think the majority of the militiamen did so. I myself never joined the party — for which afterwards, when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed, I was rather sorry.

Chapter 6

MEANWHILE, the daily — more particularly nightly — round, the common task. Sentry-go, patrols, digging; mud, rain, shrieking winds, and occasional snow. It was not till well into April that the nights grew noticeably warmer. Up here on the plateau the March days were mostly like an English March, with bright blue skies and nagging winds. The winter barley was a foot high, crimson buds were forming on the cherry trees (the line here ran through deserted orchards and vegetable gardens), and if you searched the ditches you could find violets and a kind of wild hyacinth like a poor specimen of a bluebell. Immediately behind the line there ran a wonderful, green, bubbling stream, the first transparent water I had seen since coming to the front. One day I set my teeth and crawled into the river to have my first bath in six weeks. It was what you might call a brief bath, for the water was mainly snow-water and not much above freezing-point.

Meanwhile nothing happened, nothing ever happened. The English had got into the habit of saying that this wasn't a war, it was a bloody pantomime. We were hardly under direct fire from the Fascists. The only danger was from stray bullets, which, as the lines curved forward on either side, came from several directions. All the casualties at this time were from strays. Arthur Clinton got a mysterious bullet that smashed his left shoulder and disabled his arm, permanently, I am afraid. There was a little shell-fire, but it was extraordinarily ineffectual. The scream and crash of the shells was actually looked upon as a mild diversion. The Fascists never dropped their shells on our parapet. A few hundred yards behind us there was a country house, called La Granja, with big farm-buildings, which was used as a store, headquarters, and cook-house for this sector of the line. It was this that the Fascist gunners were trying for, but they were five or six kilometres away and they never aimed well enough to do more than smash the windows and chip the walls. You were only in danger if you happened to be coming up the road when the firing started, and the shells plunged into the fields on either side of you. One learned almost immediately the mysterious art of knowing

by the sound of a shell how close it will fall. The shells the Fascists were firing at this period were wretchedly bad. Although they were 150 mm. they only made a crater about six feet wide by four deep, and at least one in four failed to explode. There were the usual romantic tales of sabotage in the Fascist factories and unexploded shells in which, instead of the charge, there was found a scrap of paper saying 'Red Front', but I never saw one. The truth was that the shells were hopelessly old; someone picked up a brass fuse-cap stamped with the date, and it was 1917. The Fascist guns were of the same make and calibre as our own, and the unexploded shells were often reconditioned and fired back. There was said to be one old shell with a nickname of its own which travelled daily to and fro, never exploding.

At night small patrols used to be sent into no man's land to lie in ditches near the Fascist lines and listen for sounds (bugle-calls, motor-horns, and so forth) that indicated activity in Huesca. There was a constant come-and-go of Fascist troops, and the numbers could be checked to some extent from listeners' reports. We always had special orders to report the ringing of church bells. It seemed that the Fascists always heard mass before going into action. In among the fields and orchards there were deserted mud-walled huts which it was safe to explore with a lighted match when you had plugged up the windows. Sometimes you came on valuable pieces of loot such as a hatchet or a Fascist water-bottle (better than ours and greatly sought after). You could explore in the daytime as well, but mostly it had to be done crawling on all fours. It was queer to creep about in those empty, fertile fields where everything had been arrested just at the harvest-moment. Last year's crops had never been touched. The unpruned vines were snaking across the ground, the cobs on the standing maize had gone as hard as stone, the mangels and sugar-beets were hyper — trophied into huge woody lumps. How the peasants must have cursed both armies! Sometimes parties of men went spud-gathering in no man's land. About a mile to the right of us, where the lines were closer together, there was a patch of potatoes that was frequented both by the Fascists and ourselves. We went there in the daytime, they only at night, as it was commanded by our machine-guns. One night to our annoyance they turned out en

masse and cleared up the whole patch. We discovered another patch farther on, where there was practically no cover and you had to lift the potatoes lying on your belly — a fatiguing job. If their machine-gunners spotted you, you had to flatten yourself out like a rat when it squirms under a door, with the bullets cutting up the clods a few yards behind you. It seemed worth it at the time. Potatoes were getting very scarce. If you got a sackful you could take them down to the cook-house and swap them for a water-bottleful of coffee.

And still nothing happened, nothing ever looked like happening. 'When are we going to attack? Why don't we attack?' were the questions you heard night and day from Spaniard and Englishman alike. When you think what fighting means it is queer that soldiers want to fight, and yet undoubtedly they do. In stationary warfare there are three things that all soldiers long for: a battle, more cigarettes, and a week's leave. We were somewhat better armed now than before. Each man had a hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition instead of fifty, and by degrees we were being issued with bayonets, steel helmets, and a few bombs. There were constant rumours of forthcoming battles, which I have since thought were deliberately circulated to keep up the spirits of the troops. It did not need much military knowledge to see that there would be no major action on this side of Huesca, at any rate for the time being. The strategic point was the road to Jaca, over on the other side. Later, when the Anarchists made their attacks on the Jaca road, our job was to make 'holding attacks' and force the Fascists to divert troops from the other side.

During all this time, about six weeks, there was only one action on our part of the front. This was when our Shock Troopers attacked the Manicomio, a disused lunatic asylum which the Fascists had converted into a fortress. There were several hundred refugee Germans serving with the P.O.U.M. They were organized in a special battalion called the Batall6n de Cheque, and from a military point of view they were on quite a different level from the rest of the militia — indeed, were more like soldiers than anyone I saw in Spain, except the Assault Guards and some of the International Column. The attack was mucked up, as usual. How many operations in this war, on the Government side, were not mucked up, I wonder? The Shock Troops took the Manicomio by storm, but the troops, of I

forget which militia, who were to support them by seizing the neighbouring hill that commanded the Manicomio, were badly let down. The captain who led them was one of those Regular Army officers of doubtful loyalty whom the Government persisted in employing. Either from fright or treachery he warned the Fascists by flinging a bomb when they were two hundred yards away. I am glad to say his men shot him dead on the spot. But the surprise-attack was no surprise, and the militiamen were mown down by heavy fire and driven off the hill, and at nightfall the Shock Troops had to abandon the Manicomio. Through the night the ambulances filed down the abominable road to Sietamo, killing the badly wounded with their joltings.

All of us were lousy by this time; though still cold it was warm enough for that. I have had a big experience of body vermin of various kinds, and for sheer beastliness the louse beats everything I have encountered. Other insects, mosquitoes for instance, make you suffer more, but at least they aren't resident vermin. The human louse somewhat resembles a tiny lobster, and he lives chiefly in your trousers. Short of burning all your clothes there is no known way of getting rid of him. Down the seams of your trousers he lays his glittering white eggs, like tiny grains of rice, which hatch out and breed families of their own at horrible speed. I think the pacifists might find it helpful to illustrate their pamphlets with enlarged photographs of lice. Glory of war, indeed! In war all soldiers are lousy, at least when it is warm enough. The men who fought at Verdun, at Waterloo, at Flodden, at Senlac, at Thermopylae — every one of them had lice crawling over his testicles. We kept the brutes down to some extent by burning out the eggs and by bathing as often as we could face it. Nothing short of lice could have driven me into that ice-cold river.

Everything was running short — boots, clothes, tobacco, soap, candles, matches, olive oil. Our uniforms were dropping to pieces, and many of the men had no boots, only rope-soled sandals. You came on piles of worn-out boots everywhere. Once we kept a dug-out fire burning for two days mainly with boots, which are not bad fuel. By this time my wife was in Barcelona and used to send me tea, chocolate, and even cigars when such things were procurable, but

even in Barcelona everything was running short, especially tobacco. The tea was a godsend, though we had no milk and seldom any sugar. Parcels were constantly being sent from England to men in the contingent but they never arrived; food, clothes, cigarettes — everything was either refused by the Post Office or seized in France. Curiously enough, the only firm that succeeded in sending packets of tea — even, on one memorable occasion, a tin of biscuits — to my wife was the Army and Navy Stores. Poor old Army and Navy! They did their duty nobly, but perhaps they might have felt happier if the stuff had been going to Franco's side of the barricade. The shortage of tobacco was the worst of all. At the beginning we had been issued with a packet of cigarettes a day, then it got down to eight cigarettes a day, then to five. Finally there were ten deadly days when there was no issue of tobacco at all. For the first time, in Spain, I saw something that you see every day in London — people picking up fag-ends.

Towards the end of March I got a poisoned hand that had to be lanced and put in a sling. I had to go into hospital, but it was not worth sending me to Sietamo for such a petty injury, so I stayed in the so — called hospital at Monflorite, which was merely a casualty clearing station. I was there ten days, part of the time in bed. The practicantes (hospital assistants) stole practically every valuable object I possessed, including my camera and all my photographs. At the front everyone stole, it was the inevitable effect of shortage, but the hospital people were always the worst. Later, in the hospital at Barcelona, an American who had come to join the International Column on a ship that was torpedoed by an Italian submarine, told me how he was carried ashore wounded, and how, even as they lifted him into the ambulance, the stretcher-bearers pinched his wrist-watch.

While my arm was in the sling I spent several blissful days wandering about the country-side. Monflorite was the usual huddle of mud and stone houses, with narrow tortuous alleys that had been churned by lorries till they looked like the craters of the moon. The church had been badly knocked about but was used as a military store. In the whole neighbourhood there were only two farm-houses of any size, Torre Lorenzo and Torre Fabian, and only two really

large buildings, obviously the houses of the landowners who had once lorded it over the countryside; you could see their wealth reflected in the miserable huts of the peasants. Just behind the river, close to the front line, there was an enormous flour-mill with a country-house attached to it. It seemed shameful to see the huge costly machine rusting useless and the wooden flour-chutes torn down for firewood. Later on, to get firewood for the troops farther back, parties of men were sent in lorries to wreck the place systematically. They used to smash the floorboards of a room by bursting a hand-grenade in it. La Granja, our store and cook-house, had possibly at one time been a convent. It had huge courtyards and out-houses, covering an acre or more, with stabling for thirty or forty horses. The country-houses in that part of Spain are of no interest architecturally, but their farm-buildings, of lime-washed stone with round arches and magnificent roof-beams, are noble places, built on a plan that has probably not altered for centuries. Sometimes it gave you a sneaking sympathy with the Fascist ex-owners to see the way the militia treated the buildings they had seized. In La Granja every room that was not in use had been turned into a latrine — a frightful shambles of smashed furniture and excrement. The little church that adjoined it, its walls perforated by shell-holes, had its floor inches deep in dung. In the great courtyard where the cooks ladled out the rations the litter of rusty tins, mud, mule dung, and decaying food was revolting. It gave point to the old army song:

There are rats, rats,
Rats as big as cats,
In the quartermaster's store!

The ones at La Granja itself really were as big as cats, or nearly; great bloated brutes that waddled over the beds of muck, too impudent even to run away unless you shot at them.

Spring was really here at last. The blue in the sky was softer, the air grew suddenly balmy. The frogs were mating noisily in the ditches. Round the drinking-pool that served for the village mules I found exquisite green frogs the size of a penny, so brilliant that the young grass looked dull beside them. Peasant lads went out with

buckets hunting for snails, which they roasted alive on sheets of tin. As soon as the weather improved the peasants had turned out for the spring ploughing. It is typical of the utter vagueness in which the Spanish agrarian revolution is wrapped that I could not even discover for certain whether the land here was collectivized or whether the peasants had simply divided it up among themselves. I fancy that in theory it was collectivized, this being P.O.U.M. and Anarchist territory. At any rate the landowners were gone, the fields were being cultivated, and people seemed satisfied. The friendliness of the peasants towards ourselves never ceased to astonish me. To some of the older ones the war must have seemed meaningless, visibly it produced a shortage of everything and a dismal dull life for everybody, and at the best of times peasants hate having troops quartered upon them. Yet they were invariably friendly — I suppose reflecting that, however intolerable we might be in other ways, we did stand between them and their one-time landlords. Civil war is a queer thing. Huesca was not five miles away, it was these people's market town, all of them had relatives there, every week of their lives they had gone there to sell their poultry and vegetables. And now for eight months an impenetrable barrier of barbed wire and machine-guns had lain between. Occasionally it slipped their memory. Once I was talking to an old woman who was carrying one of those tiny iron lamps in which the Spaniards bum olive oil. 'Where can I buy a lamp like that?' I said.' In Huesca,' she said without thinking, and then we both laughed. The village girls were splendid vivid creatures with coal-black hair, a swinging walk, and a straightforward, man-to-man demeanour which was probably a by-product of the revolution.

Men in ragged blue shirts and black corduroy breeches, with broad — brimmed straw hats, were ploughing the fields behind teams of mules with rhythmically flopping ears. Their ploughs were wretched things, only stirring the soil, not cutting anything we should regard as a furrow. All the agricultural implements were pitifully antiquated, everything being governed by the expensiveness of metal. A broken ploughshare, for instance, was patched, and then patched again, till sometimes it was mainly patches. Rakes and pitchforks were made of wood. Spades, among a people who seldom possessed boots, were unknown; they did their digging with a clumsy

hoe like those used in India. There was a kind of harrow that took one straight back to the later Stone Age. It was made of boards joined together, to about the size of a kitchen table; in the boards hundreds of holes were morticed, and into each hole was jammed a piece of flint which had been chipped into shape exactly as men used to chip them ten thousand years ago. I remember my feelings almost of horror when I first came upon one of these things in a derelict hut in no man's land. I had to puzzle over it for a long while before grasping that it was a harrow. It made me sick to think of the work that must go into the making of such a thing, and the poverty that was obliged to use flint in place of steel. I have felt more kindly towards industrialism ever since. But in the village there were two up-to-date farm tractors, no doubt seized from some big landowner's estate.

Once or twice I wandered out to the little walled graveyard that stood a mile or so from the village. The dead from the front were normally sent to Sietamo; these were the village dead. It was queerly different from an English graveyard. No reverence for the dead here! Everything overgrown with bushes and coarse grass, human bones littered everywhere. But the really surprising thing was the almost complete lack of religious inscriptions on the gravestones, though they all dated from before the revolution. Only once, I think, I saw the 'Pray for the Soul of So-and-So' which is usual on Catholic graves. Most of the inscriptions were purely secular, with ludicrous poems about the virtues of the deceased. On perhaps one grave in four or five there was a small cross or a perfunctory reference to Heaven; this had usually been chipped off by some industrious atheist with a chisel.

It struck me that the people in this part of Spain must be genuinely without religious feeling — religious feeling, I mean, in the orthodox sense. It is curious that all the time I was in Spain I never once saw a person cross himself; yet you would think such a movement would become instinctive, revolution or no revolution. Obviously the Spanish Church will come back (as the saying goes, night and the Jesuits always return), but there is no doubt that at the outbreak of the revolution it collapsed and was smashed up to an extent that would be unthinkable even for the moribund C. of E. in like

circumstances. To the Spanish people, at any rate in Catalonia and Aragon, the Church was a racket pure and simple. And possibly Christian belief was replaced to some extent by Anarchism, whose influence is widely spread and which undoubtedly has a religious tinge.

It was the day I came back from hospital that we advanced the line to what was really its proper position, about a thousand yards forward, along the little stream that lay a couple of hundred yards in front of the Fascist line. This operation ought to have been carried out months earlier. The point of doing it now was that the Anarchists were attacking on theJaca road, and to advance on this side made them divert troops to face us.

We were sixty or seventy hours without sleep, and my memories go down into a sort of blue, or rather a series of pictures. Listening-duty in no man's land, a hundred yards from the Casa Francesa, a fortified farm-house which was part of the Fascist line. Seven hours lying in a horrible marsh, in reedy-smelling water into which one's body subsided gradually deeper and deeper: the reedy smell, the numbing cold, the stars immovable in the black sky, the harsh croaking of the frogs. Though this was April it was the coldest night that I remember in Spain. Only a hundred yards behind us the working-parties were hard at it, but there was utter silence except for the chorus of the frogs. Just once during the night I heard a sound — the familiar noise of a sand-bag being flattened with a spade. It is queer how, just now and again, Spaniards can carry out a brilliant feat of organization. The whole move was beautifully planned. In seven hours six hundred men constructed twelve hundred metres of trench and parapet, at distances of from a hundred and fifty to three hundred yards from the Fascist line, and all so silently that the Fascists heard nothing, and during the night there was only one casualty. There were more next day, of course. Every man had his job assigned to him, even to the cook-house orderlies who suddenly arrived when the work was done with buckets of wine laced with brandy.

And then the dawn coming up and the Fascists suddenly discovering that we were there. The square white block of the Casa Francesa, though it was two hundred yards away, seemed to tower

over us, and the machine — guns in its sandbagged upper windows seemed to be pointing straight down into the trench. We all stood gaping at it, wondering why the Fascists didn't see us. Then a vicious swirl of bullets, and everyone had flung himself on his knees and was frantically digging, deepening the trench and scooping out small shelters in the side. My arm was still in bandages, I could not dig, and I spent most of that day reading a detective story — The Missing Money-lender its name was. I don't remember the plot of it, but I remember very clearly the feeling of sitting there reading it; the dampish clay of the trench bottom underneath me, the constant shifting of my legs out of the way as men hurried stopping down the trench, the crack-crack-crack of bullets a foot or two overhead. Thomas Parker got a bullet through the top of his thigh, which, as he said, was nearer to being a D.S.O. than he cared about. Casualties were happening all along the line, but nothing to what there would have been if they had caught us on the move during the night. A deserter told us afterwards that five Fascist sentries were shot for negligence. Even now they could have massacred us if they had had the initiative to bring up a few mortars. It was an awkward job getting the wounded down the narrow, crowded trench. I saw one poor devil, his breeches dark with blood, flung out of his stretcher and gasping in agony. One had to carry wounded men a long distance, a mile or more, for even when a road existed the ambulances never came very near the front line. If they came too near the Fascists had a habit of shelling them — justifiably, for in modern war no one scruples to use an ambulance for carrying ammunition.

And then, next night, waiting at Torre Fabian for an attack that was called off at the last moment by wireless. In the barn where we waited the floor was a thin layer of chaff over deep beds of bones, human bones and cows' bones mixed up, and the place was alive with rats. The filthy brutes came swarming out of the ground on every side. If there is one thing I hate more than another it is a rat running over me in the darkness. However, I had the satisfaction of catching one of them a good punch that sent him flying.

And then waiting fifty or sixty yards from the Fascist parapet for the order to attack. A long line of men crouching in an irrigation

ditch with their bayonets peeping over the edge and the whites of their eyes shining through the darkness. Kopp and Benjamin squatting behind us with a man who had a wireless receiving-box strapped to his shoulders. On the western horizon rosy gun-flashes followed at intervals of several seconds by enormous explosions. And then a pip-pip-pip noise from the wireless and the whispered order that we were to get out of it while the going was good. We did so, but not quickly enough. Twelve wretched children of the J.C.I. (the Youth League of the P.O.U.M., corresponding to the J.S.U. of the P.S.U.C.) who had been posted only about forty yards from the Fascist parapet, were caught by the dawn and unable to escape. All day they had to lie there, with only tufts of grass for cover, the Fascists shooting at them every time they moved. By nightfall seven were dead, then the other five managed to creep away in the darkness.

And then, for many mornings to follow, the sound of the Anarchist attacks on the other side of Huesca. Always the same sound. Suddenly, at some time in the small hours, the opening crash of several score bombs bursting simultaneously — even from miles away a diabolical, rending crash — and then the unbroken roar of massed rifles and machine-guns, a heavy rolling sound curiously similar to the roll of drums. By degrees the firing would spread all round the lines that encircled Huesca, and we would stumble out into the trench to lean sleepily against the parapet while a ragged meaningless fire swept overhead.

In the daytime the guns thundered fitfully. Torre Fabian, now our cookhouse, was shelled and partially destroyed. It is curious that when you are watching artillery-fire from a safe distance you always want the gunner to hit his mark, even though the mark contains your dinner and some of your comrades. The Fascists were shooting well that morning; perhaps there were German gunners on the job. They bracketed neatly on Torre Fabian. One shell beyond it, one shell short of it, then whizz-BOOM' Burst rafters leaping upwards and a sheet of uralite skimming down the air like a nicked playing-card. The next shell took off a corner of a building as neatly as a giant might do it with a knife. But the cooks produced dinner on time — a memorable feat.

As the days went on the unseen but audible guns began each to assume a distinct personality. There were the two batteries of Russian 75-mm. guns which fired from close in our rear and which somehow evoked in my mind the picture of a fat man hitting a golf-ball. These were the first Russian guns I had seen — or heard, rather. They had a low trajectory and a very high velocity, so that you heard the cartridge explosion, the whizz, and the shell-burst almost simultaneously. Behind Monflorite were two very heavy guns which fired a few times a day, with a deep, muffled roar that was like the baying of distant chained-up monsters. Up at Mount Aragon, the medieval fortress which the Government troops had stormed last year (the first time in its history, it was said), and which guarded one of the approaches to Huesca, there was a heavy gun which must have dated well back into the nineteenth century. Its great shells whistled over so slowly that you felt certain you could run beside them and keep up with them. A shell from this gun sounded like nothing so much as a man riding along on a bicycle and whistling. The trench-mortars, small though they were, made the most evil sound of all. Their shells are really a kind of winged torpedo, shaped like the darts thrown in public-houses and about the size of a quart bottle; they go off with a devilish metallic crash, as of some monstrous globe of brittle steel being shattered on an anvil. Sometimes our aeroplanes flew over and let loose the aerial torpedoes whose tremendous echoing roar makes the earth tremble even at two miles' distance. The shell-bursts from the Fascist anti — aircraft guns dotted the sky like cloudlets in a bad water-colour, but I never saw them get within a thousand yards of an aeroplane. When an aeroplane swoops down and uses its machine-gun the sound, from below, is like the fluttering of wings.

On our part of the line not much was happening. Two hundred yards to the right of us, where the Fascists were on higher ground, their snipers picked off a few of our comrades. Two hundred yards to the left, at the bridge over the stream, a sort of duel was going on between the Fascist mortars and the men who were building a concrete barricade across the bridge. The evil little shells whizzed over, zwing-crash! zwing-crash!, making a doubly diabolical noise when they landed on the asphalt road. A hundred yards away you

could stand in perfect safety and watch the columns of earth and black smoke leaping into the air like magic trees. The poor devils round the bridge spent much of the daytime cowering in the little man-holes they had scooped in the side of the trench. But there were less casualties than might have been expected, and the barricade rose steadily, a wall of concrete two feet thick, with embrasures for two machine-guns and a small field gun. The concrete was being reinforced with old bedsteads, which apparently was the only iron that could be found for the purpose.

Chapter 7

ONE afternoon Benjamin told us that he wanted fifteen volunteers. The attack on the Fascist redoubt which had been called off on the previous occasion was to be carried out tonight. I oiled my ten Mexican cartridges, dirtied my bayonet (the things give your position away if they flash too much), and packed up a hunk of bread, three inches of red sausage, and a cigar which my wife had sent from Barcelona and which I had been hoarding for a long time. Bombs were served out, three to a man. The Spanish Government had at last succeeded in producing a decent bomb. It was on the principle of a Mills bomb, but with two pins instead of one. After you had pulled the pins out there was an interval of seven seconds before the bomb exploded. Its chief disadvantage was that one pin was very stiff and the other very loose, so that you had the choice of leaving both pins in place and being unable to pull the stiff one out in a moment of emergency, or pulling out the stiff one beforehand and being in a constant stew lest the thing should explode in your pocket. But it was a handy little bomb to throw.

A little before midnight Benjamin led the fifteen of us down to Torre Fabian. Ever since evening the rain had been pelting down. The irrigation ditches were brimming over, and every time you stumbled into one you were in water up to your waist. In the pitch darkness and sheeting rain in the farm-yard a dim mass of men was waiting. Kopp addressed us, first in Spanish, then in English, and explained the plan of attack. The Fascist line here made an L-bend and the parapet we were to attack lay on rising ground at the corner of the L. About thirty of us, half English, and half Spanish, under the command of Jorge Roca, our battalion commander (a battalion in the militia was about four hundred men), and Benjamin, were to creep up and cut the Fascist wire. Jorge would fling the first bomb as a signal, then the rest of us were to send in a rain of bombs, drive the Fascists out of the parapet, and seize it before they could rally. Simultaneously seventy Shock Troopers were to assault the next Fascist ‘position’, which lay two hundred yards to the right of the other, joined to it by a communication-trench. To prevent us from

shooting each other in the darkness white armlets would be worn. At this moment a messenger arrived to say that there were no white armlets. Out of the darkness a plaintive voice suggested: 'Couldn't we arrange for the Fascists to wear white armlets instead?'

There was an hour or two to put in. The barn over the mule stable was so wrecked by shell-fire that you could not move about in it without a light. Half the floor had been torn away by a plunging shell and there was a twenty-foot drop on to the stones beneath. Someone found a pick and levered a burst plank out of the floor, and in a few minutes we had got a fire alight and our drenched clothes were steaming. Someone else produced a pack of cards. A rumour — one of those mysterious rumours that are endemic in war — flew round that hot coffee with brandy in it was about to be served out. We filed eagerly down the almost-collapsing staircase and wandered round the dark yard, inquiring where the coffee was to be found. Alas! there was no coffee. Instead, they called us together, ranged us into single file, and then Jorge and Benjamin set off rapidly into the darkness, the rest of us following.

It was still raining and intensely dark, but the wind had dropped. The mud was unspeakable. The paths through the beet-fields were simply a succession of lumps, as slippery as a greasy pole, with huge pools everywhere. Long before we got to the place where we were to leave our own parapet everyone had fallen several times and our rifles were coated with mud. At the parapet a small knot of men, our reserves, were waiting, and the doctor and a row of stretchers. We filed through the gap in the parapet and waded through another irrigation ditch. Splash-gurgle! Once again in water up to your waist, with the filthy, slimy mud oozing over your boot-tops. On the grass outside Jorge waited till we were all through. Then, bent almost double, he began creeping slowly forward. The Fascist parapet was about a hundred and fifty yards away. Our one chance of getting there was to move without noise.

I was in front with Jorge and Benjamin. Bent double, but with faces raised, we crept into the almost utter darkness at a pace that grew slower at every step. The rain beat lightly in our faces. When I glanced back I could see the men who were nearest to me, a bunch of humped shapes like huge black mushrooms gliding slowly forward.

But every time I raised my head Benjamin, close beside me, whispered fiercely in my ear: 'To keep ze head down! To keep ze head down!' I could have told him that he needn't worry. I knew by experiment that on a dark night you can never see a man at twenty paces. It was far more important to go quietly. If they once heard us we were done for. They had only to spray the darkness with their machine-gun and there was nothing for it but to run or be massacred.

But on the sodden ground it was almost impossible to move quietly. Do what you would your feet stuck to the mud, and every step you took was slop-slop, slop-slop. And the devil of it was that the wind had dropped, and in spite of the rain it was a very quiet night. Sounds would carry a long way. There was a dreadful moment when I kicked against a tin and thought every Fascist within miles must have heard it. But no, not a sound, no answering shot, no movement in the Fascist lines. We crept onwards, always more slowly. I cannot convey to you the depth of my desire to get there. Just to get within bombing distance before they heard us! At such a time you have not even any fear, only a tremendous hopeless longing to get over the intervening ground. I have felt exactly the same thing when stalking a wild animal; the same agonized desire to get within range, the same dreamlike certainty that it is impossible. And how the distance stretched out! I knew the ground well, it was barely a hundred and fifty yards, and yet it seemed more like a mile. When you are creeping at that pace you are aware as an ant might be of the enormous variations in the ground; the splendid patch of smooth grass here, the evil patch of sticky mud there, the tall rustling reeds that have got to be avoided, the heap of stones that almost makes you give up hope because it seems impossible to get over it without noise.

We had been creeping forward for such an age that I began to think we had gone the wrong way. Then in the darkness thin parallel lines of something blacker were faintly visible. It was the outer wire (the Fascists had two lines of wire). Jorge knelt down, fumbled in his pocket. He had our only pair of wire-cutters. Snip, snip. The trailing stuff was lifted delicately aside. We waited for the men at the back to close up. They seemed to be making a frightful noise. It might be fifty yards to the Fascist parapet now. Still onwards, bent double. A

stealthy step, lowering your foot as gently as a cat approaching a mousehole; then a pause to listen; then another step. Once I raised my head; in silence Benjamin put his hand behind my neck and pulled it violently down. I knew that the inner wire was barely twenty yards from the parapet. It seemed to me inconceivable that thirty men could get there unheard. Our breathing was enough to give us away. Yet somehow we did get there. The Fascist parapet was visible now, a dim black mound, looming high above us. Once again Jorge knelt and fumbled. Snip, snip. There was no way of cutting the stuff silently.

So that was the inner wire. We crawled through it on all fours and rather more rapidly. If we had time to deploy now all was well. Jorge and Benjamin crawled across to the right. But the men behind, who were spread out, had to form into single file to get through the narrow gap in the wire, and just as this moment there was a flash and a bang from the Fascist parapet. The sentry had heard us at last. Jorge poised himself on one knee and swung his arm like a bowler. Crash! His bomb burst somewhere over the parapet. At once, far more promptly than one would have thought possible, a roar of fire, ten or twenty rifles, burst out from the Fascist parapet. They had been waiting for us after all. Momentarily you could see every sand-bag in the lurid light. Men too far back were flinging their bombs and some of them were falling short of the parapet. Every loophole seemed to be spouting jets of flame. It is always hateful to be shot at in the dark — every rifle — flash seems to be pointed straight at yourself — but it was the bombs that were the worst. You cannot conceive the horror of these things till you have seen one burst close to you in darkness; in the daytime there is only the crash of the explosion, in the darkness there is the blinding red glare as well. I had flung myself down at the first volley. All this while I was lying on my side in the greasy mud, wrestling savagely with the pin of a bomb. The damned thing would not come out. Finally I realized that I was twisting it in the wrong direction. I got the pin out, rose to my knees, hurled the bomb, and threw myself down again. The bomb burst over to the right, outside the parapet; fright had spoiled my aim. Just at this moment another bomb burst right in front of me, so close that I could feel the heat of the explosion. I flattened myself out and dug my face

into the mud so hard that I hurt my neck and thought that I was wounded. Through the din I heard an English voice behind me say quietly: 'I'm hit.' The bomb had, in fact, wounded several people round about me without touching myself. I rose to my knees and flung my second bomb. I forget where that one went.

The Fascists were firing, our people behind were firing, and I was very conscious of being in the middle. I felt the blast of a shot and realized that a man was firing from immediately behind me. I stood up and shouted at him:

'Don't shoot at me, you bloody fool!' At this moment I saw that Benjamin, ten or fifteen yards to my right, was motioning to me with his arm. I ran across to him. It meant crossing the line of spouting loop-holes, and as I went I clapped my left hand over my cheek; an idiotic gesture — as though one's hand could stop a bullet! — but I had a horror of being hit in the face. Benjamin was kneeling on one knee with a pleased, devilish sort of expression on his face and firing carefully at the rifle-flashes with his automatic pistol. Jorge had dropped wounded at the first volley and was somewhere out of sight. I knelt beside Benjamin, pulled the pin out of my third bomb and flung it. Ah! No doubt about it that time. The bomb crashed inside the parapet, at the corner, just by the machine-gun nest.

The Fascist fire seemed to have slackened very suddenly. Benjamin leapt to his feet and shouted: 'Forward! Charge!' We dashed up the short steep slope on which the parapet stood. I say 'dashed'; 'lumbered' would be a better word; the fact is that you can't move fast when you are sodden and mudded from head to foot and weighted down with a heavy rifle and bayonet and a hundred and fifty cartridges. I took it for granted that there would be a Fascist waiting for me at the top. If he fired at that range he could not miss me, and yet somehow I never expected him to fire, only to try for me with his bayonet. I seemed to feel in advance the sensation of our bayonets crossing, and I wondered whether his arm would be stronger than mine. However, there was no Fascist waiting. With a vague feeling of relief I found that it was a low parapet and the sand-bags gave a good foothold. As a rule they are difficult to get over. Everything inside was smashed to pieces, beams flung all over the place, and great shards of uralite littered everywhere. Our bombs had

wrecked all the huts and dug-outs. And still there was not a soul visible. I thought they would be lurking somewhere underground, and shouted in English (I could not think of any Spanish at the moment): 'Come on out of it! Surrender!' No answer. Then a man, a shadowy figure in the half-light, skipped over the roof of one of the ruined huts and dashed away to the left. I started after him, prodding my bayonet ineffectually into the darkness. As I rounded the comer of the hut I saw a man — I don't know whether or not it was the same man as I had seen before — fleeing up the communication-trench that led to the other Fascist position. I must have been very close to him, for I could see him clearly. He was bareheaded and seemed to have nothing on except a blanket which he was clutching round his shoulders. If I had fired I could have blown him to pieces. But for fear of shooting one another we had been ordered to use only bayonets once we were inside the parapet, and in any case I never even thought of firing. Instead, my mind leapt backwards twenty years, to our boxing instructor at school, showing me in vivid pantomime how he had bayoneted a Turk at the Dardanelles. I gripped my rifle by the small of the butt and lunged at the man's back. He was just out of my reach. Another lunge: still out of reach. And for a little distance we proceeded like this, he rushing up the trench and I after him on the ground above, prodding at his shoulder-blades and never quite getting there — a comic memory for me to look back upon, though I suppose it seemed less comic to him.

Of course, he knew the ground better than I and had soon slipped away from me. When I came back the position was full of shouting men. The noise of firing had lessened somewhat. The Fascists were still pouring a heavy fire at us from three sides, but it was coming from a greater distance.

We had driven them back for the time being. I remember saying in an oracular manner: 'We can hold this place for half an hour, not more.' I don't know why I picked on half an hour. Looking over the right-hand parapet you could see innumerable greenish rifle-flashes stabbing the darkness; but they were a long way back, a hundred or two hundred yards. Our job now was to search the position and loot anything that was worth looting. Benjamin and some others were already scrabbling among the ruins of a big hut or dug-out in the

middle of the position. Benjamin staggered excitedly through the ruined roof, tugging at the rope handle of an ammunition box.

'Comrades! Ammunition! Plenty ammunition here!'

'We don't want ammunition,' said a voice, 'we want rifles.'

This was true. Half our rifles were jammed with mud and unusable. They could be cleaned, but it is dangerous to take the bolt out of a rifle in the darkness; you put it down somewhere and then you lose it. I had a tiny electric torch which my wife had managed to buy in Barcelona, otherwise we had no light of any description between us. A few men with good rifles began a desultory fire at the flashes in the distance. No one dared fire too rapidly; even the best of the rifles were liable to jam if they got too hot. There were about sixteen of us inside the parapet, including one or two who were wounded. A number of wounded, English and Spanish, were lying outside. Patrick O'Hara, a Belfast Irishman who had had some training in first-aid, went to and fro with packets of bandages, binding up the wounded men and, of course, being shot at every time he returned to the parapet, in spite of his indignant shouts of 'Poum!'

We began searching the position. There were several dead men lying about, but I did not stop to examine them. The thing I was after was the machine-gun. All the while when we were lying outside I had been wondering vaguely why the gun did not fire. I flashed my torch inside the machine-gun nest. A bitter disappointment! The gun was not there. Its tripod was there, and various boxes of ammunition and spare parts, but the gun was gone. They must have unscrewed it and carried it off at the first alarm. No doubt they were acting under orders, but it was a stupid and cowardly thing to do, for if they had kept the gun in place they could have slaughtered the whole lot of us. We were furious. We had set our hearts on capturing a machine-gun.

We poked here and there but did not find anything of much value. There were quantities of Fascist bombs lying about — a rather inferior type of bomb, which you touched off by pulling a string — and I put a couple of them in my pocket as souvenirs. It was impossible not to be struck by the bare misery of the Fascist dug-outs. The litter of spare clothes, books, food, petty personal belongings that you saw in our own dug-outs was completely absent; these poor unpaid conscripts seemed to own nothing except blankets

and a few soggy hunks of bread. Up at the far end there was a small dug-out which was partly above ground and had a tiny window. We flashed the torch through the window and instantly raised a cheer. A cylindrical object in a leather case, four feet high and six inches in diameter, was leaning against the wall. Obviously the machine-gun barrel. We dashed round and got in at the doorway, to find that the thing in the leather case was not a machine-gun but something which, in our weapon-starved army, was even more precious. It was an enormous telescope, probably of at least sixty or seventy magnifications, with a folding tripod. Such telescopes simply did not exist on our side of the line and they were desperately needed. We brought it out in triumph and leaned it against the parapet, to be carried off after.

At this moment someone shouted that the Fascists were closing in. Certainly the din of firing had grown very much louder. But it was obvious that the Fascists would not counter-attack from the right, which meant crossing no man's land and assaulting their own parapet. If they had any sense at all they would come at us from inside the line. I went round to the other side of the dug-outs. The position was roughly horseshoe-shaped, with the dug-outs in the middle, so that we had another parapet covering us on the left. A heavy fire was coming from that direction, but it did not matter greatly. The danger-spot was straight in front, where there was no protection at all. A stream of bullets was passing just overhead. They must be coming from the other Fascist position farther up the line; evidently the Shock Troopers had not captured it after all. But this time the noise was deafening. It was the unbroken, drum-like roar of massed rifles which I was used to hearing from a little distance; this was the first time I had been in the middle of it. And by now, of course, the firing had spread along the line for miles around. Douglas Thompson, with a wounded arm dangling useless at his side, was leaning against the parapet and firing one-handed at the flashes. Someone whose rifle had jammed was loading for him.

There were four or five of us round this side. It was obvious what we must do. We must drag the sand-bags from the front parapet and make a barricade across the unprotected side. And we had got to be quick. The fire was high at present, but they might lower it at any

moment; by the flashes all round I could see that we had a hundred or two hundred men against us. We began wrenching the sand-bags loose, carrying them twenty yards forward and dumping them into a rough heap. It was a vile job. They were big sand-bags, weighing a hundredweight each and it took every ounce of your strength to prise them loose; and then the rotten sacking split and the damp earth cascaded all over you, down your neck and up your sleeves. I remember feeling a deep horror at everything: the chaos, the darkness, the frightful din, the slithering to and fro in the mud, the struggles with the bursting sand-bags — all the time encumbered with my rifle, which I dared not put down for fear of losing it. I even shouted to someone as we staggered along with a bag between us: 'This is war! Isn't it bloody?' Suddenly a succession of tall figures came leaping over the front parapet. As they came nearer we saw that they wore the uniform of the Shock Troopers, and we cheered, thinking they were reinforcements. However, there were only four of them, three Germans and a Spaniard.

We heard afterwards what had happened to the Shock Troopers. They did not know the ground and in the darkness had been led to the wrong place, where they were caught on the Fascist wire and numbers of them were shot down. These were four who had got lost, luckily for themselves. The Germans did not speak a word of English, French, or Spanish. With difficulty and much gesticulation we explained what we were doing and got them to help us in building the barricade.

The Fascists had brought up a machine-gun now. You could see it spitting like a squib a hundred or two hundred yards away; the bullets came over us with a steady, frosty crackle. Before long we had flung enough sand-bags into place to make a low breastwork behind which the few men who were on this side of the position could lie down and fire. I was kneeling behind them. A mortar-shell whizzed over and crashed somewhere in no man's land. That was another danger, but it would take them some minutes to find our range. Now that we had finished wrestling with those beastly sand-bags it was not bad fun in a way; the noise, the darkness, the flashes approaching, our own men blazing back at the flashes. One even had time to think a little. I remember wondering whether I was

frightened, and deciding that I was not. Outside, where I was probably in less danger, I had been half sick with fright. Suddenly there was another shout that the Fascists were closing in. There was no doubt about it this time, the rifle-flashes were much nearer. I saw a flash hardly twenty yards away. Obviously they were working their way up the communication-trench. At twenty yards they were within easy bombing range; there were eight or nine of us bunched together and a single well-placed bomb would blow us all to fragments. Bob Smillie, the blood running down his face from a small wound, sprang to his knee and flung a bomb. We cowered, waiting for the crash. The fuse fizzled red as it sailed through the air, but the bomb failed to explode. (At least a quarter of these bombs were duds'). I had no bombs left except the Fascist ones and I was not certain how these worked. I shouted to the others to know if anyone had a bomb to spare. Douglas Moyle felt in his pocket and passed one across. I flung it and threw myself on my face. By one of those strokes of luck that happen about once in a year I had managed to drop the bomb almost exactly where the rifle had flashed. There was the roar of the explosion and then, instantly, a diabolical outcry of screams and groans. We had got one of them, anyway; I don't know whether he was killed, but certainly he was badly hurt. Poor wretch, poor wretch! I felt a vague sorrow as I heard him screaming. But at the same instant, in the dim light of the rifle-flashes, I saw or thought I saw a figure standing near the place where the rifle had flashed. I threw up my rifle and let fly. Another scream, but I think it was still the effect of the bomb. Several more bombs were thrown. The next rifle-flashes we saw were a long way off, a hundred yards or more. So we had driven them back, temporarily at least.

Everyone began cursing and saying why the hell didn't they send us some supports. With a sub-machine-gun or twenty men with clean rifles we could hold this place against a battalion. At this moment Paddy Donovan, who was second-in-command to Benjamin and had been sent back for orders, climbed over the front parapet.

'Hi! Come on out of it! All men to retire at once!'

'What?'

'Retire! Get out of it!'

'Why?'

‘Orders. Back to our own lines double-quick.’

People were already climbing over the front parapet. Several of them were struggling with a heavy ammunition box. My mind flew to the telescope which I had left leaning against the parapet on the other side of the position. But at this moment I saw that the four Shock Troopers, acting I suppose on some mysterious orders they had received beforehand, had begun running up the communication-trench. It led to the other Fascist position and — if they got there — to certain death. They were disappearing into the darkness. I ran after them, trying to think of the Spanish for ‘retire’; finally I shouted, ‘Atras! Atras!’ which perhaps conveyed the right meaning. The Spaniard understood it and brought the others back. Paddy was waiting at the parapet.

‘Come on, hurry up.’

‘But the telescope!’

‘B — the telescope! Benjamin’s waiting outside.’

We climbed out. Paddy held the wire aside for me. As soon as we got away from the shelter of the Fascist parapet we were under a devilish fire that seemed to be coming at us from every direction. Part of it, I do not doubt, came from our own side, for everyone was firing all along the line. Whichever way we turned a fresh stream of bullets swept past; we were driven this way and that in the darkness like a flock of sheep. It did not make it any easier that we were dragging a captured box of ammunition — one of those boxes that hold 1750 rounds and weigh about a hundredweight — besides a box of bombs and several Fascist rifles. In a few minutes, although the distance from parapet to parapet was not two hundred yards and most of us knew the ground, we were completely lost. We found ourselves slithering about in a muddy field, knowing nothing except that bullets were coming from both sides. There was no moon to go by, but the sky was growing a little lighter. Our lines lay east ofHuesca; I wanted to stay where we were till the first crack of dawn showed us which was east and which was west; but the others were against it. We slithered onwards, changing our direction several times and taking it in turns to haul at the ammunition-box. At last we saw the low flat line of a parapet looming in front of us. It might be ours or it might be the Fascists’; nobody had the dimmest idea which way we

were going. Benjamin crawled on his belly through some tall whitish weed till he was about twenty yards from the parapet and tried a challenge. A shout of 'Poum!' answered him. We jumped to our feet, found our way along the parapet, slopped once more through the irrigation ditch — splash-gurgle! — and were in safety.

Kopp was waiting inside the parapet with a few Spaniards. The doctor and the stretchers were gone. It appeared that all the wounded had been got in except Jorge and one of our own men, Hiddlestone by name, who were missing. Kopp was pacing up and down, very pale. Even the fat folds at the back of his neck were pale; he was paying no attention to the bullets that streamed over the low parapet and cracked close to his head. Most of us were squatting behind the parapet for cover. Kopp was muttering. 'Jorge! Cogno! Jorge!' And then in English. 'If Jorge is gone it is terreeble, terreeble!' Jorge was his personal friend and one of his best officers. Suddenly he turned to us and asked for five volunteers, two English and three Spanish, to go and look for the missing men. Moyle and I volunteered with three Spaniards.

As we got outside the Spaniards murmured that it was getting dangerously light. This was true enough; the sky was dimly blue. There was a tremendous noise of excited voices coming from the Fascist redoubt. Evidently they had re-occupied the place in much greater force than before. We were sixty or seventy yards from the parapet when they must have seen or heard us, for they sent over a heavy burst of fire which made us drop on our faces. One of them flung a bomb over the parapet — a sure sign of panic. We were lying in the grass, waiting for an opportunity to move on, when we heard or thought we heard — I have no doubt it was pure imagination, but it seemed real enough at the time — that the Fascist voices were much closer. They had left the parapet and were coming after us. 'Run!' I yelled to Moyle, and jumped to my feet. And heavens, how I ran! I had thought earlier in the night that you can't run when you are sodden from head to foot and weighted down with a rifle and cartridges; I learned now you can always run when you think you have fifty or a hundred armed men after you. But if I could run fast, others could run faster. In my flight something that might have been a shower of meteors sped past me. It was the three Spaniards, who

had been in front. They were back to our own parapet before they stopped and I could catch up with them. The truth was that our nerves were all to pieces. I knew, however, that in a half light one man is invisible where five are clearly visible, so I went back alone. I managed to get to the outer wire and searched the ground as well as I could, which was not very well, for I had to lie on my belly. There was no sign ofJorge or Hiddlestone, so I crept back. We learned afterwards that both Jorge and Hiddlestone had been taken to the dressing-station earlier. Jorge was lightly wounded through the shoulder. Hiddlestone had received a dreadful wound — a bullet which travelled right up his left arm, breaking the bone in several places; as he lay helpless on the ground a bomb had burst near him and torn various other parts of his body. He recovered, I am glad to say. Later he told me that he had worked his way some distance lying on his back, then had clutched hold of a wounded Spaniard and they had helped one another in.

It was getting light now. Along the line for miles around a ragged meaningless fire was thundering, like the rain that goes on raining after a storm. I remember the desolate look of everything, the morasses of mud, the weeping poplar trees, the yellow water in the trench-bottoms; and men's exhausted faces, unshaven, streaked with mud, and blackened to the eyes with smoke. When I got back to my dug — out the three men I shared it with were already fast sleep. They had flung themselves down with all their equipment on and their muddy rifles clutched against them. Everything was sodden, inside the dug — out as well as outside. By long searching I managed to collect enough chips of dry wood to make a tiny fire. Then I smoked the cigar which I had been hoarding and which, surprisingly enough, had not got broken during the night.

Afterwards we learned that the action had been a success, as such things go. It was merely a raid to make the Fascists divert troops from the other side of Huesca, where the Anarchists were attacking again. I had judged that the Fascists had thrown a hundred or two hundred men into the counter-attack, but a deserter told us later on that it was six hundred. I dare say he was lying — deserters, for obvious reasons, often try to curry favour. It was a great pity about the telescope. The thought of losing that beautiful bit of loot worries

me even now.

Chapter 8

THE days grew hotter and even the nights grew tolerably warm. On a bullet — chipped tree in front of our parapet thick clusters of cherries were forming. Bathing in the river ceased to be an agony and became almost a pleasure. Wild roses with pink blooms the size of saucers straggled over the shell-holes round Torre Fabian. Behind the line you met peasants wearing wild roses over their ears. In the evenings they used to go out with green nets, hunting quails. You spread the net over the tops of the grasses and then lay down and made a noise like a female quail. Any male quail that was within hearing then came running towards you, and when he was underneath the net you threw a stone to scare him, whereupon he sprang into the air and was entangled in the net. Apparently only male quails were caught, which struck me as unfair.

There was a section of Andalusians next to us in the line now. I do not know quite how they got to this front. The current explanation was that they had run away from Malaga so fast that they had forgotten to stop at Valencia; but this, of course, came from the Catalans, who professed to look down on the Andalusians as a race of semi-savages. Certainly the Andalusians were very ignorant. Few if any of them could read, and they seemed not even to know the one thing that everybody knows in Spain — which political party they belonged to. They thought they were Anarchists, but were not quite certain; perhaps they were Communists. They were gnarled, rustic-looking men, shepherds or labourers from the olive groves, perhaps, with faces deeply stained by the ferocious suns of farther south. They were very useful to us, for they had an extraordinary dexterity at rolling the dried-up Spanish tobacco into cigarettes. The issue of cigarettes had ceased, but in Monflorite it was occasionally possible to buy packets of the cheapest kind of tobacco, which in appearance and texture was very like chopped chaff. Its flavour was not bad, but it was so dry that even when you had succeeded in making a cigarette the tobacco promptly fell out and left an empty cylinder. The Andalusians, however, could roll admirable cigarettes and had a special technique for tucking the ends in.

Two Englishmen were laid low by sunstroke. My salient memories of that time are the heat of the midday sun, and working half-naked with sand — bags punishing one's shoulders which were already flayed by the sun; and the lousiness of our clothes and boots, which were literally dropping to pieces; and the struggles with the mule which brought our rations and which did not mind rifle-fire but took to flight when shrapnel burst in the air; and the mosquitoes (just beginning to be active) and the rats, which were a public nuisance and would even devour leather belts and cartridge-pouches. Nothing was happening except an occasional casualty from a sniper's bullet and the sporadic artillery-fire and air-raids on Huesca. Now that the trees were in full leaf we had constructed snipers' platforms, like machans, in the poplar trees that fringed the line. On the other side of Huesca the attacks were petering out. The Anarchists had had heavy losses and had not succeeded in completely cutting the Jaca road. They had managed to establish themselves close enough on either side to bring the road itself under machine-gun fire and make it impassable for traffic; but the gap was a kilometre wide and the Fascists had constructed a sunken road, a sort of enormous trench, along which a certain number of lorries could come and go. Deserters reported that in Huesca there were plenty of munitions and very little food. But the town was evidently not going to fall. Probably it would have been impossible to take it with the fifteen thousand ill-armed men who were available. Later, in June, the Government brought troops from the Madrid front and concentrated thirty thousand men on Huesca, with an enormous quantity of aeroplanes, but still the town did not fall.

When we went on leave I had been a hundred and fifteen days in the line, and at the time this period seemed to me to have been one of the most futile of my whole life. I had joined the militia in order to fight against Fascism, and as yet I had scarcely fought at all, had merely existed as a sort of passive object, doing nothing in return for my rations except to suffer from cold and lack of sleep. Perhaps that is the fate of most soldiers in most wars. But now that I can see this period in perspective I do not altogether regret it. I wish, indeed, that I could have served the Spanish Government a little more effectively; but from a personal point of view — from the point of view of my

own development — those first three or four months that I spent in the line were less futile than I then thought. They formed a kind of interregnum in my life, quite different from anything that had gone before and perhaps from anything that is to come, and they taught me things that I could not have learned in any other way.

The essential point is that all this time I had been isolated — for at the front one was almost completely isolated from the outside world: even of what was happening in Barcelona one had only a dim conception — among people who could roughly but not too inaccurately be described as revolutionaries. This was the result of the militia — system, which on the Aragon front was not radically altered till about June 1937. The workers' militias, based on the trade unions and each composed of people of approximately the same political opinions, had the effect of canalizing into one place all the most revolutionary sentiment in the country. I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragon one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilized life — snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc. — had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money — tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master. Of course such a state of affairs could not last. It was simply a temporary and local phase in an enormous game that is being played over the whole surface of the earth. But it lasted long enough to have its effect upon anyone who experienced it. However much one cursed at the time, one realized afterwards that one had been in contact with something strange and valuable. One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word

'comrade' stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality. I am well aware that it is now the fashion to deny that Socialism has anything to do with equality. In every country in the world a huge tribe of party-hacks and sleek little professors are busy 'proving' that Socialism means no more than a planned state-capitalism with the grab-motive left intact. But fortunately there also exists a vision of Socialism quite different from this. The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the 'mystique' of Socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all. And it was here that those few months in the militia were valuable to me. For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. The effect was to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than it had been before. Partly, perhaps, this was due to the good luck of being among Spaniards, who, with their innate decency and their ever-present Anarchist tinge, would make even the opening stages of Socialism tolerable if they had the chance.

Of course at the time I was hardly conscious of the changes that were occurring in my own mind. Like everyone about me I was chiefly conscious of boredom, heat, cold, dirt, lice, privation, and occasional danger. It is quite different now. This period which then seemed so futile and eventless is now of great importance to me. It is so different from the rest of my life that already it has taken on the magic quality which, as a rule, belongs only to memories that are years old. It was beastly while it was happening, but it is a good patch for my mind to browse upon. I wish I could convey to you the atmosphere of that time. I hope I have done so, a little, in the earlier chapters of this book. It is all bound up in my mind with the winter cold, the ragged uniforms of militiamen, the oval Spanish faces, the morse-like tapping of machine-guns, the smells of urine and rotting bread, the tinny taste of bean-stews wolfed hurriedly out of unclean

pannikins.

The whole period stays by me with curious vividness. In my memory I live over incidents that might seem too petty to be worth recalling. I am in the dug-out at Monte Pocero again, on the ledge of limestone that serves as a bed, and young Ram6n is snoring with his nose flattened between my shoulder-blades. I am stumbling up the mucky trench, through the mist that swirls round me like cold steam. I am half-way up a crack in the mountain-side, struggling to keep my balance and to tug a root of wild rosemary out of the ground. High overhead some meaningless bullets are singing.

I am lying hidden among small fir-trees on the low ground west of Monte Oscuro, with Kopp and Bob Edwards and three Spaniards. Up the naked grey hill to the right of us a string of Fascists are climbing like ants. Close in front a bugle-call rings out from the Fascist lines. Kopp catches my eye and, with a schoolboy gesture, thumbs his nose at the sound.

I am in the mucky yard at La Granja, among the mob of men who are struggling with their tin pannikins round the cauldron of stew. The fat and harassed cook is warding them off with the ladle. At a table nearby a bearded man with a huge automatic pistol strapped to his belt is hewing loaves of bread into five pieces. Behind me a Cockney voice (Bill Chambers, with whom I quarrelled bitterly and who was afterwards killed outside Huesca) is singing:

There are rats, rats,
Rats as big as cats,
In the . . .

A shell comes screaming over. Children of fifteen fling themselves on their faces. The cook dodges behind the cauldron. Everyone rises with a sheepish expression as the shell plunges and booms a hundred yards away.

I am walking up and down the line of sentries, under the dark boughs of the poplars. In the flooded ditch outside the rats are paddling about, making as much noise as otters. As the yellow dawn comes up behind us, the Andalusian sentry, mufHed in his cloak, begins singing. Across no man's land, a hundred or two hundred

yards away, you can hear the Fascist sentry also singing.

On 25 April, after the usual mananas, another section relieved us and we handed over our rifles, packed our kits, and marched back to Monflorite. I was not sorry to leave the line. The lice were multiplying in my trousers far faster than I could massacre them, and for a month past I had had no socks and my boots had very little sole left, so that I was walking more or less barefoot. I wanted a hot bath, clean clothes, and a night between sheets more passionately than it is possible to want anything when one has been living a normal civilized life. We slept a few hours in a barn in Monflorite, jumped a lorry in the small hours, caught the five o'clock train at Barbastro, and — having the luck to connect with a fast train at Lerida — were in Barcelona by three o'clock in the afternoon of the 26th. And after that the trouble began.

Chapter 9

FROM Mandalay, in Upper Burma, you can travel by train to Maymyo, the principal hill-station of the province, on the edge of the Shan plateau. It is rather a queer experience. You start off in the typical atmosphere of an eastern city — the scorching sunlight, the dusty palms, the smells of fish and spices and garlic, the squashy tropical fruits, the swarming dark-faced human beings — and because you are so used to it you carry this atmosphere intact, so to speak, in your railway carriage. Mentally you are still in Mandalay when the train stops at Maymyo, four thousand feet above sea — level. But in stepping out of the carriage you step into a different hemisphere. Suddenly you are breathing cool sweet air that might be that of England, and all round you are green grass, bracken, fir-trees, and hill — women with pink cheeks selling baskets of strawberries.

Getting back to Barcelona, after three and a half months at the front, reminded me of this. There was the same abrupt and startling change of atmosphere. In the train, all the way to Barcelona, the atmosphere of the front persisted; the dirt, the noise, the discomfort, the ragged clothes the feeling of privation, comradeship, and equality. The train, already full of militiamen when it left Barbastro, was invaded by more and more peasants at every station on the line; peasants with bundles of vegetables, with terrified fowls which they carried head — downwards, with sacks which looped and writhed all over the floor and were discovered to be full of live rabbits — finally with a quite considerable flock of sheep which were driven into the compartments and wedged into every empty space. The militiamen shouted revolutionary songs which drowned the rattle of the train and kissed their hands or waved red and black handkerchiefs to every pretty girl along the line. Bottles of wine and of anis, the filthy Aragonese liqueur, travelled from hand to hand. With the Spanish goat-skin water-bottles you can squirt a jet of wine right across a railway carriage into your friend’s mouth, which saves a lot of trouble. Next to me a black-eyed boy of fifteen was recounting sensational and, I do not doubt, completely untrue stories of his own exploits at the front to two old leather-faced peasants who listened

open-mouthed. Presently the peasants undid their bundles and gave us some sticky dark-red wine. Everyone was profoundly happy, more happy than I can convey. But when the train had rolled through Sabadell and into Barcelona, we stepped into an atmosphere that was scarcely less alien and hostile to us and our kind than if this had been Paris or London.

Everyone who has made two visits, at intervals of months, to Barcelona during the war has remarked upon the extraordinary changes that took place in it. And curiously enough, whether they went there first in August and again in January, or, like myself, first in December and again in April, the thing they said was always the same: that the revolutionary atmosphere had vanished. No doubt to anyone who had been there in August, when the blood was scarcely dry in the streets and militia were quartered in the smart hotels, Barcelona in December would have seemed bourgeois; to me, fresh from England, it was liker to a workers' city than anything I had conceived possible. Now the tide had rolled back. Once again it was an ordinary city, a little pinched and chipped by war, but with no outward sign of working-class predominance.

The change in the aspect of the crowds was startling. The militia uniform and the blue overalls had almost disappeared; everyone seemed to be wearing the smart summer suits in which Spanish tailors specialize. Fat prosperous men, elegant women, and sleek cars were everywhere. (It appeared that there were still no private cars; nevertheless, anyone who 'was anyone' seemed able to command a car.) The officers of the new Popular Army, a type that had scarcely existed when I left Barcelona, swarmed in surprising numbers. The Popular Army was officered at the rate of one officer to ten men. A certain number of these officers had served in the militia and been brought back from the front for technical instruction, but the majority were young men who had gone to the School of War in preference to joining the militia. Their relation to their men was not quite the same as in a bourgeois army, but there was a definite social difference, expressed by the difference of pay and uniform. The men wore a kind of coarse brown overalls, the officers wore an elegant khaki uniform with a tight waist, like a British Army officer's uniform, only a little more so. I do not suppose that more than one in twenty of them had

yet been to the front, but all of them had automatic pistols strapped to their belts; we, at the front, could not get pistols for love or money. As we made our way up the street I noticed that people were staring at our dirty exteriors. Of course, like all men who have been several months in the line, we were a dreadful sight. I was conscious of looking like a scarecrow. My leather jacket was in tatters, my woollen cap had lost its shape and slid perpetually over one eye, my boots consisted of very little beyond splayed-out uppers. All of us were in more or less the same state, and in addition we were dirty and unshaven, so it was no wonder that the people stared. But it dismayed me a little, and brought it home to me that some queer things had been happening in the last three months.

During the next few days I discovered by innumerable signs that my first impression had not been wrong. A deep change had come over the town. There were two facts that were the keynote of all else. One was that the people — the civil population — had lost much of their interest in the war; the other was that the normal division of society into rich and poor, upper class and lower class, was reasserting itself.

The general indifference to the war was surprising and rather disgusting. It horrified people who came to Barcelona from Madrid or even from Valencia. Partly it was due to the remoteness of Barcelona from the actual fighting; I noticed the same thing a month later in Tarragona, where the ordinary life of a smart seaside town was continuing almost undisturbed. But it was significant that all over Spain voluntary enlistment had dwindled from about January onwards. In Catalonia, in February, there had been a wave of enthusiasm over the first big drive for the Popular Army, but it had not led to any great increase in recruiting. The war was only six months old or thereabouts when the Spanish Government had to resort to conscription, which would be natural in a foreign war, but seems anomalous in a civil war. Undoubtedly it was bound up with the disappointment of the revolutionary hopes with which the war had started. The trade union members who formed themselves into militias and chased the Fascists back to Zaragoza in the first few weeks of war had done so largely because they believed themselves to be fighting for working-class control; but it was becoming more

and more obvious that working-class control was a lost cause, and the common people, especially the town proletariat, who have to fill the ranks in any war, civil or foreign, could not be blamed for a certain apathy. Nobody wanted to lose the war, but the majority were chiefly anxious for it to be over. You noticed this wherever you went. Everywhere you met with the same perfunctory remark:' This war — terrible, isn't it? When is it going to end?' Politically conscious people were far more aware of the internecine struggle between Anarchist and Communist than of the fight against Franco. To the mass of the people the food shortage was the most important thing. 'The front' had come to be thought of as a mythical far-off place to which young men disappeared and either did not return or returned after three or four months with vast sums of money in their pockets. (A militiaman usually received his back pay when he went on leave.) Wounded men, even when they were hopping about on crutches, did not receive any special consideration. To be in the militia was no longer fashionable. The shops, always the barometers of public taste, showed this clearly. When I first reached Barcelona the shops, poor and shabby though they were, had specialized in militiamen's equipment. Forage-caps, zipper jackets, Sam Browne belts, hunting-knives, water-bottles, revolver-holsters were displayed in every window. Now the shops were markedly smarter, but the war had been thrust into the background. As I discovered later, when buying my kit before going back to the front, certain things that one badly needed at the front were very difficult to procure.

Meanwhile there was going on a systematic propaganda against the party militias and in favour of the Popular Army. The position here was rather curious. Since February the entire armed forces had theoretically been incorporated in the Popular Army, and the militias were, on paper, reconstructed along Popular Army lines, with differential pay-rates, gazetted rank, etc., etc. The divisions were made up of 'mixed brigades', which were supposed to consist partly of Popular Army troops and partly of militia. But the only changes that had actually taken place were changes of name. The P.O.U.M. troops, for instance, previously called the Lenin Division, were now known as the 29th Division. Until June very few Popular Army troops reached the Aragon front, and in consequence the militias

were able to retain their separate structure and their special character. But on every wall the Government agents had stencilled: 'We need a Popular Army', and over the radio and in the Communist Press there was a ceaseless and sometimes very malignant jibing against the militias, who were described as ill-trained, undisciplined, etc., etc.; the Popular Army was always described as 'heroic'. From much of this propaganda you would have derived the impression that there was something disgraceful in having gone to the front voluntarily and something praiseworthy in waiting to be conscripted. For the time being, however, the militias were holding the line while the Popular Army was training in the rear, and this fact had to be advertised as little as possible. Drafts of militia returning to the front were no longer marched through the streets with drums beating and flags flying. They were smuggled away by train or lorry at five o'clock in the morning. A few drafts of the Popular Army were now beginning to leave for the front, and these, as before, were marched ceremoniously through the streets; but even they, owing to the general waning of interest in the war, met with comparatively little enthusiasm. The fact that the militia troops were also, on paper. Popular Army troops, was skilfully used in the Press propaganda. Any credit that happened to be going was automatically handed to the Popular Army, while all blame was reserved for the militias. It sometimes happened that the same troops were praised in one capacity and blamed in the other.

But besides all this there was the startling change in the social atmosphere — a thing difficult to conceive unless you have actually experienced it. When I first reached Barcelona I had thought it a town where class distinctions and great differences of wealth hardly existed. Certainly that was what it looked like. 'Smart' clothes were an abnormality, nobody cringed or took tips, waiters and flower-women and bootblacks looked you in the eye and called you 'comrade'. I had not grasped that this was mainly a mixture of hope and camouflage. The working class believed in a revolution that had been begun but never consolidated, and the bourgeoisie were scared and temporarily disguising themselves as workers. In the first months of revolution there must have been many thousands of people who deliberately put on overalls and shouted revolutionary slogans as a

way of saving their skins. Now things were returning to normal. The smart restaurants and hotels were full of rich people wolfing expensive meals, while for the working-class population food-prices had jumped enormously without any corresponding rise in wages. Apart from the expensiveness of everything, there were recurrent shortages of this and that, which, of course, always hit the poor rather than the rich. The restaurants and hotels seemed to have little difficulty in getting whatever they wanted, but in the working-class quarters the queues for bread, olive oil, and other necessaries were hundreds of yards long. Previously in Barcelona I had been struck by the absence of beggars; now there were quantities of them. Outside the delicatessen shop at the top of the Ramblas gangs of barefooted children were always waiting to swarm round anyone who came out and clamour for scraps of food. The 'revolutionary' forms of speech were dropping out of use. Strangers seldom addressed you as tu and camarada nowadays; it was usually senor and usted. Buenos dias was beginning to replace salud. The waiters were back in their boiled shirts and the shop-walkers were cringing in the familiar manner. My wife and I went into a hosiery shop on the Ramblas to buy some stockings. The shopman bowed and rubbed his hands as they do not do even in England nowadays, though they used to do it twenty or thirty years ago. In a furtive indirect way the practice of tipping was coming back. The workers' patrols had been ordered to dissolve and the pre-war police forces were back on the streets. One result of this was that the cabaret show and high-class brothels, many of which had been closed by the workers' patrols, had promptly reopened. A small but significant instance of the way in which everything was now orientated in favour of the wealthier classes could be seen in the tobacco shortage. For the mass of the people the shortage of tobacco was so desperate that cigarettes filled with sliced liquorice-root were being sold in the streets. I tried some of these once. (A lot of people tried them once.) Franco held the Canaries, where all the Spanish tobacco is grown; consequently the only stocks of tobacco left on the Government side were those that had been in existence before the war. These were running so low that the tobacconists' shops only opened once a week; after waiting for a couple of hours in a queue you might, if you were lucky, get a three-quarter-ounce packet of

tobacco. Theoretically the Government would not allow tobacco to be purchased from abroad, because this meant reducing the gold-reserves, which had got to be kept for arms and other necessities. Actually there was a steady supply of smuggled foreign cigarettes of the more expensive kinds. Lucky Strikes and so forth, which gave a grand opportunity for profiteering. You could buy the smuggled cigarettes openly in the smart hotels and hardly less openly in the streets, provided that you could pay ten pesetas (a militiaman's daily wage) for a packet. The smuggling was for the benefit of wealthy people, and was therefore connived at. If you had enough money there was nothing that you could not get in any quantity, with the possible exception of bread, which was rationed fairly strictly. This open contrast of wealth and poverty would have been impossible a few months earlier, when the working class still were or seemed to be in control. But it would not be fair to attribute it solely to the shift of political power. Partly it was a result of the safety of life in Barcelona, where there was little to remind one of the war except an occasional air-raid. Everyone who had been in Madrid said that it was completely different there. In Madrid the common danger forced people of almost all kinds into some sense of comradeship. A fat man eating quails while children are begging for bread is a disgusting sight, but you are less likely to see it when you are within sound of the guns.

8 The workers' patrols are said to have closed 75 per cent of the brothels.

A day or two after the street-fighting I remember passing through one of the fashionable streets and coming upon a confectioner's shop with a window full of pastries and bonbons of the most elegant kinds, at staggering prices. It was the kind of shop you see in Bond Street or the Rue de la Paix. And I remember feeling a vague horror and amazement that money could still be wasted upon such things in a hungry war-stricken country. But God forbid that I should pretend to any personal superiority. After several months of discomfort I had a ravenous desire for decent food and wine, cocktails, American cigarettes, and so forth, and I admit to having wallowed in every luxury that I had money to buy. During that first week, before the street-fighting began, I had several preoccupations which interacted

upon one another in a curious way. In the first place, as I have said, I was busy making myself as comfortable as I could. Secondly, thanks to over-eating and over-drinking, I was slightly out of health all that week. I would feel a little unwell, go to bed for half a day, get up and eat another excessive meal, and then feel ill again. At the same time I was making secret negotiations to buy a revolver. I badly wanted a revolver — in trench-fighting much more useful than a rifle — and they were very difficult to get hold of. The Government issued them to policemen and Popular Army officers, but refused to issue them to the militia; you had to buy them, illegally, from the secret stores of the Anarchists. After a lot of fuss and nuisance an Anarchist friend managed to procure me a tiny 26-mm. automatic pistol, a wretched weapon, useless at more than five yards but better than nothing. And besides all this I was making preliminary arrangements to leave the P.O.U.M. militia and enter some other unit that would ensure my being sent to the Madrid front.

I had told everyone for a long time past that I was going to leave the P.O.U.M. As far as my purely personal preferences went I would have liked to join the Anarchists. If one became a member of the C.N.T. it was possible to enter the F.A.I. militia, but I was told that the F.A.I. were likelier to send me to Teruel than to Madrid. If I wanted to go to Madrid I must join the International Column, which meant getting a recommendation from a member of the Communist Party. I sought out a Communist friend, attached to the Spanish Medical Aid, and explained my case to him. He seemed very anxious to recruit me and asked me, if possible, to persuade some of the other I.L.P. Englishmen to come with me. If I had been in better health I should probably have agreed there and then. It is hard to say now what difference this would have made. Quite possibly I should have been sent to Albacete before the Barcelona fighting started; in which case, not having seen the fighting at close quarters, I might have accepted the official version of it as truthful. On the other hand, if I had been in Barcelona during the fighting, under Communist orders but still with a sense of personal loyalty to my comrades in the P.O.U.M., my position would have been impossible. But I had another week's leave due to me and I was very anxious to get my health back before returning to the line. Also — the kind of detail

that is always deciding one's destiny — I had to wait while the boot-makers made me a new pair of marching boots. (The entire Spanish army had failed to produce a pair of boots big enough to fit me.) I told my Communist friend that I would make definite arrangements later. Meanwhile I wanted a rest. I even had a notion that we — my wife and I — might go to the seaside for two or three days. What an idea! The political atmosphere ought to have warned me that that was not the kind of thing one could do nowadays.

For under the surface-aspect of the town, under the luxury and growing poverty, under the seeming gaiety of the streets, with their flower — stalls, their many-coloured flags, their propaganda-posters, and thronging crowds, there was an unmistakable and horrible feeling of political rivalry and hatred. People of all shades of opinion were saying forebodingly: 'There's going to be trouble before long.' The danger was quite simple and intelligible. It was the antagonism between those who wished the revolution to go forward and those who wished to check or prevent it — ultimately, between Anarchists and Communists. Politically there was now no power in Catalonia except the P.S.U.C. and their Liberal allies. But over against this there was the uncertain strength of the C.N.T., less well-armed and less sure of what they wanted than their adversaries, but powerful because of their numbers and their predominance in various key industries. Given this alignment of forces there was bound to be trouble. From the point of view of the P.S.U.C.-controlled Generalite, the first necessity, to make their position secure, was to get the weapons out of the C.N.T. workers' hands. As I have pointed out earlier, the move to break up the party militias was at bottom a manoeuvre towards this end. At the same time the pre-war armed police forces. Civil Guards, and so forth, had been brought back into use and were being heavily reinforced and armed. This could mean only one thing. The Civil Guards, in particular, were a gendarmerie of the ordinary continental type, who for nearly a century past had acted as the bodyguards of the possessing class. Meanwhile a decree had been issued that all arms held by private persons were to be surrendered. Naturally this order had not been obeyed; it was clear that the Anarchists' weapons could only be taken from them by force. Throughout this time there were rumours, always vague and

contradictory owing to newspaper censorship, of minor clashes that were occurring all over Catalonia. In various places the armed police forces had made attacks on Anarchist strongholds. At Puigcerda, on the French frontier, a band of Carabineros were sent to seize the Customs Office, previously controlled by Anarchists and Antonio Martin, a well-known Anarchist, was killed. Similar incidents had occurred at Figueras and, I think, at Tarragona. In Barcelona there' had been a series of more or less unofficial brawls in the working-class suburbs. C.N.T. and U.G.T. members had been murdering one another for some time past; on several occasions the murders were followed by huge, provocative funerals which were quite deliberately intended to stir up political hatred. A short time earlier a C.N.T. member had been murdered, and the C.N.T. had turned out in hundreds of thousands to follow the cortege. At the end of April, just after I got to Barcelona, Roldan, a prominent member of the U.G.T., was murdered, presumably by someone in the C.N.T. The Government ordered all shops to close and staged ah enormous funeral procession, largely of Popular Army troops, which took two hours to pass a given point. From the hotel window I watched it without enthusiasm. It was obvious that the so-called funeral was merely a display of strength; a little more of this kind of thing and there might be bloodshed. The same night my wife and I were woken by a fusillade of shots from the Plaza de Cataluna, a hundred or two hundred yards away. We learned next day that it was a C.N.T. man being bumped off, presumably by someone in the U.G.T. It was of course distinctly possible that all these murders were committed by agents provocateurs. One can gauge the attitude of the foreign capitalist Press towards the Communist-Anarchist feud by the fact that Roldan's murder was given wide publicity, while the answering murder was carefully unmentioned.

The 1st of May was approaching, and there was talk of a monster demonstration in which both the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. were to take part. The C.N.T. leaders, more moderate than many of their followers, had long been working for a reconciliation with the U.G.T.; indeed the keynote of their policy was to try and form the two blocks of unions into one huge coalition. The idea was that the C.N.T. and U.G.T. should march together and display their

solidarity. But at the last moment the demonstration was called off. It was perfectly clear that it would only lead to rioting. So nothing happened on 1 May. It was a queer state of affairs. Barcelona, the so-called revolutionary city, was probably the only city in non-Fascist Europe that had no celebrations that day. But I admit I was rather relieved. The I.L.P. contingent was expected to march in the P.O.U.M. section of the procession, and everyone expected trouble. The last thing I wished for was to be mixed up in some meaningless street-fight. To be marching up the street behind red flags inscribed with elevating slogans, and then to be bumped off from an upper window by some total stranger with a sub-machine-gun — that is not my idea of a useful way to die.

Chapter 10

ABOUT midday on 3 May a friend crossing the lounge of the hotel said casually: 'There's been some kind of trouble at the Telephone Exchange, I hear.' For some reason I paid no attention to it at the time.

That afternoon, between three and four, I was half-way down the Ramblas when I heard several rifle-shots behind me. I turned round and saw some youths, with rifles in their hands and the red and black handkerchiefs of the Anarchists round their throats, edging up a side — street that ran off the Ramblas northward. They were evidently exchanging shots with someone in a tall octagonal tower — a church, I think — that commanded the side-street. I thought instantly: 'It's started!' But I thought it without any very great feeling of surprise — for days past everyone had been expecting 'it' to start at any moment. I realized that I must get back to the hotel at once and see if my wife was all right. But the knot of Anarchists round the opening of the side-street were motioning the people back and shouting to them not to cross the line of fire. More shots rang out. The bullets from the tower were flying across the street and a crowd of panic-stricken people was rushing down the Ramblas, away from the firing; up and down the street you could hear snap — snap — snap as the shopkeepers slammed the steel shutters over their windows. I saw two Popular Army officers retreating cautiously from tree to tree with their hands on their revolvers. In front of me the crowd was surging into the Metro station in the middle of the Ramblas to take cover. I immediately decided not to follow them. It might mean being trapped underground for hours.

At this moment an American doctor who had been with us at the front ran up to me and grabbed me by the arm. He was greatly excited.

'Come on, we must get down to the Hotel Falcon.' (The Hotel Falcon was a sort of boarding-house maintained by the P.O.U.M. and used chiefly by militiamen on leave.) 'The P.O.U.M. chaps will be meeting there. The trouble's starting. We must hang together.'

‘But what the devil is it all about?’ I said.

The doctor was hauling me along by the arm. He was too excited to give a very clear statement. It appeared that he had been in the Plaza de Cataluna when several lorry-loads of armed Civil Guards had driven up to the Telephone Exchange, which was operated mainly by C.N.T. workers, and made a sudden assault upon it. Then some Anarchists had arrived and there had been a general affray. I gathered that the ‘trouble’ earlier in the day had been a demand by the Government to hand over the Telephone Exchange, which, of course, was refused.

As we moved down the street a lorry raced past us from the opposite direction. It was full of Anarchists with rifles in their hands. In front a ragged youth was lying on a pile of mattresses behind a light machine-gun. When we got to the Hotel Falcon, which was at the bottom of the Ramblas, a crowd of people was seething in the entrance-hall; there was a great confusion, nobody seemed to know what we were expected to do, and nobody was armed except the handful of Shock Troopers who usually acted as guards for the building. I went across to the Comite Local of the P.O.U.M., which was almost opposite. Upstairs, in the room where militiamen normally went to draw their pay, another crowd was seething. A tall, pale, rather handsome man of about thirty, in civilian clothes, was trying to restore order and handing out belts and cartridge-boxes from a pile in the corner. There seemed to be no rifles as yet. The doctor had disappeared — I believe there had already been casualties and a call for doctors — but another Englishman had arrived. Presently, from an inner office, the tall man and some others began bringing out armfuls of rifles and handing them round. The other Englishman and myself, as foreigners, were slightly under suspicion and at first nobody would give us a rifle. Then a militiaman whom I had known at the front arrived and recognized me, after which we were given rifles and a. few clips of cartridges, somewhat grudgingly.

There was a sound of firing in the distance and the streets were completely empty of people. Everyone said that it was impossible to go up the Ramblas. The Civil Guards had seized buildings in commanding positions and were letting fly at everyone who passed. I

would have risked it and gone back to the hotel, but there was a vague idea floating round that the Comite Local was likely to be attacked at any moment and we had better stand by. All over the building, on the stairs, and on the pavement outside, small knots of people were standing and talking excitedly. No one seemed to have a very clear idea of what was happening. All I could gather was that the Civil Guards had attacked the Telephone Exchange and seized various strategic spots that commanded other buildings belonging to the workers. There was a general impression that the Civil Guards were 'after' the C.N.T. and the working class generally. It was noticeable that, at this stage, no one seemed to put the blame on the Government. The poorer classes in Barcelona looked upon the Civil Guards as something rather resembling the Black and Tans, and it seemed to be taken for granted that they had started this attack on their own initiative. Once I heard how things stood I felt easier in my mind. The issue was clear enough. On one side the C.N.T., on the other side the police. I have no particular love for the idealized 'worker' as he appears in the bourgeois Communist's mind, but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.

A long time passed and nothing seemed to be happening at our end of the town. It did not occur to me that I could ring up the hotel and find out whether my wife was all right; I took it for granted that the Telephone Exchange would have stopped working — though, as a matter of fact, it was only out of action for a couple of hours. There seemed to be about three hundred people in the two buildings. Predominantly they were people of the poorest class, from the back-streets down by the quays; there was a number of women among them, some of them carrying babies, and a crowd of little ragged boys. I fancy that many of them had no notion what was happening and had simply fled into the P.O.U.M. buildings for protection. There was also a number of militiamen on leave, and a sprinkling of foreigners. As far as I could estimate, there were only about sixty rifles between the lot of us. The office upstairs was ceaselessly besieged by a crowd of people who were demanding rifles and being told that there were none left. The younger militia boys, who seemed

to regard the whole affair as a kind of picnic, were prowling round and trying to wheedle or steal rifles from anyone who had them. It was not long before one of them got my rifle away from me by a clever dodge and immediately made himself scarce. So I was unarmed again, except for my tiny automatic pistol, for which I had only one clip of cartridges.

It grew dark, I was getting hungry, and seemingly there was no food in the Falcon. My friend and I slipped out to his hotel, which was not far away, to get some dinner. The streets were utterly dark and silent, not a soul stirring, steel shutters drawn over all the shop windows, but no barricades built yet. There was a great fuss before they would let us into the hotel, which was locked and barred. When we got back I learned that the Telephone Exchange was working and went to the telephone in the office upstairs to ring up my wife. Characteristically, there was no telephone directory in the building, and I did not know the number of the Hotel Continental; after a searching from room to room for about an hour I came upon a guide-book which gave me the number. I could not make contact with my wife, but I managed to get hold of John McNair, the I.L.P. representative in Barcelona. He told me that all was well, nobody had been shot, and asked me if we were all right at the Comite Local. I said that we should be all right if we had some cigarettes. I only meant this as a joke; nevertheless half an hour later McNair appeared with two packets of Lucky Strike. He had braved the pitch-dark streets, roamed by Anarchist patrols who had twice stopped him at the pistol's point and examined his papers. I shall not forget this small act of heroism. We were very glad of the cigarettes.

They had placed armed guards at most of the windows, and in the street below a little group of Shock Troopers were stopping and questioning the few passers-by. An Anarchist patrol car drove up, bristling with weapons. Beside the driver a beautiful dark-haired girl of about eighteen was nursing a sub-machine-gun across her knees. I spent a long time wandering about the building, a great rambling place of which it was impossible to learn the geography. Everywhere was the usual litter, the broken furniture and torn paper that seem to be the inevitable products of revolution. All over the place people were sleeping; on a broken sofa in a passage two poor women from

the quayside were peacefully snoring. The place had been a cabaret-theatre before the P.O.U.M. took it over. There were raised stages in several of the rooms; on one of them was a desolate grand piano. Finally I discovered what I was looking for — the armoury. I did not know how this affair was going to turn out, and I badly wanted a weapon. I had heard it said so often that all the rival parties, P.S.U.C., P.O.U.M., and C.N.T.–F.A.I. alike, were hoarding arms in Barcelona, that I could not believe that two of the principal P.O.U.M. buildings contained only the fifty or sixty rifles that I had seen. The room which acted as an armoury was unguarded and had a flimsy door; another Englishman and myself had no difficulty in prizing it open. When we got inside we found that what they had told us was true — there were no more weapons. All we found there were about two dozen small-bore rifles of an obsolete pattern and a few shot — guns, with no cartridges for any of them. I went up to the office and asked if they had any spare pistol ammunition; they had none. There were a few boxes of bombs, however, which one of the Anarchist patrol cars had brought us. I put a couple in one of my cartridge-boxes. They were a crude type of bomb, ignited by rubbing a sort of match at the top and very liable to go off of their own accord.

People were sprawling asleep all over the floor. In one room a baby was crying, crying ceaselessly. Though this was May the night was getting cold. On one of the cabaret-stages the curtains were still up, so I ripped a curtain down with my knife, rolled myself up in it, and had a few hours' sleep. My sleep was disturbed, I remember, by the thought of those beastly bombs, which might blow me into the air if I rolled on them too vigorously. At three in the morning the tall handsome man who seemed to be in command woke me up, gave me a rifle, and put me on guard at one of the windows. He told me that Salas, the Chief of Police responsible for the attack on the Telephone Exchange, had been placed under arrest. (Actually, as we learned later, he had only been deprived of his post. Nevertheless the news confirmed the general impression that the Civil Guards had acted without orders.) As soon as it was dawn the people downstairs began building two barricades, one outside the Comite Local and the other outside the Hotel Falcon. The Barcelona streets are paved with square cobbles, easily built up into a wall, and under the cobbles is a

kind of shingle that is good for filling sand-bags. The building of those barricades was a strange and wonderful sight; I would have given something to be able to photograph it. With the kind — of passionate energy that Spaniards display when they have definitely decided to begin upon any job of work, long lines of men, women, and quite small children were tearing up the cobblestones, hauling them along in a hand-cart that had been found somewhere, and staggering to and fro under heavy sacks of sand. In the doorway of the Comite Local a German-Jewish girl, in a pair of militiaman's trousers whose knee — buttons just reached her ankles, was watching with a smile. In a couple of hours the barricades were head-high, with riflemen posted at the loopholes, and behind one barricade a fire was burning and men were frying eggs.

They had taken my rifle away again, and there seemed to be nothing that one could usefully do. Another Englishman and myself decided to go back to the Hotel Continental. There was a lot of firing in the distance, but seemingly none in the Ramblas. On the way up we looked in at the food-market. A very few stalls had opened; they were besieged by a crowd of people from the working-class quarters south of the Ramblas. Just as we got there, there was a heavy crash of rifle — fire outside, some panes of glass in the roof were shivered, and the crowd went flying for the back exits. A few stalls remained open, however; we managed to get a cup of coffee each and buy a wedge of goat's-milk cheese which I tucked in beside my bombs. A few days later I was very glad of that cheese.

At the street-corner where I had seen the Anarchists begin. firing the day before a barricade was now standing. The man behind it (I was on the other side of the street) shouted to me to be careful. The Civil Guards in the church tower were firing indiscriminately at everyone who passed. I paused and then crossed the opening at a run; sure enough, a bullet cracked past me, uncomfortably close. When I neared the P.O.U.M. Executive Building, still on the other side of the road, there were fresh shouts of warning from some Shock Troopers standing in the doorway — shouts which, at the moment, I did not understand. There were trees and a newspaper kiosk between myself and the building (streets of this type in Spain have a broad walk running down the middle), and I could not see what they were

pointing at. I went up to the Continental, made sure that all was well, washed my face, and then went back to the P.O.U.M. Executive Building (it was about a hundred yards down the street) to ask for orders. By this time the roar of rifle and machine-gun fire from various directions was almost comparable to the din of a battle. I had just found Kopp and was asking him what we were supposed to do when there was a series of appalling crashes down below. The din was so loud that I made sure someone must be firing at us with a field-gun. Actually it was only hand-grenades, which make double their usual noise when they burst among stone buildings.

Kopp glanced out of the window, cocked his stick behind his back, said: 'Let us investigate,' and strolled down the stairs in his usual unconcerned manner, I following. Just inside the doorway a group of Shock Troopers were bowling bombs down the pavement as though playing skittles. The bombs were bursting twenty yards away with a frightful, ear-splitting crash which was mixed up with the banging of rifles. Half across the street, from behind the newspaper kiosk, a head — it was the head of an American militiaman whom I knew well — was sticking up, for all the world like a coconut at a fair. It was only afterwards that I grasped what was really happening. Next door to the P.O.U.M. building there was a cafe with a hotel above it, called the Cafe Moka. The day before twenty or thirty armed Civil Guards had entered the cafe and then, when the fighting started, had suddenly seized the building and barricaded themselves in. Presumably they had been ordered to seize the cafe as a preliminary to attacking the P.O.U.M. offices later. Early in the morning they had attempted to come out, shots had been exchanged, and one Shock Trooper was badly wounded and a Civil Guard killed. The Civil Guards had fled back into the cafe, but when the American came down the street they had opened fire on him, though he was not armed. The American had flung himself behind the kiosk for cover, and the Shock Troopers were flinging bombs at the Civil Guards to drive them indoors again.

Kopp took in the scene at a glance, pushed his way forward and hauled back a red-haired German Shock Trooper who was just drawing the pin out of a bomb with his teeth. He shouted to everyone to stand back from the doorway, and told us in several languages that

we had got to avoid bloodshed. Then he stepped out on to the pavement and, in sight of the Civil Guards, ostentatiously took off his pistol and laid it on the ground. Two Spanish militia officers did the same, and the three of them walked slowly up to the doorway where the Civil Guards were huddling. It was a thing I would not have done for twenty pounds. They were walking, unarmed, up to men who were frightened out of their wits and had loaded guns in their hands. A Civil Guard, in shirt-sleeves and livid with fright, came out of the door to parley with Kopp. He kept pointing in an agitated manner at two unexploded bombs that were lying on the pavement. Kopp came back and told us we had better touch the bombs off. Lying there, they were a danger to anyone who passed. A Shock Trooper fired his rifle at one of the bombs and burst it, then fired at the other and missed. I asked him to give me his rifle, knelt down and let fly at the second bomb. I also missed it, I am sorry to say.

This was the only shot I fired during the disturbances. The pavement was covered with broken glass from the sign over the Cafe Moka, and two cars that were parked outside, one of them Kopp's official car, had been riddled with bullets and their windscreens smashed by bursting bombs.

Kopp took me upstairs again and explained the situation. We had got to defend the P.O.U.M. buildings if they were attacked, but the P.O.U.M. leaders had sent instructions that we were to stand on the defensive and not open fire if we could possibly avoid it. Immediately opposite there was a cinematograph, called the Poliorama, with a museum above it, and at the top, high above the general level of the roofs, a small observatory with twin domes. The domes commanded the street, and a few men posted up there with rifles could prevent any attack on the P.O.U.M. buildings. The caretakers at the cinema were C.N.T. members and would let us come and go. As for the Civil Guards in the Cafe Moka, there would be no trouble with them; they did not want to fight and would be only too glad to live and let live. Kopp repeated that our orders were not to fire unless we were fired on ourselves or our buildings attacked. I gathered, though he did not say so, that the P.O.U.M. leaders were furious at being dragged into this affair, but felt that they had got to stand by the C.N.T.

They had already placed guards in the observatory. The next three days and nights I spent continuously on the roof of the Poliorama, except for brief intervals when I slipped across to the hotel for meals. I was in no danger, I suffered from nothing worse than hunger and boredom, yet it was one of the most unbearable periods of my whole life. I think few experiences could be more sickening, more disillusioning, or, finally, more nerve-racking than those evil days of street warfare.

I used to sit on the roof marvelling at the folly of it all. From the little windows in the observatory you could see for miles around — vista after vista of tall slender buildings, glass domes, and fantastic curly roofs with brilliant green and copper tiles; over to eastward the glittering pale blue sea — the first glimpse of the sea that I had had since coming to Spain. And the whole huge town of a million people was locked in a sort of violent inertia, a nightmare of noise without movement. The sunlit streets were quite empty. Nothing was happening except the streaming of bullets from barricades and sand-bagged windows. Not a vehicle was stirring in the streets; here and there along the Ramblas the trams stood motionless where their drivers had jumped out of them when the fighting started. And all the while the devilish noise, echoing from thousands of stone buildings, went on and on and on, like a tropical rainstorm. Crack-crack, rattle — rattle, roar — sometimes it died away to a few shots, sometimes it quickened to a deafening fusillade, but it never stopped while daylight lasted, and punctually next dawn it started again.

What the devil was happening, who was fighting whom, and who was winning, was at first very difficult to discover. The people of Barcelona are so used to street-fighting and so familiar with the local geography that they knew by a kind of instinct which political party will hold which streets and which buildings. A foreigner is at a hopeless disadvantage. Looking out from the observatory, I could grasp that the Ramblas, which is one of the principal streets of the town, formed a dividing line. To the right of the Ramblas the working-class quarters were solidly Anarchist; to the left a confused fight was going on among the tortuous by-streets, but on that side the P.S.U.C. and the Civil Guards were more or less in control. Up at our end of the Ramblas, round the Plaza de Cataluna, the position was so

complicated that it would have been quite unintelligible if every building had not flown a party flag. The principal landmark here was the Hotel Colon, the headquarters of the P.S.U.C., dominating the Plaza de Cataluna. In a window near the last 0 but one in the huge 'Hotel Colon' that sprawled across its face they had a machine-gun that could sweep the square with deadly effect. A hundred yards to the right of us, down the Ramblas, the J.S.U., the youth league of the P.S.U.C. (corresponding to the Young Communist League in England), were holding a big department store whose sandbagged side-windows fronted our observatory. They had hauled down their red flag and hoisted the Catalan national flag. On the Telephone Exchange, the starting-point of all the trouble, the Catalan national flag and the Anarchist flag were flying side by side. Some kind of temporary compromise had been arrived at there, the exchange was working uninterruptedly and there was no firing from the building.

In our position it was strangely peaceful. The Civil Guards in the Cafe Moka had drawn down the steel curtains and piled up the cafe furniture to make a barricade. Later half a dozen of them came on to the roof, opposite to ourselves, and built another barricade of mattresses, over which they hung a Catalan national flag. But it was obvious that they had no wish to start a fight. Kopp had made a definite agreement with them: if they did not fire at us we would not fire at them. He had grown quite friendly with the Civil Guards by this time, and had been to visit them several times in the Cafe Moka. Naturally they had looted everything drinkable the cafe possessed, and they made Kopp a present of fifteen bottles of beer. In return Kopp had actually given them one of our rifles to make up for one they had somehow lost on the previous day. Nevertheless, it was a queer feeling sitting on that roof. Sometimes I was merely bored with the whole affair, paid no attention to the hellish noise, and spent hours reading a succession of Penguin Library books which, luckily, I had bought a few days earlier; sometimes I was very conscious of the armed men watching me fifty yards away. It was a little like being in the trenches again; several times I caught myself, from force of habit, speaking of the Civil Guards as 'the Fascists'. There were generally about six of us up there. We placed a man on guard in each of the observatory towers, and the rest of us sat on the lead roof

below, where there was no cover except a stone palisade. I was well aware that at any moment the Civil Guards might receive telephone orders to open fire. They had agreed to give us warning before doing so, but there was no certainty that they would keep to their agreement. Only once, however, did trouble look like starting. One of the Civil Guards opposite knelt down and began firing across the barricade. I was on guard in the observatory at the time. I trained my rifle on him and shouted across:

'Hi! Don't you shoot at us!'

'What?'

'Don't you fire at us or we'll fire back!'

'No, no! I wasn't firing at you. Look — down there!'

He motioned with his rifle towards the side-street that ran past the bottom of our building. Sure enough, a youth in blue overalls, with a rifle in his hand, was dodging round the corner. Evidently he had just taken a shot at the Civil Guards on the roof.

'I was firing at him. He fired first.' (I believe this was true.) 'We don't want to shoot you. We're only workers, the same as you are.'

He made the anti-Fascist salute, which I returned. I shouted across:

'Have you got any more beer left?'

'No, it's all gone.'

The same day, for no apparent reason, a man in the J.S.U. building farther down the street suddenly raised his rifle and let fly at me when I was leaning out of the window. Perhaps I made a tempting mark. I did not fire back. Though he was only a hundred yards away the bullet went so wide that it did not even hit the roof of the observatory. As usual, Spanish standards of marksmanship had saved me. I was fired at several times from this building.

The devilish racket of firing went on and on. But so far as I could see, and from all I heard, the fighting was defensive on both sides. People simply remained in their buildings or behind their barricades and blazed away at the people opposite. About half a mile away from us there was a street where some of the main offices of the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. were almost exactly facing one another; from that direction the volume of noise was terrific. I passed down that street

the day after the fighting was over and the panes of the shop-windows were like sieves. (Most of the shopkeepers in Barcelona had their windows criss-crossed with strips of paper, so that when a bullet hit a pane it did not shiver to pieces.) Sometimes the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire was punctuated by the crash of hand-grenades. And at long intervals, perhaps a dozen times in all, there were tremendously heavy explosions which at the time I could not account for; they sounded like aerial bombs, but that was impossible, for there were no aeroplanes about. I was told afterwards — quite possibly it was true — that agents provocateurs were touching off masses of explosive in order to increase the general noise and panic. There was, however, no artillery-fire. I was listening for this, for if the guns began to fire it would mean that the affair was becoming serious (artillery is the determining factor in street warfare). Afterwards there were wild tales in the newspapers about batteries of guns firing in the streets, but no one was able to point to a building that had been hit by a shell. In any case the sound of gunfire is unmistakable if one is used to it.

Almost from the start food was running short. With difficulty and under cover of darkness (for the Civil Guards were constantly sniping into the Ramblas) food was brought from the Hotel Falcon for the fifteen or twenty militiamen who were in the P.O.U.M. Executive Building, but there was barely enough to go round, and as many of us as possible went to the Hotel Continental for our meals. The Continental had been 'collectivized' by the Generalite and not, like most of the hotels, by the C.N.T. or U.G.T., and it was regarded as neutral ground. No sooner had the fighting started than the hotel filled to the brim with a most extraordinary collection of people. There were foreign journalists, political suspects of every shade, an American airman in the service of the Government, various Communist agents, including a fat, sinister-looking Russian, said to be an agent of the Ogpu, who was nicknamed Charlie Chan and wore attached to his waist-band a revolver and a neat little bomb, some families of well — to-do Spaniards who looked like Fascist sympathizers, two or three wounded men from the International Column, a gang of lorry drivers from. some huge French lorries which had been carrying a load of oranges back to France and had

been held up by the fighting, and a number of Popular Army officers. The Popular Army, as a body, remained neutral throughout the fighting, though a few soldiers slipped away from the barracks and took part as individuals; on the Tuesday morning I had seen a couple of them at the P.O.U.M. barricades. At the beginning, before the food-shortage became acute and the newspapers began stirring up hatred, there was a tendency to regard the whole affair as a joke. This was the kind of thing that happened every year in Barcelona, people were saying. George Tioli, an Italian journalist, a great friend of ours, came in with his trousers drenched with blood. He had gone out to see what was happening and had been binding up a wounded man on the pavement when someone playfully tossed a hand-grenade at him, fortunately not wounding him seriously. I remember his remarking that the Barcelona paving-stones ought to be numbered; it would save such a lot of trouble in building and demolishing barricades. And I remember a couple of men from the International Column sitting in my room at the hotel when I came in tired, hungry, and dirty after a night on guard. Their attitude was completely neutral. If they had been good party-men they would, I suppose, have urged me to change sides, or even have pinioned me and taken away the bombs of which my pockets were full; instead they merely commiserated with me for having to spend my leave in doing guard-duty on a roof. The general attitude was: 'This is only a dust-up between the Anarchists and the police — it doesn't mean anything.' In spite of the extent of the fighting and the number of casualties I believe this was nearer the truth than the official version which represented the affair as a planned rising.

It was about Wednesday (5 May) that a change seemed to come over things. The shuttered streets looked ghastly. A very few pedestrians, forced abroad for one reason or another, crept to and fro, flourishing white handkerchiefs, and at a spot in the middle of the Ramblas that was safe from bullets some men were crying newspapers to the empty street. On Tuesday Solidaridad Obrera, the Anarchist paper, had described the attack on the Telephone Exchange as a 'monstrous provocation' (or words to that effect), but on Wednesday it changed its tune and began imploring everyone to go back to work. The Anarchist leaders were broadcasting the same

message. The office of La Batalla, the P.O.U.M. paper, which was not defended, had been raided and seized by the Civil Guards at about the same time as the Telephone Exchange, but the paper was being printed, and a few copies distributed, from another address. I urged everyone to remain at the barricades. People were divided in their minds and wondering uneasily how the devil this was going to end. I doubt whether anyone left the barricades as yet, but everyone was sick of the meaningless fighting, which could obviously lead to no real decision, because no one wanted this to develop into a full-sized civil war which might mean losing the war against Franco. I heard this fear expressed on all sides. So far as one could gather from what people were saying at the time the C.N.T. rank and file wanted, and had wanted from the beginning, only two things: the handing back of the Telephone Exchange and the disarming of the hated Civil Guards. If the Generalite had promised to do these two things, and also promised to put an end to the food profiteering, there is little doubt that the barricades would have been down in two hours. But it was obvious that the Generalite was not going to give in. Ugly rumours were flying round. It was said that the Valencia Government was sending six thousand men to occupy Barcelona, and that five thousand Anarchist and P.O.U.M. troops had left the Aragon front to oppose them. Only the first of these rumours was true. Watching from the observatory tower we saw the low grey shapes of warships closing in upon the harbour. Douglas Moyle, who had been a sailor, said that they looked like British destroyers. As a matter of fact they were British destroyers, though we did not learn this till afterwards.

That evening we heard that on the Plaza de Espana four hundred Civil Guards had surrendered and handed their arms to the Anarchists; also the news was vaguely filtering through that in the suburbs (mainly working-class quarters) the C.N.T. were in control. It looked as though we were winning. But the same evening Kopp sent for me and, with a grave face, told me that according to information he had just received the Government was about to outlaw the P.O.U.M. and declare a state of war upon it. The news gave me a shock. It was the first glimpse I had had of the interpretation that was likely to be put upon this affair later on. I dimly foresaw that when the fighting ended the entire blame would

be laid upon the P.O.U.M., which was the weakest party and therefore the most suitable scapegoat. And meanwhile our local neutrality was at an end. If the Government declared war upon us we had no choice but to defend ourselves, and here at the Executive building we could be certain that the Civil Guards next door would get orders to attack us. Our only chance was to attack them first. Kopp was waiting for orders on the telephone; if we heard definitely that the P.O.U.M. was outlawed we must make preparations at once to seize the Cafe Moka.

I remember the long, nightmarish evening that we spent in fortifying the building. We locked the steel curtains across the front entrance and behind them built a barricade of slabs of stone left behind by the workmen who had been making some alterations. We went over our stock of weapons. Counting the six rifles that were on the roof of the Poliorama opposite, we had twenty-one rifles, one of them defective, about fifty rounds of ammunition for each rifle, and a few dozen bombs; otherwise nothing except a few pistols and revolvers. About a dozen men, mostly Germans, had volunteered for the attack on the Cafe Moka, if it came off. We should attack from the roof, of course, some time in the small hours, and take them by surprise; they were more numerous, but our morale was better, and no doubt we could storm the place, though people were bound to be killed in doing so. We had no food in the building except a few slabs of chocolate, and the rumour had gone round that 'they' were going to cut off the water supply. (Nobody knew who 'they' were. It might be the Government that controlled the waterworks, or it might be the C.N.T. — nobody knew.) We spent a long time filling up every basin in the lavatories, every bucket we could lay hands on, and, finally, the fifteen beer bottles, now empty, which the Civil Guards had given to Kopp.

I was in a ghastly frame of mind and dog-tired after about sixty hours without much sleep. It was now late into the night. People were sleeping all over the floor behind the barricade downstairs. Upstairs there was a small room, with a sofa in it, which we intended to use as a dressing-station, though, needless to say, we discovered that there was neither iodine nor bandages in the building. My wife had come down from the hotel in case a nurse should be needed. I lay

down on the sofa, feeling that I would like half an hour's rest before the attack on the Moka, in which I should presumably be killed. I remember the intolerable discomfort caused by my pistol, which was strapped to my belt and sticking into the small of my back. And the next thing I remember is waking up with a jerk to find my wife standing beside me. It was broad daylight, nothing had happened, the Government had not declared war on the P.O.U.M., the water had not been cut off, and except for the sporadic firing in the streets everything was normal. My wife said that she had not had the heart to wake me and had slept in an arm-chair in one of the front rooms.

That afternoon there was a kind of armistice. The firing died away and with surprising suddenness the streets filled with people. A few shops began to pull up their shutters, and the market was packed with a huge crowd clamouring for food, though the stalls were almost empty. It was noticeable, however, that the trams did not start running. The Civil Guards were still behind their barricades in the Moka; on neither side were the fortified buildings evacuated. Everyone was rushing round and trying to buy food. And (MI every side you heard the same anxious questions: 'Do you think it's stopped? Do you think it's going to start again?' 'It' — the fighting — was now thought of as some kind of natural calamity, like a hurricane or an earthquake, which was happening to us all alike and which we had no power of stopping. And sure enough, almost immediately — I suppose there must really have been several hours' truce, but they seemed more like minutes than hours — a sudden crash of rifle-fire, like a June cloud-burst, sent everyone scurrying; the steel shutters snapped into place, the streets emptied like magic, the barricades were manned, and 'it' had started again.;

I went back to my post on the roof with a feeling of concentrated disgust and fury. When you are taking part in events like these you are, I suppose, in a small way, making history, and you ought by rights to feel like a historical character. But you never do, because at such times the physical details always outweigh everything else. Throughout the fighting I never made the correct 'analysis' of the situation that was so glibly made by journalists hundreds of miles away. What I was chiefly thinking about was not the rights and wrongs of this miserable internecine scrap, but simply the discomfort

and boredom of sitting day and night on that intolerable roof, and the hunger which was growing worse and worse — for none of us had had a proper meal since Monday. It was in my mind all the while that I should have to go back to the front as soon as this business was over. It was infuriating. I had been a hundred and fifteen days in the line and had come back to Barcelona ravenous for a bit of rest and comfort; and instead I had to spend my time sitting on a roof opposite Civil Guards as bored as myself, who periodically waved to me and assured me that they were 'workers' (meaning that they hoped I would not shoot them), but who would certainly open fire if they got the order to do so. If this was history it did not feel like it. It was more like a bad period at the front, when men were short and we had to do abnormal hours of guard-duty; instead of being heroic one just had to stay at one's post, bored, dropping with sleep, and completely uninterested as to what it was all about.

Inside the hotel, among the heterogeneous mob who for the most part had not dared to put their noses out of doors, a horrible atmosphere of suspicion had grown up. Various people were infected with spy mania and were creeping round whispering that everyone else was a spy of the Communists, or the Trotskyists, or the Anarchists, or what-not. The fat Russian agent was cornering all the foreign refugees in turn and explaining plausibly that this whole affair was an Anarchist plot. I watched him with some interest, for it was the first time that I had seen a person whose profession was telling lies — unless one counts journalists. There was something repulsive in the parody of smart hotel life that was still going on behind shuttered windows amid the rattle of rifle-fire. The front dining-room had been abandoned after a bullet came through the window and chipped a pillar, and the guests were crowded into a darkish room at the back, where there were never quite enough tables to go round. The waiters were reduced in numbers — some of them were C.N.T. members and had joined in the general strike — and had dropped their boiled shirts for the time being, but meals were still being served with a pretence of ceremony. There was, however, practically nothing to eat. On that Thursday night the principal dish at dinner was one sardine each. The hotel had had no bread for days, and even the wine was running so low that we were drinking older

and older wines at higher and higher prices. This shortage of food went on for several days after the fighting was over. Three days running, I remember, my wife and I breakfasted off a little piece of goat's-milk cheese with no bread and nothing to drink. The only thing that was plentiful was oranges. The French lorry drivers brought quantities of their oranges into the hotel. They were a tough — looking bunch; they had with them some flashy Spanish girls and a huge porter in a black blouse. At any other time the little snob of a hotel manager would have done his best to make them uncomfortable, in fact would have refused to have them on the premises, but at present they were popular because, unlike the rest of us, they had a private store of bread which everyone was trying to cadge from them.

I spent that final night on the roof, and the next day it did really look as though the fighting was coming to an end. I do not think there was much firing that day — the Friday. No one seemed to know for certain whether the troops from Valencia were really coining; they arrived that evening, as a matter of fact. The Government was broadcasting half-soothing, half-threatening messages, asking everyone to go home and saying that after a certain hour anyone found carrying arms would be arrested. Not much attention was paid to the Government's broadcasts, but everywhere the people were fading away from the barricades. I have no doubt that it was mainly the food shortage that was responsible. From every side you heard the same remark:' We have no more food, we must go back to work.' On the other hand the Civil Guards, who could count on getting their rations so long as there was any food in the town, were able to stay at their posts. By the afternoon the streets were almost normal, though the deserted barricades were still standing; the Ramblas were thronged with people, the shops nearly all open, and — most reassuring of all — the trams that had stood so long in frozen blocks jerked into motion and began running. The Civil Guards were still holding the Cafe Moka and had not taken down their barricades, but some of them brought chairs out and sat on the pavement with their rifles across their knees. I winked at one of them as I went past and got a not unfriendly grin; he recognized me, of course. Over the Telephone Exchange the Anarchist flag had been

hauled down and only the Catalan flag was flying. That meant that the workers were definitely beaten; I realized — though, owing to my political ignorance, not so clearly as I ought to have done — that when the Government felt more sure of itself there would be reprisals. But at the time I was not interested in that aspect of things. All I felt was a profound relief that the devilish din of firing was over, and that one could buy some food and have a bit of rest and peace before going back to the front.

It must have been late that evening that the troops from Valencia first appeared in the streets. They were the Assault Guards, another formation similar to the Civil Guards and the Carabineros (i.e. a formation intended primarily for police work), and the picked troops of the Republic. Quite suddenly they seemed to spring up out of the ground; you saw them everywhere patrolling the streets in groups of ten — tall men in grey or blue uniforms, with long rifles slung over their shoulders, and a sub-machine-gun to each group. Meanwhile there was a delicate job to be done. The six rifles which we had used for the guard in the observatory towers were still lying there, and by hook or by crook we had got to get them back to the P.O.U.M. building. It was only a question of getting them across the street. They were part of the regular armoury of the building, but to bring them into the street was to contravene the Government's order, and if we were caught with them in our hands we should certainly be arrested — worse, the rifles would be confiscated. With only twenty-one rifles in the building we could not afford to lose six of them. After a lot of discussion as to the best method, a red-haired Spanish boy and myself began to smuggle them out. It was easy enough to dodge the Assault Guard patrols; the danger was the Civil Guards in the Moka, who were well aware that we had rifles in the observatory and might give the show away if they saw us carrying them across. Each of us partially undressed and slung a rifle over the left shoulder, the butt under the armpit, the barrel down the trouser-leg. It was unfortunate that they were long Mausers. Even a man as tall as I am cannot wear a long Mauser down his trouser-leg without discomfort. It was an intolerable job getting down the corkscrew staircase of the observatory with a completely rigid left leg. Once in the street, we found that the only way to move was with extreme slowness, so

slowly that you did not have to bend your knees. Outside the picture-house I saw a group of people staring at me with great interest as I crept along at tortoise-speed. I have often wondered what they thought was the matter with me. Wounded in the war, perhaps. However, all the rifles were smuggled across without incident.

Next day the Assault Guards were everywhere, walking the streets like conquerors. There was no doubt that the Government was simply making a display of force in order to overawe a population which it already knew would not resist; if there had been any real fear of further outbreaks the Assault Guards would have been kept in barracks and not scattered through the streets in small bands. They were splendid troops, much the best I had seen in Spain, and, though I suppose they were in a sense 'the enemy', I could not help liking the look of them. But it was with a sort of amazement that I watched them strolling to and fro. I was used to the ragged, scarcely-armed militia on the Aragon front, and I had not known that the Republic possessed troops like these. It was not only that they were picked men physically, it was their weapons that most astonished me. All of them were armed with brand-new rifles of the type known as 'the Russian rifle' (these rifles were sent to Spain by the U.S.S.R., but were, I believe, manufactured in America). I examined one of them. It was a far from perfect rifle, but vastly better than the dreadful old blunderbusses we had at the front. The Assault Guards had one submachine-gun between ten men and an automatic pistol each; we at the front had approximately one machine-gun between fifty men, and as for pistols and revolvers, you could only procure them illegally. As a matter of fact, though I had not noticed it till now, it was the same everywhere. The Civil Guards and Carabineros, who were not intended for the front at all, were better armed and far better clad than ourselves. I suspect it is the same in all wars — always the same contrast between the sleek police in the rear and the ragged soldiers in the line. On the whole the Assault Guards got on very well with the population after the first day or two. On the first day there was a certain amount of trouble because some of the Assault Guards — acting on instructions, I suppose — began behaving in a provocative manner. Bands of them boarded trams, searched the passengers, and, if they had C.N.T. membership cards in their

pockets, tore them up and stamped on them. This led to scuffles with armed Anarchists, and one or two people were killed. Very soon, however, the Assault Guards dropped their conquering air and relations became more friendly. It was noticeable that most of them had picked up a girl after a day or two.

The Barcelona fighting had given the Valencia Government the long — wanted excuse to assume fuller control of Catalonia. The workers' militias were to be broken' up and redistributed among the Popular Army. The Spanish Republican flag was flying all over Barcelona — the first time I had seen it, I think, except over a Fascist trench. In the working-class quarters the barricades were being pulled down, rather fragmentarily, for it is a lot easier to build a barricade than to put the stones back. Outside the P.S.U.C. buildings the barricades were allowed to remain standing, and indeed many were standing as late as June. The Civil Guards were still occupying strategic points. Huge seizures of arms were being made from C.N.T. strongholds, though I have no doubt a good many escaped seizure. La Batalla was still appearing, but it was censored until the front page was almost completely blank. The P.S.U.C. papers were uncensored and were publishing inflammatory articles demanding the suppression of the P.O.U.M. The P.O.U.M. was declared to be a disguised Fascist organization, and a cartoon representing the P.O.U.M. as a figure slipping off" a mask marked with the hammer and sickle and revealing a hideous, maniacal face marked with the swastika, was being circulated all over the town by P.S.U.C. agents. Evidently the official version of the Barcelona fighting was already fixed upon: it was to be represented as a 'fifth column' Fascist rising engineered solely by the P.O.U.M.

In the hotel the horrible atmosphere of suspicion and hostility had grown worse now that the fighting was over. In the face of the accusations that were being flung about it was impossible to remain neutral. The posts were working again, the foreign Communist papers were beginning to arrive, and their accounts of the fighting were not only violently partisan but, of course, wildly inaccurate as to facts. I think some of the Communists on the spot, who had seen what was actually happening, were dismayed by the interpretation that was being put upon events, but naturally they had to stick to

their own side. Our Communist friend approached me once again and asked me whether I would not transfer into the International Column.

I was rather surprised. 'Your papers are saying I'm a Fascist,' I said. 'Surely I should be politically suspect, coming from the P.O.U.M."

'Oh, that doesn't matter. After all, you were only acting under orders.'

I had to tell him that after this affair I could not join any Communist-controlled unit. Sooner or later it might mean being used against the Spanish working class. One could not tell when this kind of thing would break out again, and if I had to use my rifle at all in such an affair I would use it on the side of the working class and not against them. He was very decent about it. But from now on the whole atmosphere was changed. You could not, as before, 'agree to differ' and have drinks with a man who was supposedly your political opponent. There were some ugly wrangles in the hotel lounge. Meanwhile the jails were already full and overflowing. After the fighting was over the Anarchists had, of course, released their prisoners, but the Civil Guards had not released theirs, and most of them were thrown into prison and kept there without trial, in many cases for months on end. As usual, completely innocent people were being arrested owing to police bungling. I mentioned earlier that Douglas Thompson was wounded about the beginning of April. Afterwards we had lost touch with him, as usually happened when a man was wounded, for wounded men were frequently moved from one hospital to another. Actually he was at Tarragona hospital and was sent back to Barcelona about the time when the fighting started. On the Tuesday morning I met him in the street, considerably bewildered by the firing that was going on all round. He asked the question everyone was asking:

'What the devil is this all about?'

I explained as well as I could. Thompson said promptly:

'I'm going to keep out of this. My arm's still bad. I shall go back to my hotel and stay there.'

He went back to his hotel, but unfortunately (how important it is in street-fighting to understand the local geography!) it was a hotel in a part of the town controlled by the Civil Guards. The place was

raided and Thompson was arrested, flung into jail, and kept for eight days in a cell so full of people that nobody had room to lie down. There were many similar cases. Numerous foreigners with doubtful political records were on the run, with the police on their track and in constant fear of denunciation. It was worst for the Italians and Germans, who had no passports and were generally wanted by the secret police in their own countries. If they were arrested they were liable to be deported to France, which might mean being sent back to Italy or Germany, where God knew what horrors were awaiting them. One or two foreign women hurriedly regularized their position by 'marrying' Spaniards. A German girl who had no papers at all dodged the police by posing for several days as a man's mistress. I remember the look of shame and misery on the poor girl's face when I accidentally bumped into her coming out of the man's bedroom. Of course she was not his mistress, but no doubt she thought I thought she was. You had all the while a hateful feeling that someone hitherto your friend might be denouncing you to the secret police. The long nightmare of the fighting, the noise, the lack of food and sleep, the mingled strain and boredom of sitting on the roof and wondering whether in another minute I should be shot myself or be obliged to shoot somebody else had put my nerves on edge. I had got to the point when every time a door banged I grabbed for my pistol. On the Saturday morning there was an uproar of shots outside and everyone cried out: 'It's starting again!' I ran into the street to find that it was only some Assault Guards shooting a mad dog. No one who was in Barcelona then, or for months later, will forget the horrible atmosphere produced by fear, suspicion, hatred, censored newspapers, crammed jails, enormous food queues, and prowling gangs of armed men.

I have tried to give some idea of what it felt like to be in the middle of the Barcelona fighting; yet I do not suppose I have succeeded in conveying much of the strangeness of that time. One of the things that stick in my mind when I look back is the casual contacts one made at the time, the sudden glimpses of non-combatants to whom the whole thing was simply a meaningless uproar. I remember the fashionably-dressed woman I saw strolling down the Ramblas, with a shopping-basket over her arm and leading

a white poodle, while the rifles cracked and roared a street or two away. It is conceivable that she was deaf. And the man I saw rushing across the completely empty Plaza de Cataluna, brandishing a white handkerchief in each hand. And the large party of people all dressed in black who kept trying for about an hour to cross the Plaza de Cataluna and always failing. Every time they emerged from the side-street at the corner the P.S.U.C. machine-gunners in the Hotel Colon opened fire and drove them back — I don't know why, for they were obviously unarmed. I have since thought that they may have been a funeral party. And the little man who acted as caretaker at the museum over the Poliorama and who seemed to regard the whole affair as a social occasion. He was so pleased to have the English visiting him — the English were so simpatico, he said. He hoped we would all come and see him again when the trouble was over; as a matter of fact I did go and see him. And the other little man, sheltering in a doorway, who jerked his head in a pleased manner towards the hell of firing on the Plaza de Cataluna and said (as though remarking that it was a fine morning): 'So we've got the nineteenth of July back again!' And the people in the shoe-shop who were making my marching-boots. I went there before the fighting, after it was over, and, for a very few minutes, during the brief armistice on 5 May. It was an expensive shop, and the shop-people were U.G.T. and may have been P.S.U.C. members — at any rate they were politically on the other side and they knew that I was serving with the P.O.U.M. Yet their attitude was completely indifferent. 'Such a pity, this kind of thing, isn't it? And so bad for business. What a pity it doesn't stop! As though there wasn't enough of that kind of thing at the front!' etc., etc. There must have been quantities of people, perhaps a majority of the inhabitants of Barcelona, who regarded the whole affair without a nicker of interest, or with no more interest than they would have felt in an air-raid.

In this chapter I have described only my personal experiences. In the next chapter I must discuss as best I can the larger issues — what actually happened and with what results, what were the rights and wrongs of the affair, and who if anyone was responsible. So much political capital has been made out of the Barcelona fighting that it is important to try and get a balanced view of it. An immense amount,

enough to fill many books, has already been written on the subject, and I do not suppose I should exaggerate if I said that nine-tenths of it is untruthful. Nearly all the newspaper accounts published at the time were manufactured by journalists at a distance, and were not only inaccurate in their facts but intentionally misleading. As usual, only one side of the question has been allowed to get to the wider public. Like everyone who was in Barcelona at the time. I saw only what was happening in my immediate neighbourhood, but I saw and heard quite enough to be able to contradict many of the lies that have been circulated. As before, if you are not interested in political controversy and the mob of parties and sub-parties with their confusing names (rather like the names of the generals in a Chinese war), please skip. It is a horrible thing to have to enter into the details of inter-party polemics; it is like diving into a cesspool. But it is necessary to try and establish the truth, so far as it is possible. This squalid brawl in a distant city is more important than might appear at first sight.

Chapter 11

IT will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist. Future historians will have nothing to go upon except a mass of accusations and party propaganda. I myself have little data beyond what I saw with my own eyes and what I have learned from other eyewitnesses whom I believe to be reliable. I can, however, contradict some of the more flagrant lies and help to get the affair into some kind of perspective.

First of all, what actually happened?

For some time past there had been tension throughout Catalonia. In earlier chapters of this book I have given some account of the struggle between Communists and Anarchists. By May 1937 things had reached a point at which some kind of violent outbreak could be regarded as inevitable. The immediate cause of friction was the Government's order to surrender all private weapons, coinciding with the decision to build up a heavily-armed 'non-political' police-force from which trade union members were to be excluded. The meaning of this was obvious to everyone; and it was also obvious that the next move would be the taking over of some of the key industries controlled by the C.N.T. In addition there was a certain amount of resentment among the working classes because of the growing contrast of wealth and poverty and a general vague feeling that the revolution had been sabotaged. Many people were agreeably surprised when there was no rioting on i May. On 3 May the Government decided to take over the Telephone Exchange, which had been operated since the beginning of the war mainly by C.N.T. workers; it was alleged that it was badly run and that official calls were being tapped. Salas, the Chief of Police (who may or may not have been exceeding his orders), sent three lorry-loads of armed Civil Guards to seize the building, while the streets outside were cleared by armed police in civilian clothes. At about the same time bands of Civil Guards seized various other buildings in strategic spots. Whatever the real intention may have been, there was a widespread belief that this was the signal for a general attack on the

C.N.T. by the Civil Guards and the P.S.U.C. (Communists and Socialists). The word flew round the town that the workers' buildings were being attacked, armed Anarchists appeared on the streets, work ceased, and fighting broke out immediately. That night and the next morning barricades were built all over the town, and there was no break in the fighting until the morning of 6 May. The fighting was, however, mainly defensive on both sides. Buildings were besieged, but, so far as I know, none were stormed, and there was no use of artillery. Roughly speaking, the C.N.T.–F.A.I.–P.O.U.M. forces held the working-class suburbs, and the armed police-forces and the P.S.U.C. held the central and official portion of the town. On 6 May there was an armistice, but fighting soon broke out again, probably because of premature attempts by Civil Guards to disarm C.N.T. workers. Next morning, however, the people began to leave the barricades of their own accord. Up till, roughly, the night of 5 May the C.N.T. had had the better of it, and large numbers of Civil Guards had surrendered. But there was no generally accepted leadership and no fixed plan — indeed, so far as one could judge, no plan at all except a vague determination to resist the Civil Guards. The official leaders of the C.N.T. had joined with those of the U.G.T. in imploring everyone to go back to work; above all, food was running short. In such circumstances nobody was sure enough of the issue to go on fighting. By the afternoon of 7 May conditions were almost normal. That evening six thousand Assault Guards, sent by sea from Valencia, arrived and took control of the town. The Government issued an order for the surrender of all arms except those held by the regular forces, and during the next few days large numbers of arms were seized. The casualties during the fighting were officially given out as four hundred killed and about a thousand wounded. Four hundred killed is possibly an exaggeration, but as there is no way of verifying this we must accept it as accurate.

Secondly, as to the after-effects of the fighting. Obviously it is impossible to say with any certainty what these were. There is no evidence that the outbreak had any direct effect upon the course of the war, though obviously it must have had if it continued even a few days longer. It was made the excuse for bringing Catalonia under the direct control of Valencia, for hastening the break-up of the militias,

and for the suppression of the P.O.U.M., and no doubt it also had its share in bringing down the Caballero Government. But we may take it as certain that these things would have happened in any case. The real question is whether the C.N.T. workers who came into the street gained or lost by showing fight on this occasion. It is pure guesswork, but my own opinion is that they gained more than they lost. The seizure of the Barcelona Telephone Exchange was simply one incident in a long process. Since the previous year direct power had been gradually manoeuvred out of the hands of the syndicates, and the general movement was away from working-class control and towards centralized control, leading on to State capitalism or, possibly, towards the reintroduction of private capitalism. The fact that at this point there was resistance probably slowed the process down. A year after the outbreak of war the Catalan workers had lost much of their power, but their position was still comparatively favourable. It might have been much less so if they had made it clear that they would lie down under no matter what provocation. There are occasions when it pays better to fight and be beaten than not to fight at all.

Thirdly, what purpose, if any, lay behind the outbreak? Was it any kind of coup d'etat or revolutionary attempt? Did it definitely aim at overthrowing the Government? Was it preconcerted at all?

My own opinion is that the fighting was only preconcerted in the sense that everyone expected it. There were no signs of any very definite plan on either side. On the Anarchist side the action was almost certainly spontaneous, for it was an affair mainly of the rank and file. The people came into the streets and their political leaders followed reluctantly, or did not follow at all. The only people who even talked in a revolutionary strain were the Friends of Durruti, a small extremist group within the F.A.I., and the P.O.U.M. But once again they were following and not leading. The Friends of Durruti distributed some kind of revolutionary leaflet, but this did not appear until 5 May and cannot be said to have started the fighting, which had started of its own accord two days earlier. The official leaders of the C.N.T. disowned the whole affair from the start. There were a number of reasons for this. To begin with, the fact that the C.N.T. was still represented in the Government and the Generalite ensured

that its leaders would be more conservative than their followers. Secondly, the main object of the C.N.T. leaders was to form an alliance with the U.G.T., and the fighting was bound to widen the split between C.N.T. and U.G.T., at any rate for the time being. Thirdly — though this was not generally known at the time — the Anarchist leaders feared that if things went beyond a certain point and the workers took possession of the town, as they were perhaps in a position to do on 5 May, there would be foreign intervention. A British cruiser and two British destroyers had closed in upon the harbour, and no doubt there were other warships not far away. The English newspapers gave it out that these ships were proceeding to Barcelona 'to protect British interests', but in fact they made no move to do so; that is, they did not land any men or take off any refugees. There can be no certainty about this, but it was at least inherently likely that the British Government, which had not raised a finger to save the Spanish Government from Franco, would intervene quickly enough to save it from its own working class.

The P.O.U.M. leaders did not disown the affair, in fact they encouraged their followers to remain at the barricades and even gave their approval (in La Batalla, 6 May) to the extremist leaflet issued by the Friends of Durruti. (There is great uncertainty about this leaflet, of which no one now seems able to produce a copy.) In some of the foreign papers it was described as an 'inflammatory poster' which was 'plastered' all over the town. There was certainly no such poster. From comparison of various reports I should say that the leaflet called for (i) The formation of a revolutionary council (junta), (ii) The shooting of those responsible for the attack on the Telephone Exchange, (iii) The disarming of the Civil Guards. There is also some uncertainty as to how far La Batalla expressed agreement with the leaflet. I myself did not see the leaflet or La Batalla of that date. The only handbill I saw during the fighting was one issued by the tiny group of Trotskyists ('Bolshevik-Leninists') on 4 May. This merely said: 'Everyone to the barricades — general strike of all industries except war industries.' (In other words, it merely demanded what was happening already.) But in reality the attitude of the P.O.U.M. leaders was hesitating. They had never been in favour of insurrection until the war against Franco was won; on the other

hand the workers had come into the streets, and the P.O.U.M. leaders took the rather pedantic Marxist line that when the workers are on the streets it is the duty of the revolutionary parties to be with them. Hence, in spite of uttering revolutionary slogans about the 'reawakening of the spirit of 19 July', and so forth, they did their best to limit the workers' action to the defensive. They never, for instance, ordered an attack on any building; they merely ordered their followers to remain on guard and, as I mentioned in the last chapter, not to fire when it could be avoided. La Batalla also issued instructions that no troops were to leave the front. As far as one can estimate it, I should say that the responsibility of the P.O.U.M. amounts to having urged everyone to remain at the barricades, and probably to having persuaded a certain number to remain there longer than they would otherwise have done. Those who were in personal touch with the P.O.U.M. leaders at the time (I myself was not) have told me that they were in reality dismayed by the whole business, but felt that they had got to associate themselves with it. Afterwards, of course, political capital was made out of it in the usual manner. Gorkin, one of the P.O.U.M. leaders, even spoke later of 'the glorious days of May'. From the propaganda point of view this may have been the right line; certainly the P.O.U.M. rose somewhat in numbers during the brief period before its suppression. Tactically it was probably a mistake to give countenance to the leaflet of the Friends of Durruti, which was a very small organization and normally hostile to the P.O.U.M. Considering the general excitement and the things that were being said on both sides, the leaflet did not in effect mean much more than 'Stay at the barricades', but by seeming to approve of it while Solidaridad Obrera, the Anarchist paper, repudiated it, the P.O.U.M. leaders made it easy for the Communist press to say afterwards that the fighting was a kind of insurrection engineered solely by the P.O.U.M. However, we may be certain that the Communist press would have said this in any case. It was nothing compared with the accusations that were made both before and afterwards on less evidence. The C.N.T. leaders did not gain much by their more cautious attitude; they were praised for their loyalty but were levered out of both the Government and the Generalite as soon as the

opportunity arose.

9 A recent number of Inprecor states the exact opposite — that La Batalla orders the P.O.U.M. troops to leave the front! The point can easily be settled by referring to La Batalla of the date named.

So far as one could judge from what people were saying at the time, there was no real revolutionary intention anywhere. The people behind the barricades were ordinary C.N.T. workers, probably with a sprinkling of U.G.T. workers among them, and what they were attempting was not to overthrow the Government but to resist what they regarded, rightly or wrongly, as an attack by the police. Their action was essentially defensive, and I doubt whether it should be described, as it was in nearly all the foreign newspapers, as a 'rising'. A rising implies aggressive action and a definite plan. More exactly it was a riot — a very bloody riot, because both sides had fire-arms in their hands and were willing to use them.

But what about the intentions on the other side? If it was not an Anarchist coup d'etat, was it perhaps a Communist coup d'etat — a planned effort to smash the power of the C.N.T. at one blow?

I do not believe it was, though certain things might lead one to suspect it. It is significant that something very similar (seizure of the Telephone Exchange by armed police acting under orders from Barcelona) happened in Tarragona two days later. And in Barcelona the raid on the Telephone Exchange was not an isolated act. In various parts of the town bands of Civil Guards and P.S.U.C. adherents seized buildings in strategic spots, if not actually before the fighting started, at any rate with surprising promptitude. But what one has got to remember is that these things were happening in Spain and not in England. Barcelona is a town with a long history of street-fighting. In such places things happen quickly, the factions are ready-made, everyone knows the local geography, and when the guns begin to shoot people take their places almost as in a fire-drill. Presumably those responsible for the seizure of the Telephone Exchange expected trouble — though not on the scale that actually happened — and had made ready to meet it. But it does not follow that they were planning a general attack on the C.N.T. There are two reasons why I do not believe that either side had made preparations for large-scale fighting:

(i) Neither side had brought troops to Barcelona beforehand. The fighting was only between those who were in Barcelona already, mainly civilians and police.

(ii) The food ran short almost immediately. Anyone who has served in Spain knows that the one operation of war that Spaniards really perform really well is that of feeding their troops. It is most unlikely that if either side had contemplated a week or two of street — fighting and a general strike they would not have stored food beforehand.

Finally, as to the rights and wrongs of the affair.

A tremendous dust was kicked up in the foreign anti-Fascist press, but, as usual, only one side of the case has had anything like a hearing. As a result the Barcelona fighting has been represented as an insurrection by disloyal Anarchists and Trotskyists who were 'stabbing the Spanish Government in the back', and so forth. The issue was not quite so simple as that. Undoubtedly when you are at war with a deadly enemy it is better not to begin fighting among yourselves; but it is worth remembering that it takes two to make a quarrel and that people do not begin building barricades unless they have received something that they regard as a provocation.

The trouble sprang naturally out of the Government's order to the Anarchists to surrender their arms. In the English press this was translated into English terms and took this form: that arms were desperately needed on the Aragon front and could not be sent there because the unpatriotic Anarchists were holding them back. To put it like this is to ignore the conditions actually existing in Spain. Everyone knew that both the Anarchists and the P.S.U.C. were hoarding arms, and when the fighting broke out in Barcelona this was made clearer still; both sides produced arms in abundance. The Anarchists were well aware that even if they surrendered their arms, the P.S.U.C., politically the main power in Catalonia, would still retain theirs; and this in fact was what happened after the fighting was over. Meanwhile actually visible on the streets, there were quantities of arms which would have been very welcome at the front, but which were being retained for the 'non-political' police forces in the rear. And underneath this there was the irreconcilable difference between Communists and Anarchists, which was bound to lead to

some kind of struggle sooner or later. Since the beginning of the war the Spanish Communist Party had grown enormously in numbers and captured most of the political power, and there had come into Spain thousands of foreign Communists, many of whom were openly expressing their intention of 'liquidating' Anarchism as soon as the war against Franco was won. In the circumstances one could hardly expect the Anarchists to hand over the weapons which they had got possession of in the summer of 1936.

The seizure of the Telephone Exchange was simply the match that fired an already existing bomb. It is perhaps just conceivable that those responsible imagined that it would not lead to trouble. Company, the Catalan President, is said to have declared laughingly a few days earlier that the Anarchists would put up with anything. But certainly it was not a wise action. For months past there had been a long series of armed clashes between Communists and Anarchists in various parts of Spain. Catalonia and especially Barcelona was in a state of tension that had already led to street affrays, assassinations, and so forth. Suddenly the news ran round the city that armed men were attacking the buildings that the workers had captured in the July fighting and to which they attached great sentimental importance. One must remember that the Civil Guards were not loved by the working-class population. For generations past la guardia. had been simply an appendage of the landlord and the boss, and the Civil Guards were doubly hated because they were suspected, quite justly, of being of very doubtful loyalty against the Fascists. It is probable that the emotion that brought people into the streets in the first few hours was much the same emotion as had led them to resist the rebel generals at the beginning of the war. Of course it is arguable that the C.N.T. workers ought to have handed over the Telephone Exchange without protest. One's opinion here will be governed by one's attitude on the question of centralized government and working-class control. More relevantly it may be said: 'Yes, very likely the C.N.T. had a case. But, after all, there was a war on, and they had no business to start a fight behind the lines.' Here I agree entirely. Any internal disorder was likely to aid Franco. But what actually precipitated the fighting? The Government may or may not have had the right to seize the Telephone Exchange; the point is that in the

actual circumstances it was bound to lead to a fight. It was a provocative action, a gesture which said in effect, and presumably was meant to say: 'Your power is at an end — we are taking over.' It was not common sense to expect anything but resistance. If one keeps a sense of proportion one must realize that the fault was not — could not be, in a matter of this kind — entirely on one side. The reason why a one-sided version has been accepted is simply that the Spanish revolutionary parties have no footing in the foreign press. In the English press, in particular, you would have to search for a long time before finding any favourable reference, at any period of the war, to the Spanish Anarchists. They have been systematically denigrated, and, as I know by my own experience, it is almost impossible to get anyone to print anything in their defence.

10 New Statesman (14 May).

11 At the outbreak of war the Civil Guards had everywhere sided with the stronger party. On several occasions later in the war, e.g. at Santander, the local Civil Guards went over to the Fascists in a body.

I have tried to write objectively about the Barcelona fighting, though, obviously, no one can be completely objective on a question of this kind. One is practically obliged to take sides, and it must be clear enough which side I am on. Again, I must inevitably have made mistakes of fact, not only here but in other parts of this narrative. It is very difficult to write accurately about the Spanish war, because of the lack of non-propagandist documents. I warn everyone against my bias, and I warn everyone against my mistakes. Still, I have done my best to be honest. But it will be seen that the account I have given is completely different from that which appeared in the foreign and especially the Communist press. It is necessary to examine the Communist version, because it was published all over the world, has been supplemented at short intervals ever since, and is probably the most widely accepted one.

In the Communist and pro-Communist press the entire blame for the Barcelona fighting was laid upon the P.O.U.M. The affair was represented not as a spontaneous outbreak, but as a deliberate, planned insurrection against the Government, engineered solely by the P.O.U.M. with the aid of a few misguided 'uncontrollables'. More than this, it was definitely a Fascist plot, carried out under

Fascist orders with the idea of starting civil war in the rear and thus paralysing the Government. The P.O.U.M. was 'Franco's Fifth Column' — a 'Trotskyist' organization working in league with the Fascists. According to the Daily Worker (11 May):

The German and Italian agents, who poured into Barcelona ostensibly to 'prepare' the notorious 'Congress of the Fourth International', had one big task. It was this:

They were — in cooperation with the local Trotskyists — to prepare a situation of disorder and bloodshed, in which it would be possible for the Germans and Italians to declare that they were 'unable to exercise naval control of the Catalan coasts effectively because of the disorder prevailing in Barcelona' and were, therefore, 'unable to do otherwise than land forces in Barcelona'.

In other words, what was being prepared was a situation in which the German and Italian Governments could land troops or marines quite openly on the Catalan coasts, declaring that they were doing so 'in order to preserve order'. . . .

The instrument for all this lay ready to hand for the Germans and Italians in the shape of the Trotskyist organization known as the P.O.U.M.

The P.O.U.M., acting in cooperation with well-known criminal elements, and with certain other deluded persons in the Anarchist organizations planned, organized, and led the attack in the rearguard, accurately timed to coincide with the attack on the front at Bilbao, etc., etc.

Later in the article the Barcelona fighting becomes 'the P.O.U.M. attack', and in another article in the same issue it is stated that there is 'no doubt that it is at the door of the P.O.U.M. that the responsibility for the bloodshed in Catalonia must be laid'. Inprecor (29 May) states that those who erected the barricades in Barcelona were 'only members of the P.O.U.M. organized from that party for this purpose'.

I could quote a great deal more, but this is clear enough. The P.O.U.M. was wholly responsible and the P.O.U.M. was acting under Fascist orders. In a moment I will give some more extracts from the accounts that appeared in the Communist press; it will be seen that they are so self-contradictory as to be completely worthless.

But before doing so it is worth pointing to several a priori reasons why this version of the May fighting as a Fascist rising engineered by the P.O.U.M. is next door to incredible.

(i) The P.O.U.M. had not the numbers or influence to provoke disorders of this magnitude. Still less had it the power to call a general strike. It was a political organization with no very definite footing in the trade unions, and it would have been hardly more capable of producing a strike throughout Barcelona than (say) the English Communist Party would be of producing a general strike throughout Glasgow. As I said earlier, the attitude of the P.O.U.M. leaders may have helped to prolong the fighting to some extent; but they could not have originated it even if they had wanted to.

(ii) The alleged Fascist plot rests on bare assertion and all the evidence points in the other direction. We are told that the plan was for the German and Italian Governments to land troops in Catalonia; but no German or Italian troopships approached the coast. As to the 'Congress of the Fourth International' and the' German and Italian agents', they are pure myth. So far as I know there had not even been any talk of a Congress of the Fourth International. There were vague plans for a Congress of the P.O.U.M. and its brother-parties (English I.L.P., German S.A.P., etc., etc.); this had been tentatively fixed for some time in July — two months later — and not a single delegate had yet arrived. The 'German and Italian agents' have no existence outside the pages of the Daily Worker. Anyone who crossed the frontier at that time knows that it was not so easy to 'pour' into Spain, or out of it, for that matter.

(iii) Nothing happened either at Lerida, the chief stronghold of the P.O.U.M., or at the front. It is obvious that if the P.O.U.M. leaders had wanted to aid the Fascists they would have ordered their militia to walk out of the line and let the Fascists through. But nothing of the kind was done or suggested. Nor were any extra men brought out of the line beforehand, though it would have been easy enough to smuggle, say, a thousand or two thousand men back to Barcelona on various pretexts. And there was no attempt even at indirect sabotage of the front. The transport of food, munitions, and so forth continued as usual; I verified this by inquiry afterwards. Above all, a planned rising of the kind suggested would have needed months of

preparation, subversive propaganda among the militia, and so forth. But there was no sign or rumour of any such thing. The fact that the militia at the front played no part in the 'rising' should be conclusive. If the P.O.U.M. were really planning a coup d'etat it is inconceivable that they would not have used the ten thousand or so armed men who were the only striking force they had.

It will be clear enough from this that the Communist thesis of a P.O.U.M. 'rising' under Fascist orders rests on less than no evidence. I will add a few more extracts from the Communist press. The Communist accounts of the opening incident, the raid on the Telephone Exchange, are illuminating; they agree in nothing except in putting the blame on the other side. It is noticeable that in the English Communist papers the blame is put first upon the Anarchists and only later upon the P.O.U.M. There is a fairly obvious reason for this. Not everyone in England has heard of'Trotskyism', whereas every English-speaking person shudders at the name of 'Anarchist'. Let it once be known that 'Anarchists' are implicated, and the right atmosphere of prejudice is established; after that the blame can safely be transferred to the 'Trotskyists'. The Daily Worker begins thus (6 May):

A minority gang of Anarchists on Monday and Tuesday seized and attempted to hold the telephone and telegram buildings, and started firing into the street.

There is nothing like starting off with a reversal of roles. The Civil Guards attack a building held by the C.N.T.; so the C.N.T. are represented as attacking their own building attacking themselves, in fact. On the other hand, the Daily Worker of 11 May states:

The Left Catalan Minister of Public Security, Aiguade, and the United Socialist General Commissar of Public Order, Rodrigue Salas, sent the armed republican police into the Telef6nica building to disarm the employees there, most of them members of C.N.T. unions.

This does not seem to agree very well with the first statement; nevertheless the Daily Worker contains no admission that the first statement was wrong. The Daily Worker of 11 May states that the leaflets of the Friends of Durruti, which were disowned by the C.N.T., appeared on 4 May and 5 May, during the fighting. Inprecor

(22 May) states that they appeared on 3 May, before the fighting, and adds that 'in view of these facts' (the appearance of various leaflets):

The police, led by the Prefect of Police in person, occupied the central telephone exchange in the afternoon of 3 May. The police were shot at while discharging their duty. This was the signal for the provocateurs to begin shooting affrays all over the city.

And here is Inprecor for 29 May:

At three o'clock in the afternoon the Commissar for Public Security, Comrade Salas, went to the Telephone Exchange, which on the previous night had been occupied by 50 members of the P.O.U.M. and various uncontrollable elements.

This seems rather curious. The occupation of the Telephone Exchange by 50 P.O.U.M. members is what one might call a picturesque circumstance, and one would have expected somebody to notice it at the time. Yet it appears that it was discovered only three or four weeks later. In another issue of Inprecor the 50 P.O.U.M. members become 50 P.O.U.M. militiamen. It would be difficult to pack together more contradictions than are contained in these few short passages. At one moment the C.N.T. are attacking the Telephone Exchange, the next they are being attacked there; a leaflet appears before the seizure of the Telephone Exchange and is the cause of it, or, alternatively, appears afterwards and is the result of it; the people in the Telephone Exchange are alternatively C.N.T. members and P.O.U.M. members — and so on. And in a still later issue of the Daily Worker (3 June) Mr J. R. Campbell informs us that the Government only seized the Telephone Exchange because the barricades were already erected!

For reasons of space I have taken only the reports of one incident, but the same discrepancies run all through the accounts in the Communist press. In addition there are various statements which are obviously pure fabrication. Here for instance is something quoted by the Daily Worker (7 May) and said to have been issued by the Spanish Embassy in Paris:

A significant feature of the uprising has been that the old monarchist flag was flown from the balcony of various houses in Barcelona, doubtless in the belief that those who took part in the rising had become masters of the situation.

The Daily Worker very probably reprinted this statement in good faith, but those responsible for it at the Spanish Embassy must have been quite deliberately lying. Any Spaniard would understand the internal situation better than that. A monarchist flag in Barcelona! It was the one thing that could have united the warring factions in a moment. Even the Communists on the spot were obliged to smile when they read about it. It is the same with the reports in the various Communist papers upon the arms supposed to have been used by the P.O.U.M. during the 'rising'. They would be credible only if one knew nothing whatever of the facts. In the Daily Worker of 17 May Mr Frank Pitcairn states:

There were actually all sorts of arms used by them in the outrage. There were the arms which they have been stealing for months past, and hidden, and there were arms such as tanks, which they stole from the barracks just at the beginning of the rising. It is clear that scores of machine-guns and several thousand rifles are still in their possession.

Inprecor (29 May) also states:

On 3 May the P.O.U.M. had at its disposal some dozens of machine-guns and several thousand rines. . . . On the Plaza de Espana the Trotskyists brought into action batteries of'75' guns which were destined for the front in Aragon and which the militia had carefully concealed on their premises.

Mr Pitcairn does not tell us how and when it became dear that the P.O.U.M. possessed scores of machine-guns and several thousand rifles. I have given an estimate of the arms which were at three of the principal P.O.U.M. buildings — about eighty rifles, a few bombs, and no machine-guns; i.e. about sufficient for the armed guards which, at that time, all the political parties placed on their buildings. It seems strange that afterwards, when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed and all its buildings seized, these thousands of weapons never came to light; especially the tanks and field-guns, which are not the kind of thing that can be hidden up the chimney. But what is revealing in the two statements above is the complete ignorance they display of the local circumstances. According to Mr Pitcairn the P.O.U.M. stole tanks 'from the barracks'. He does not tell us which barracks. The P.O.U.M. militiamen who were in Barcelona (now comparatively

few, as direct recruitment to the party militias had ceased) shared the Lenin Barracks with a considerably larger number of Popular Army troops. Mr Pitcaim is asking us to believe, therefore, that the P.O.U.M. stole tanks with the connivance of the Popular Army. It is the same with the 'premises' on which the 75-mm. guns were concealed. There is no mention of where these 'premises' were. Those batteries of guns, firing on the Plaza de Espana, appeared in many newspaper reports, but I think we can say with certainty that they never existed. As I mentioned earlier, I heard no artillery-fire during the fighting, though the Plaza de Espana was only a mile or so away. A few days later I examined the Plaza de Espana and could find no buildings that showed marks of shell-fire. And an eye-witness who was in that neighbourhood throughout the fighting declares that no guns ever appeared there. (Incidentally, the tale of the stolen guns may have originated with Antonov-Ovseenko, the Russian Consul-General. He, at any rate, communicated it to a well-known English journalist, who afterwards repeated it in good faith in a weekly paper. Antonov-Ovseenko has since been 'purged'. How this would affect his credibility I do not know.) The truth is, of course, that these tales about tanks, field-guns, and so forth have only been invented because otherwise it is difficult to reconcile the scale of the Barcelona fighting with the P.O.U.M.'S small numbers. It was necessary to claim that the P.O.U.M. was wholly responsible for the fighting; it was also necessary to claim that it was an insignificant party with no following and 'numbered only a few thousand members', according to Inprecor. The only hope of making both statements credible was to pretend that the P.O.U.M. had all the weapons of a modern mechanized army.

It is impossible to read through the reports in the Communist Press without realizing that they are consciously aimed at a public ignorant of the facts and have no other purpose than to work up prejudice. Hence, for instance, such statements as Mr Pitcairn's in the Daily Worker of 11 May that the 'rising' was suppressed by the Popular Army. The idea here is to give outsiders the impression that all Catalonia was solid against the 'Trotskyists'. But the Popular Army remained neutral throughout the fighting; everyone in Barcelona knew this, and it is difficult to believe that Mr Pitcairn did

not know it too. Or again, the juggling in the Communist Press with the figures for killed and wounded, with the object of exaggerating the scale of the disorders. Diaz, General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party, widely quoted in the Communist Press, gave the numbers as 900 dead and 2500 wounded. The Catalan Minister of Propaganda, who was hardly likely to underestimate, gave the numbers as 400 killed and 1000 wounded. The Communist Party doubles the bid and adds a few more hundreds for luck.

The foreign capitalist newspapers, in general, laid the blame for the fighting upon the Anarchists, but there were a few that followed the Communist line. One of these was the English News Chronicle, whose correspondent, Mr John Langdon-Davies, was in Barcelona at the tune I quote portions of his article here:

A TROTSKYIST REVOLT

. . . This has not been an Anarchist uprising. It is a frustrated putsch of the 'Trotskyist' P.O.U.M., working through their controlled organizations, 'Friends of Durruti' and Libertarian Youth. . . . The tragedy began on Monday afternoon when the Government sent armed police into the Telephone Building, to disarm the workers there, mostly C.N.T. men. Grave irregularities in the service had been a scandal for some time. A large crowd gathered in the Plaza de Cataluna outside, while the C.N.T. men resisted, retreating floor by floor to the top of the building. . . . The incident was very obscure, but word went round that the Government was out against the Anarchists. The streets filled with armed men. . . . By nightfall every workers' centre and Government building was barricaded, and at ten o'clock the first volleys were fired and the first ambulances began ringing their way through the streets. By dawn all Barcelona was under fire. . . . As the day wore on and the dead mounted to over a hundred, one could make a guess at what was happening. The Anarchist C.N.T. and Socialist U.G.T. were not technically 'out in the street'. So long as they remained behind the barricades they were merely watchfully waiting, an attitude which included the right to shoot at anything armed in the open street . . . (the) genera] bursts were invariably aggravated by pacos — hidden solitary men, usually Fascists, shooting from roof — tops at nothing in particular, but doing all they could to add to the general panic. . . . By Wednesday

evening, however, it began to be clear who was behind the revolt. All the walls had been plastered with an inflammatory poster calling for an immediate revolution and for the shooting of Republican and Socialist leaders. It was signed by the 'Friends of Durruti'. On Thursday morning the Anarchists daily denied all knowledge or sympathy with it, but La Batalla, the P.O.U.M. paper, reprinted the document with the highest praise. Barcelona, the first city of Spain, was plunged into bloodshed by agents provocateurs using this subversive organization.

This does not agree very completely with the Communist versions I have quoted above, but it will be seen that even as it stands it is self — contradictory. First the affair is described as 'a Trotskyist revolt', then it is shown to have resulted from a raid on the Telephone building and the general belief that the Government was 'out against' the Anarchists. The city is barricaded and both C.N.T. and U.G.T. are behind the barricades; two days afterwards the inflammatory poster (actually a leaflet) appears, and this is declared by implication to have started the whole business — effect preceding cause. But there is a piece of very serious misrepresentation here. Mr Langdon-Davies describes the Friends of Durruti and Libertarian Youth as 'controlled organizations' of the P.O.U.M. Both were Anarchist organizations and had no connexion with the P.O.U.M. The Libertarian Youth was the youth league of the Anarchists, corresponding to the J.S.U. of the P.S.U.C., etc. The Friends of Durruti was a small organization within the F.A.I., and was in general bitterly hostile to the P.O.U.M. So far as I can discover, there was no one who was a member of both. It would be about equally true to say that the Socialist League is a 'controlled organization' of the English Liberal Party. Was Mr Langdon-Davies unaware of this? If he was, he should have written with more caution about this very complex subject.

I am not attacking Mr Langdon-Davies's good faith; but admittedly he left Barcelona as soon as the fighting was over, i.e. at the moment when he could have begun serious inquiries, and throughout his report there are clear signs that he has accepted the official version of a 'Trotskyist revolt' without sufficient verification. This is obvious even in the extract I have quoted. 'By nightfall' the

barricades are built, and 'at ten o'clock' the first volleys are fired. These are not the words of an eye-witness. From this you would gather that it is usual to wait for your enemy to build a barricade before beginning to shoot at him. The impression given is that some hours elapsed between the building of the barricades and the firing of the first volleys; whereas — naturally — it was the other way about. I and many others saw the first volleys fired early in the afternoon. Again, there are the solitary men, 'usually Fascists', who are shooting from the roof — tops. Mr Langdon-Davies does not explain how he knew that these men were Fascists. Presumably he did not climb on to the roofs and ask them. He is simply repeating what he has been told and, as it fits in with the official version, is not questioning it. As a matter of fact, he indicates one probable source of much of his information by an incautious reference to the Minister of Propaganda at the beginning of his article. Foreign journalists in Spain were hopelessly at the mercy of the Ministry of Propaganda, though one would think that the very name of this ministry would be a sufficient warning. The Minister of Propaganda was, of course, about as likely to give an objective account of the Barcelona trouble as (say) the late Lord Carson would have been to give an objective account of the Dublin rising of 1916.

I have given reasons for thinking that the Communist version of the Barcelona fighting cannot be taken seriously. In addition I must say something about the general charge that the P.O.U.M. was a secret Fascist organization in the pay of Franco and Hitler.

This charge was repeated over and over in the Communist Press, especially from the beginning of 1937 onwards. It was part of the world-wide drive of the official Communist Party against 'Trotskyism', of which the P.O.U.M. was supposed to be representative in Spain. 'Trotskyism', according to Frente Rojo (the Valencia Communist paper) 'is not a political doctrine. Trotskyism is an official capitalist organization, a Fascist terrorist band occupied in crime and sabotage against the people.' The P.O.U.M. was a 'Trotskyist' organization in league with the Fascists and part of 'Franco's Fifth Column'. What was noticeable from the start was that no evidence was produced in support of this accusation; the thing was simply asserted with an air of authority. And the attack

was made with the maximum of personal libel and with complete irresponsibility as to any effects it might have upon the war. Compared with the job of libelling the P.O.U.M., many Communist writers appear to have considered the betrayal of military secrets unimportant. In a February number of the Daily Worker, for instance, a writer (Winifred Bates) is allowed to state that the P.O.U.M. had only half as many troops on its section of the front as it pretended. This was not true, but presumably the writer believed it to be true. She and the Daily Worker were perfectly willing, therefore, to hand to the enemy one of the most important pieces of information that can be handed through the columns of a newspaper. In the New Republic Mr Ralph Bates stated that the P.O.U.M. troops were 'playing football with the Fascists in no man's land' at a time when, as a matter of fact, the P.O.U.M. troops were suffering heavy casualties and a number of my personal friends were killed and wounded. Again, there was the malignant cartoon which was widely circulated, first in Madrid and later in Barcelona, representing the P.O.U.M. as slipping off a mask marked with the hammer and sickle and revealing a face marked with the swastika. Had the Government not been virtually under Communist control it would never have permitted a thing of this kind to be circulated in wartime. It was a deliberate blow at the morale not only of the P.O.U.M. militia, but of any others who happened to be near them; for it is not encouraging to be told that the troops next to you in the line are traitors. As a matter of fact, I doubt whether the abuse that was heaped upon them from the rear actually had the effect of demoralizing the P.O.U.M. militia. But certainly it was calculated to do so, and those responsible for it must be held to have put political spite before anti-Fascist unity.

The accusation against the P.O.U.M. amounted to this: that a body of some scores of thousands of people, almost entirely working class, besides numerous foreign helpers and sympathizers, mostly refugees from Fascist countries, and thousands of militia, was simply a vast spying organization in Fascist pay. The thing was opposed to common sense, and the past history of the P.O.U.M. was enough to make it incredible. All the P.O.U.M. leaders had revolutionary histories behind them. Some of them had been mixed up in the 1934 revolt, and most of them had been imprisoned for Socialist activities

under the Lerroux Government or the monarchy. In 1936 its then leader, Joaquin Maurin, was one of the deputies who gave warning in the Cortes of Franco's impending revolt. Some time after the outbreak of war he was taken prisoner by the Fascists while trying to organize resistance in Franco's rear. When the revolt broke out the P.O.U.M. played a conspicuous part in resisting it, and in Madrid, in particular, many of its members were killed in the street-fighting. It was one of the first bodies to form columns of militia in Catalonia and Madrid. It seems almost impossible to explain these as the actions of a party in Fascist pay. A party in Fascist pay would simply have joined in on the other side.

Nor was there any sign of pro-Fascist activities during the war. It was arguable — though finally I do not agree — that by pressing for a more revolutionary policy the P.O.U.M. divided the Government forces and thus aided the Fascists;

I think any Government of reformist type would be justified in regarding a party like the P.O.U.M. as a nuisance. But this is a very different matter from direct treachery. There is no way of explaining why, if the P.O.U.M. was really a Fascist body, its militia remained loyal. Here were eight or ten thousand men holding important parts of the line during the intolerable conditions of the winter of 1936-7. Many of them were in the trenches four or five months at a stretch. It is difficult to see why they did not simply walk out of the line or go over to the enemy. It was always in their power to do so, and at times the effect might have been decisive. Yet they continued to fight, and it was shortly after the P.O.U.M. was suppressed as a political party, when the event was fresh in everyone's mind, that the militia — not yet redistributed among the Popular Army — took part in the murderous attack to the east of Huesca when several thousand men were killed in one or two days. At the very least one would have expected fraternization with the enemy and a constant trickle of deserters. But, as I have pointed out earlier, the number of desertions was exceptionally small. Again, one would have expected pro-Fascist propaganda, 'defeatism', and so forth. Yet there was no sign of any such thing. Obviously there must have been Fascist spies and agents provocateurs in the P.O.U.M.; they exist in all Left-wing parties; but there is no evidence that there were more of them there

than elsewhere.

It is true that some of the attacks in the Communist Press said, rather grudgingly, that only the P.O.U.M. leaders were in Fascist pay, and not the rank and file. But this was merely an attempt to detach the rank and file from their leaders. The nature of the accusation implied that ordinary members, militiamen, and so forth, were all in the plot together; for it was obvious that if Nin, Gorkin, and the others were really in Fascist pay, it was more likely to be known to their followers, who were in contact with them, than to journalists in London, Paris, and New York. And in any case, when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed the Communist-controlled secret police acted on the assumption that all were guilty alike, and arrested everyone connected with the P.O.U.M. whom they could lay hands on, including even wounded men, hospital nurses, wives of P.O.U.M. members, and in some cases, even children.

Finally, on 15-16 June, the P.O.U.M. was suppressed and declared an illegal organization. This was one of the first acts of the Negrin Government which came into office in May. When the Executive Committee of the P.O.U.M. had been thrown into jail, the Communist Press produced what purported to be the discovery of an enormous Fascist plot. For a while the Communist Press of the whole world was flaming with this kind of thing (Daily Worker, 21 June, summarizing various Spanish Communist papers):

SPANISH TROTSKYISTS PLOT WITH FRANCO

Following the arrest of a large number of leading Trotskyists in Barcelona and elsewhere . . . there became known, over the weekend, details of one of the most ghastly pieces of espionage ever known in wartime, and the ugliest revelation of Trotskyist treachery to date . . . Documents in the possession of the police, together with the full confession of no less than 200 persons under arrest, prove, etc. etc.

What these revelations 'proved' was that the P.O.U.M. leaders were transmitting military secrets to General Franco by radio, were in touch with Berlin, and were acting in collaboration with the secret Fascist organization in Madrid. In addition there were sensational details about secret messages in invisible ink, a mysterious document signed with the letter N. (standing for Nin), and so on and so forth.

But the final upshot was this: six months after the event, as I

write, most of the P.O.U.M. leaders are still in jail, but they have never been brought to trial, and the charges of communicating with Franco by radio, etc., have never even been formulated. Had they really been guilty of espionage they would have been tried and shot in a week, as so many Fascist spies had been previously. But not a scrap of evidence was ever produced except the unsupported statements in the Communist Press. As for the two hundred 'full confessions', which, if they had existed, would have been enough to convict anybody, they have never been heard of again. They were, in fact, two hundred efforts of somebody's imagination.

More than this, most of the members of the Spanish Government have disclaimed all belief in the charges against the P.O.U.M. Recently the cabinet decided by five to two in favour of releasing anti-Fascist political prisoners; the two dissentients being the Communist ministers. In August an international delegation headed by James Maxton M.P., went to Spain to inquire into the charges against the P.O.U.M. and the disappearance of Andres Nin. Prieto, the Minister of National Defence, Irujo, the Minister of Justice, Zugazagoitia, Minister of the Interior, Ortega y Gasset, the Procureur-General, Prat Garcia, and others all repudiated any belief in the P.O.U.M. leaders being guilty of espionage. Irujo added that he had been through the dossier of the case, that none of the so-called pieces of evidence would bear examination, and that the document supposed to have been signed by Nin was 'valueless' — i.e. a forgery. Prieto considered the P.O.U.M. leaders to be responsible for the May fighting in Barcelona, but dismissed the idea of their being Fascist spies. 'What is most grave', he added,' is that the arrest of the P.O.U.M. leaders was not decided upon by the Government, and the police carried out these arrests on their own authority. Those responsible are not the heads of the police, but their entourage, which has been infiltrated by the Communists according to their usual custom.' He cited other cases of illegal arrests by the police. Irujo likewise declared that the police had become 'quasi-independent' and were in reality under the control of foreign Communist elements. Prieto hinted fairly broadly to the delegation that the Government could not afford to offend the Communist Party while the Russians were supplying arms. When another delegation, headed by John

McGovern M.P., went to Spain in December, they got much the same answers as before, and Zugazagoitia, the Minister of the Interior, repeated Prieto's hint in even plainer terms. 'We have received aid from Russia and have had to permit certain actions which we did not like.' As an illustration of the autonomy of the police, it is interesting to learn that even with a signed order from the Director of Prisons and the Minister of Justice, McGovern and the others could not obtain admission to one of the 'secret prisons' maintained by the Communist Party in Barcelona.

12 For reports on the two delegations see Le Populaire (7 September), Laleche (18 September), Report on the Maxton delegation published by Independent News (219 Rue Saint-Denis, Paris), and McGovern's pamphlet Terror in Spain.

I think this should be enough to make the matter clear. The accusation of espionage against the P.O.U.M. rested solely upon articles in the Communist press and the activities of the Communist-controlled secret police. The P.O.U.M. leaders, and hundreds or thousands of their followers, are still in prison, and for six months past the Communist press has continued to clamour for the execution of the 'traitors' But Negrin and the others have kept their heads and refused to stage a wholesale massacre of'Trotskyists'. Considering the pressure that has been put upon them, it is greatly to their credit that they have done so. Meanwhile, in face of what I have quoted above, it becomes very difficult to believe that the P.O.U.M. was really a Fascist spying organization, unless one also believes that Maxton, Mc-Govern, Prieto, Irujo, Zugazagoitia, and the rest are all in Fascist pay together.

Finally, as to the charge that the P.O.U.M. was 'Trotskyist'. This word is now flung about with greater and greater freedom, and it is used in a way that is extremely misleading and is often intended to mislead. It is worth stopping to define it. The word Trotskyist is used to mean three distinct things:

(i) One who, like Trotsky, advocates 'world revolution' as against 'Socialism in a single country'. More loosely, a revolutionary extremist.

(ii) A member of the actual organization of which Trotsky is head.

(iii) A disguised Fascist posing as a revolutionary who acts

especially by sabotage in the U.S.S.R., but, in general, by splitting and undermining the Left-wing forces.

In sense (i) the P.O.U.M. could probably be described as Trotskyist. So can the English I.L.P., the German S.A.P., the Left Socialists in France, and so on. But the P.O.U.M. had no connexion with Trotsky or the Trotskyist ('Bolshevik-Lenninist') organization. When the war broke out the foreign Trotskyists who came to Spain (fifteen or twenty in number) worked at first for the P.O.U.M., as the party nearest to their own viewpoint, but without becoming party-members; later Trotsky ordered his followers to attack the P.O.U.M. policy, and the Trotskyists were purged from the party offices, though a few remained in the militia. Nin, the P.O.U.M. leader after Maurin's capture by the Fascists, was at one time Trotsky's secretary, but had left him some years earlier and formed the P.O.U.M. by the amalgamation of various Opposition Communists with an earlier party, the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc. Nin's one-time association with Trotsky has been used in the Communist press to show that the P.O.U.M. was really Trotskyist.

By the same line of argument it could be shown that the English Communist Party is really a Fascist organization, because of Mr John Strachey's one-time association with Sir Oswald Mosley.

In sense (ii), the only exactly defined sense of the word, the P.O.U.M. was certainly not Trotskyist. It is important to make this distinction, because it is taken for granted by the majority of Communists that a Trotskyist in sense (ii) is invariably a Trotskyist in sense (iii) — i.e. that the whole Trotskyist organization is simply a Fascist spying-machine. 'Trotskyism' only came into public notice in the time of the Russian sabotage trials, and to call a man a Trotskyist is practically equivalent to calling him a murderer, agent provocateur, etc. But at the same time anyone who criticizes Communist policy from a Left-wing standpoint is liable to be denounced as a Trotskyist. Is it then asserted that everyone professing revolutionary extremism is in Fascist pay?

In practice it is or is not, according to local convenience. When Maxton went to Spain with the delegation I have mentioned above, Verdad, Frente Rojo, and other Spanish Communist papers instantly denounced him as a 'Trotsky-Fascist', spy of the Gestapo, and so

forth. Yet the English Communists were careful not to repeat this accusation. In the English Communist press Maxton becomes merely a 'reactionary enemy of the working class', which is conveniently vague. The reason, of course, is simply that several sharp lessons have given the English Communist press a wholesome dread of the law of libel. The fact that the accusation was not repeated in a country where it might have to be proved is sufficient confession that it is a lie.

It may seem that I have discussed the accusations against the P.O.U.M. at greater length than was necessary. Compared with the huge miseries of a civil war, this kind of internecine squabble between parties, with its inevitable injustices and false accusations, may appear trivial. It is not really so. I believe that libels and press — campaigns of this kind, and the habits of mind they indicate, are capable of doing the most deadly damage to the anti-Fascist cause.

Anyone who has given the subject a glance knows that the Communist tactic of dealing with political opponents by means of trumped-up accusations is nothing new. Today the key-word is 'Trotsky-Fascist'; yesterday it was 'Social-Fascist'. It is only six or seven years since the Russian State trials 'proved' that the leaders of the Second International, including, for instance, Leon Blum and prominent members of the British Labour Party, were hatching a huge plot for the military invasion of the U.S.S.R. Yet today the French Communists are glad enough to accept Blum as a leader, and the English Communists are raising heaven and earth to get inside the Labour Party. I doubt whether this kind of thing pays, even from a sectarian point of view. And meanwhile there is no possible doubt about the hatred and dissension that the 'Trotsky-Fascist' accusation is causing. Rank-and — file Communists everywhere are led away on a senseless witch-hunt after 'Trotskyists', and parties of the type of the P.O.U.M. are driven back into the terribly sterile position of being mere anti-Communist parties. There is already the beginning of a dangerous split in the world working-class movement. A few more libels against life-long Socialists, a few more frame-ups like the charges against the P.O.U.M., and the split may become irreconcilable. The only hope is to keep political controversy on a plane where exhaustive discussion is possible. Between the

Communists and those who stand or claim to stand to the Left of them there is a real difference. The Communists hold that Fascism can be beaten by alliance with sections of the capitalist class (the Popular Front); their opponents hold that this manoeuvre simply gives Fascism new breeding-grounds. The question has got to be settled; to make the wrong decision may be to land ourselves in for centuries of semi-slavery. But so long as no argument is produced except a scream of 'Trotsky-Fascist!' the discussion cannot even begin. It would be impossible for me, for instance, to debate the rights and wrongs of the Barcelona fighting with a Communist Party member, because no Communist — that is to say, no' good' Communist — could admit that I have given a truthful account of the facts. If he followed his party 'line dutifully he would have to declare that I am lying or, at best, that I am hopelessly misled and that anyone who glanced at the Daily Worker headlines a thousand miles from the scene of events knows more of what was happening in Barcelona than I do. In such circumstances there can be no argument; the necessary minimum of agreement cannot be reached. What purpose is served by saying that men like Maxton are in Fascist pay? Only the purpose of making serious discussion impossible. It is as though in the middle of a chess tournament one competitor should suddenly begin screaming that the other is guilty of arson or bigamy. The point that is really at issue remains untouched. Libel settles nothing.

Chapter 12

IT must have been three days after the Barcelona fighting ended that we returned to the front. After the fighting — more particularly after the slanging-match in the newspapers — it was difficult to think about this war in quite the same naively idealistic manner as before. I suppose there is no one who spent more than a few weeks in Spain without being in some degree disillusioned. My mind went back to the newspaper correspondent whom I had met my first day in Barcelona, and who said to me: 'This war is a racket the same as any other.' The remark had shocked me deeply, and at that time (December) I do not believe it was true; it was not true even now, in May; but it was becoming truer. The fact is that every war suffers a kind of progressive degradation with every month that it continues, because such things as individual liberty and a truthful press are simply not compatible with military efficiency.

One could begin now to make some kind of guess at what was likely to happen. It was easy to see that the Caballero Government would fall and be replaced by a more Right-wing Government with a stronger Communist influence (this happened a week or two later), which would set itself to break the power of the trade unions once and for all. And afterwards, when Franco was beaten — and putting aside the huge problems raised by the reorganization of Spain — the prospect was not rosy. As for the newspaper talk about this being a 'war for democracy', it was plain eyewash. No one in his senses supposed that there was any hope of democracy, even as we understand it in England or France, in a country so divided and exhausted as Spain would be when the war was over. It would have to be a dictatorship, and it was clear that the chance of a working-class dictatorship had passed. That meant that the general movement would be in the direction of some kind of Fascism. Fascism called, no doubt, by some politer name, and — because this was Spain — more human and less efficient than the German or Italian varieties. The only alternatives were an infinitely worse dictatorship by Franco, or (always a possibility) that the war would end with Spain divided up, either by actual frontiers or into economicszones.

Whichever way you took it it was a depressing outlook. But it did not follow that the Government was not worth fighting for as against the more naked and developed Fascism of Franco and Hitler. Whatever faults the post-war Government might have, Franco's regime would certainly be worse. To the workers — the town proletariat — it might in the end make very little difference who won, but Spain is primarily an agricultural country and the peasants would almost certainly benefit by a Government victory. Some at least of the seized lands would remain in their possession, in which case there would also be a distribution of land in the territory that had been Franco's, and the virtual serfdom that had existed in some parts of Spain was not likely to be restored. The Government in control at the end of the war would at any rate be anti-clerical and anti-feudal. It would keep the Church in check, at least for the time being, and would modernize the country — build roads, for instance, and promote education and public health; a certain amount had been done in this direction even during the war. Franco, on the other hand, in so far as he was not merely the puppet of Italy and Germany, was tied to the big feudal landlords and stood for a stuffy clerico-military reaction. The Popular Front might be a swindle, but Franco was an anachronism. Only millionaires or romantics could want him to win.

Moreover, there was the question of the international prestige of Fascism, which for a year or two past had been haunting me like a nightmare. Since 1930 the Fascists had won all the victories; it was time they got a beating, it hardly mattered from whom. If we could drive Franco and his foreign mercenaries into the sea it might make an immense improvement in the world situation, even if Spain itself emerged with a stifling dictatorship and all its best men in jail. For that alone the war would have been worth winning.

This was how I saw things at the time. I may say that I now think much more highly of the Negrin Government than I did when it came into office. It has kept up the difficult fight with splendid courage, and it has shown more political tolerance than anyone expected. But I still believe that — unless Spain splits up, with unpredictable consequences — the tendency of the post-war Government is bound to be Fascistic. Once again I let this opinion stand, and take the chance that time will do to me what it does to most prophets.

We had just reached the front when we heard that Bob Smillie, on his way back to England, had been arrested at the frontier, taken down to Valencia, and thrown into jail. Smillie had been in Spain since the previous October. He had worked for several months at the P.O.U.M. office and had then joined the militia when the other I.L.P. members arrived, on the understanding that he was to do three months at the front before going back to England to take part in a propaganda tour. It was some time before we could discover what he had been arrested for. He was being kept incommunicado, so that not even a lawyer could see him. In Spain there is — at any rate in practice — no habeas corpus, and you can be kept in jail for months at a stretch without even being charged, let alone tried. Finally we learned from a released prisoner that Smillie had been arrested for 'carrying arms'. The 'arms', as I happened to know, were two hand-grenades of the primitive type used at the beginning of the war, which he had been taking home to show off at his lectures, along with shell splinters and other souvenirs. The charges and fuses had been removed from them — they were mere cylinders of steel and completely harmless. It was obvious that this was only a pretext and that he had been arrested because of his known connexion with the P.O.U.M. The Barcelona fighting had only just ended and the authorities were, at that moment, extremely anxious not to let anyone out of Spain who was in a position to contradict the official version. As a result people were liable to be arrested at the frontier on more or less frivolous pretexts. Very possibly the intention, at the beginning, was only to detain Smillie for a few days. But the trouble is that, in Spain, once you are in jail you generally stay there, with or without trial.

We were still at Huesca, but they had placed us further to the right, opposite the Fascist redoubt which we had temporarily captured a few weeks earlier. I was now acting as teniente — corresponding to second-lieutenant in the British Army, I suppose — in command of about thirty men, English and Spanish. They had sent my name in for a regular commission; whether I should get it was uncertain. Previously the militia officers had refused to accept regular commissions, which meant extra pay and conflicted with the equalitarian ideas of the militia, but they were now obliged to do so.

Benjamin had already been gazetted captain and Kopp was in process of being gazetted major. The Government could not, of course, dispense with the militia officers, but it was not confirming any of them in a higher rank than major, presumably in order to keep the higher commands for Regular Army officers and the new officers from the School of War. As a result, in our division, the agth, and no doubt in many others, you had the queer temporary situation of the divisional commander, the brigade commanders, and the battalion commanders all being majors.

There was not much happening at the front. The battle round the Jaca road had died away and did not begin again till mid June. In our position the chief trouble was the snipers. The Fascist trenches were more than a hundred and fifty yards away, but they were on higher ground and were on two sides of us, our line forming a right-angle salient. The corner of the salient was a dangerous spot; there had always been a toll of sniper casualties there. From time to time the Fascists let fly at us with a rifle-grenade or some similar weapon. It made a ghastly crash — unnerving, because you could not hear it coming in time to dodge — but was not really dangerous; the hole it blew in the ground was no bigger than a wash-tub. The nights were pleasantly warm, the days blazing hot, the mosquitoes were becoming a nuisance, and in spite of the clean clothes we had brought from Barcelona we were almost immediately lousy. Out in the deserted orchards in no man's land the cherries were whitening on the trees. For two days there were torrential rains, the dug-outs flooded, and the parapet sank a foot; after that there were more days of digging out the sticky clay with the wretched Spanish spades which have no handles and bend like tin spoons.

They had promised us a trench-mortar for the company; I was looking forward to it gready. At nights we patrolled as usual — more dangerous than it used to be, because the Fascist trenches were better manned and they had grown more alert; they had scattered tin cans just outside their wire and used to open up with the machine-guns when they heard a clank. In the daytime we sniped from no man's land. By crawling a hundred yards you could get to a ditch, hidden by tall grasses, which commanded a gap in the Fascist parapet. We had set up a rifle-rest in the ditch. If you waited long enough you

generally saw a khaki-clad figure slip hurriedly across the gap. I had several shots. I don't know whether I hit anyone — it is most unlikely; I am a very poor shot with a rifle. But it was rather fun, the Fascists did not know where the shots were coming from, and I made sure I would get one of them sooner or later. However, the dog it was that died — a Fascist sniper got me instead. I had been about ten days at the front when it happened. The whole experience of being hit by a bullet is very interesting and I think it is worth describing in detail.

It was at the corner of the parapet, at five o'clock in the morning. This was always a dangerous time, because we had the dawn at our backs, and if you stuck your head above the parapet it was clearly outlined against the sky. I was talking to the sentries preparatory to changing the guard. Suddenly, in the very middle of saying something, I felt — it is very hard to describe what I felt, though I remember it with the utmost vividness.

Roughly speaking it was the sensation of being at the centre of an explosion. There seemed to be a loud bang and a blinding flash of light all round me, and I felt a tremendous shock — no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electric terminal; with it a sense of utter weakness, a feeling of being stricken and shrivelled up to nothing. The sand-bags in front of me receded into immense distance. I fancy you would feel much the same if you were struck by lightning. I knew immediately that I was hit, but because of the seeming bang and flash I thought it was a rifle nearby that had gone off accidentally and shot me. All this happened in a space of time much less than a second. The next moment my knees crumpled up and I was falling, my head hitting the ground with a violent bang which, to my relief, did not hurt. I had a numb, dazed feeling, a consciousness of being very badly hurt, but no pain in the ordinary sense.

The American sentry I had been talking to had started forward. 'Gosh! Are you hit?' People gathered round. There was the usual fuss— 'Lift him up! Where's he hit? Get his shirt open!' etc., etc. The American called for a knife to cut my shirt open. I knew that there was one in my pocket and tried to get it out, but discovered that my right arm was paralysed. Not being in pain, I felt a vague

satisfaction. This ought to please my wife, I thought; she had always wanted me to be wounded, which would save me from being killed when the great battle came. It was only now that it occurred to me to wonder where I was hit, and how badly; I could feel nothing, but I was conscious that the bullet had struck me somewhere in the front of the body. When I tried to speak I found that I had no voice, only a faint squeak, but at the second attempt I managed to ask where I was hit. In the throat, they said. Harry Webb, our stretcher-bearer, had brought a bandage and one of the little bottles of alcohol they gave us for field-dressings. As they lifted me up a lot of blood poured out of my mouth, and I heard a Spaniard behind me say that the bullet had gone clean through my neck. I felt the alcohol, which at ordinary times would sting like the devil, splash on to the wound as a pleasant coolness.

They laid me down again while somebody fetched a stretcher. As soon as I knew that the bullet had gone clean through my neck I took it for granted that I was done for. I had never heard of a man or an animal getting a bullet through the middle of the neck and surviving it. The blood was dribbling out of the comer of my mouth. 'The artery's gone,' I thought. I wondered how long you last when your carotid artery is cut; not many minutes, presumably. Everything was very blurry. There must have been about two minutes during which I assumed that I was killed. And that too was interesting — I mean it is interesting to know what your thoughts would be at such a time. My first thought, conventionally enough, was for my wife. My second was a violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done, suits me so well. I had time to feel this very vividly. The stupid mischance infuriated me. The meaninglessness of it! To be bumped off, not even in battle, but in this stale comer of the trenches, thanks to a moment's carelessness! I thought, too, of the man who had shot me — wondered what he was like, whether he was a Spaniard or a foreigner, whether he knew he had got me, and so forth. I could not feel any resentment against him. I reflected that as he was a Fascist I would have killed him if I could, but that if he had been taken prisoner and brought before me at this moment I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting. It may be, though, that if you were really dying your

thoughts would be quite different.

They had just got me on to the stretcher when my paralysed right arm came to life and began hurting damnably. At the time I imagined that I must have broken it in falling; but the pain reassured me, for I knew that your sensations do not become more acute when you are dying. I began to feel more normal and to be sorry for the four poor devils who were sweating and slithering with the stretcher on their shoulders. It was a mile and a half to the ambulance, and vile going, over lumpy, slippery tracks. I knew what a sweat it was, having helped to carry a wounded man down a day or two earlier. The leaves of the silver poplars which, in places, fringed our trenches brushed against my face; I thought what a good thing it was to be alive in a world where silver poplars grow. But all the while the pain in my arm was diabolical, making me swear and then try not to swear, because every time I breathed too hard the blood bubbled out of my mouth.

The doctor re-bandaged the wound, gave me a shot of morphia, and sent me off to Sietamo. The hospitals at Sietamo were hurriedly constructed wooden huts where the wounded were, as a rule, only kept for a few hours before being sent on to Barbastro or Lerida. I was dopey from morphia but still in great pain, practically unable to move and swallowing blood constantly. It was typical of Spanish hospital methods that while I was in this state the untrained nurse tried to force the regulation hospital meal — a huge meal of soup, eggs, greasy stew, and so forth — down my throat and seemed surprised when I would not take it. I asked for a cigarette, but this was one of the periods of tobacco famine and there was not a cigarette in the place. Presently two comrades who had got permission to leave the line for a few hours appeared at my bedside.

'Hullo! You're alive, are you? Good. We want your watch and your revolver and your electric torch. And your knife, if you've got one.'

They made off with all my portable possessions. This always happened when a man was wounded — everything he possessed was promptly divided up; quite rightly, for watches, revolvers, and so forth were precious at the front and if they went down the line in a wounded man's kit they were certain to be stolen somewhere on the

way.

By the evening enough sick and wounded had trickled in to make up a few ambulance-loads, and they sent us on to Barbastro. What a journey! It used to be said that in this war you got well if you were wounded in the extremities, but always died of a wound in the abdomen. I now realized why. No one who was liable to bleed internally could have survived those miles of jolting over metal roads that had been smashed to pieces by heavy lorries and never repaired since the war began. Bang, bump, wallop! It took me back to my early childhood and a dreadful thing called the Wiggle-Woggle at the White City Exhibition. They had forgotten to tie us into the stretchers. I had enough strength in my left arm to hang on, but one poor wretch was spilt on to the floor and suffered God knows what agonies. Another, a walking case who was sitting in the corner of the ambulance, vomited all over the place. The hospital in Barbastro was very crowded, the beds so close together that they were almost touching. Next morning they loaded a number of us on to the hospital train and sent us down to Lerida.

I was five or six days in Lerida. It was a big hospital, with sick, wounded, and ordinary civilian patients more or less jumbled up together. Some of the men in my ward had frightful wounds. In the next bed to me there was a youth with black hair who was suffering from some disease or other and was being given medicine that made his urine as green as emerald. His bed-bottle was one of the sights of the ward. An English-speaking Dutch Communist, having heard that there was an Englishman in the hospital, befriended me and brought me English newspapers. He had been ter-ribly wounded in the October fighting, and had somehow managed to settle down at Lerida hospital and had married one of the nurses. Thanks to his wound, one of his legs had shrivelled till it was no thicker than my arm. Two militiamen on leave, whom I had met my first week at the front, came in to see a wounded friend and recognized me. They were kids of about eighteen. They stood awkwardly beside my bed, trying to think of something to say, and then, as a way of demonstrating that they were sorry I was wounded, suddenly took all the tobacco out of their pockets, gave it to me, and fled before I could give it back. How typically Spanish! I discovered afterwards that you

could not buy tobacco anywhere in the town and what they had given me was a week's ration.

After a few days I was able to get up and walk about with my arm in a sling. For some reason it hurt much more when it hung down. I also had, for the time being, a good deal of internal pain from the damage I had done myself in falling, and my voice had disappeared almost completely, but I never had a moment's pain from the bullet wound itself. It seems this is usually the case. The tremendous shock of a bullet prevents sensation locally; a splinter of shell or bomb, which is jagged and usually hits you less hard, would probably hurt like the devil. There was a pleasant garden in the hospital grounds, and in it was a pool with gold-fishes and some small dark grey fish — bleak, I think. I used to sit watching them for hours. The way things were done at Lerida gave me an insight into the hospital system on the Aragon front — whether it was the same on other fronts I do not know. In some ways the hospitals were very good. The doctors were able men and there seemed to be no shortage of drugs and equipment. But there were two bad faults on account of which, I have no doubt, hundreds or thousands of men have died who might have been saved.

One was the fact that all the hospitals anywhere near the front line were used more or less as casualty clearing-stations. The result was that you got no treatment there unless you were too badly wounded to be moved. In theory most of the wounded were sent straight to Barcelona or Tarragona, but owing to the lack of transport they were often a week or ten days in getting there. They were kept hanging about at Sietamo, Barbastro, Monzon, Lerida, and other places, and meanwhile they were getting no treatment except an occasional clean bandage, sometimes not even that. Men with dreadful shell wounds, smashed bones, and so forth, were swathed in a sort of casing made of bandages and plaster of Paris; a description of the wound was written in pencil on the outside, and as a rule the casing was not removed till the man reached Barcelona or Tarragona ten days later. It was almost impossible to get one's wound examined on the way; the few doctors could not cope with the work, and they simply walked hurriedly past your bed, saying: 'Yes, yes, they'll attend to you at Barcelona.' There were always rumours that the hospital train

was leaving for Barcelona manana. The other fault was the lack of competent nurses. Apparently there was no supply of trained nurses in Spain, perhaps because before the war this work was done chiefly by nuns. I have no complaint against the Spanish nurses, they always treated me with the greatest kindness, but there is no doubt that they were terribly ignorant. All of them knew how to take a temperature, and some of them knew how to tie a bandage, but that was about all. The result was that men who were too ill to fend for themselves were often shamefully neglected. The nurses would let a man remain constipated for a week on end, and they seldom washed those who were too weak to wash themselves. I remember one poor devil with a smashed arm telling me that he had been three weeks without having his face washed. Even beds were left unmade for days together. The food in all the hospitals was very good — too good, indeed. Even more in Spain than elsewhere it seemed to be the tradition to stuff sick people with heavy food. At Lerida the meals were terrific. Breakfast, at about six in the morning, consisted of soup, an omelette, stew, bread, white wine, and coffee, and lunch was even larger — this at a time when most of the civil population was seriously underfed. Spaniards seem not to recognize such a thing as a light diet. They give the same food to sick people as to well ones — always the same rich, greasy cookery, with everything sodden in olive oil.

One morning it was announced that the men in my ward were to be sent down to Barcelona today. I managed to send a wire to my wife, telling her that I was coming, and presently they packed us into buses and took us down to the station. It was only when the train was actually starting that the hospital orderly who travelled with us casually let fall that we were not going to Barcelona after all, but to Tarragona. I suppose the engine-driver had changed his mind. 'Just like Spain!' I thought. But it was very Spanish, too, that they agreed to hold up the train while I sent another wire, and more Spanish still that the wire never got there.

They had put us into ordinary third-class carriages with wooden seats, and many of the men were badly wounded and had only got out of bed for the first time that morning. Before long, what with the heat and the jolting, half of them were in a state of collapse and

several vomited on the floor. The hospital orderly threaded his way among the corpse — like forms that sprawled everywhere, carrying a large goatskin bottle full of water which he squirted into this mouth or that. It was beastly water; I remember the taste of it still. We got into Tarragona as the sun was getting low. The line runs along the shore a stone's throw from the sea. As our train drew into the station a troop-train full of men from the International Column was drawing out, and a knot of people on the bridge were waving to them. It was a very long train, packed to bursting-point with men, with field-guns lashed on the open trucks and more men clustering round the guns. I remember with peculiar vividness the spectacle of that train passing in the yellow evening light; window after window full of dark, smiling faces, the long tilted barrels of the guns, the scarlet scarves fluttering — all this gliding slowly past us against a turquoise-coloured sea.

'Extranjeros — foreigners,' said someone. 'They're Italians. 'Obviously they were Italians. No other people could have grouped themselves so picturesquely or returned the salutes of the crowd with so much grace — a grace that was none the less because about half the men on the train were drinking out of up-ended wine bottles. We heard afterwards that these were some of the troops who won the great victory at Guadalajara in March; they had been on leave and were being transferred to the Aragon front. Most of them, I am afraid, were killed at Huesca only a few weeks later. The men who were well enough to stand had moved across the carriage to cheer the Italians as they went past. A crutch waved out of the window; bandaged forearms made the Red Salute. It was like an allegorical picture of war; the trainload of fresh men gliding proudly up the line, the maimed men sliding slowly down, and all the while the guns on the open trucks making one's heart leap as guns always do, and reviving that pernicious feeling, so difficult to get rid of, that war is glorious after all.

The hospital at Tarragona was a very big one and full of wounded from all fronts. What wounds one saw there! They had a way of treating certain wounds which I suppose was in accordance with the latest medical practice, but which was peculiarly horrible to look at. This was to leave the wound completely open and unbandaged, but

protected from flies by a net of butter-muslin, stretched over wires. Under the muslin you would see the red jelly of a half-healed wound. There was one man wounded in the face and throat who had his head inside a sort of spherical helmet of butter-muslin; his mouth was closed up and he breathed through a little tube that was fixed between his lips. Poor devil, he looked so lonely, wandering to and fro, looking at you through his muslin cage and unable to speak. I was three or four days at Tarragona. My strength was coming back, and one day, by going slowly, I managed to walk down as far as the beach. It was queer to see the seaside life going on almost as usual; the smart cafes along the promenade and the plump local bourgeoisie bathing and sunning themselves in deck-chairs as though there had not been a war within a thousand miles. Nevertheless, as it happened, I saw a bather drowned, which one would have thought impossible in that shallow and tepid sea.

Finally, eight or nine days after leaving the front, I had my wound examined. In the surgery where newly-arrived cases were examined, doctors with huge pairs of shears were hacking away the breast-plates of plaster in which men with smashed ribs, collar-bones, and so forth had been cased at the dressing-stations behind the line; out of the neck-hole of the huge clumsy breast-plate you would see protruding an anxious, dirty face, scrubby with a week's beard. The doctor, a brisk, handsome man of about thirty, sat me down in a chair, grasped my tongue with a piece of rough gauze, pulled it out as far as it would go, thrust a dentist's mirror down my throat, and told me to say 'Eh!' After doing this till my tongue was bleeding and my eyes running with water, he told me that one vocal cord was paralysed.

'When shall I get my voice back?' I said.

'Your voice? Oh, you'll never get your voice back,' he said cheerfully.

However, he was wrong, as it turned out. For about two months I could not speak much above a whisper, but after that my voice became normal rather suddenly, the other vocal cord having 'compensated'. The pain in my arm was due to the bullet having pierced a bunch of nerves at the back of the neck. It was a shooting pain like neuralgia, and it went on hurting continuously for about a

month, especially at night, so that I did not get much sleep. The fingers of my right hand were also semi-paralysed. Even now, five months afterwards, my forefinger is still numb — a queer effect for a neck wound to have.

The wound was a curiosity in a small way and various doctors examined it with much clicking of tongues and ‘Que suerte! Qye suerte!’ One of them told me with an air of authority that the bullet had missed the artery by ‘about a millimetre’. I don’t know how he knew. No one I met at this time — doctors, nurses, practicantes, or fellow-patients — failed to assure me that a man who is hit through the neck and survives it is the luckiest creature alive. I could not help thinking that it would be even luckier not to be hit at all.

Chapter 13

IN Barcelona, during all those last weeks I spent there, there was a peculiar evil feeling in the air — an atmosphere of suspicion, fear, uncertainty, and veiled hatred. The May fighting had left ineradicable after-effects behind it. With the fall of the Caballero Government the Communists had come definitely into power, the charge of internal order had been handed over to Communist ministers, and no one doubted that they would smash their political rivals as soon as they got a quarter of a chance Nothing was happening as yet, I myself had not even any mental picture of what was going to happen; and yet there was a perpetual vague sense of danger, a consciousness of some evil thing that was impending. However little you were actually conspiring, the atmosphere forced you to feel like a conspirator. You seemed to spend all your time holding whispered conversations in corners of cafes and wondering whether that person at the next table was a police spy.

Sinister rumours of all kinds were flying round, thanks to the Press censorship. One was that the Negrin-Prieto Government was planning to compromise the war. At the time I was inclined to believe this, for the Fascists were closing in on Bilbao and the Government was visibly doing nothing to save it. Basque flags were displayed all over the town, girls rattled collecting-boxes in the cafes, and there were the usual broadcasts about 'heroic defenders', but the Basques were getting no real assistance. It was tempting to believe that the Government was playing a double game. Later events have proved, that I was quite wrong here, but it seems probable that Bilbao could have been saved if a little more energy had been shown. An offensive on the Aragon front, even an unsuccessful one, would have forced Franco to divert part of his army; as it was the Government did not begin any offensive action till it was far too late — indeed, till about the time when Bilbao fell. The C.N.T. was distributing in huge numbers a leaflet saying: 'Be on your guard!' and hinting that 'a certain Party' (meaning the Communists) was plotting a coup d'etat. There was also a widespread fear that Catalonia was going to be invaded. Earlier, when we went back to

the front, I had seen the powerful defences that were being constructed scores of miles behind the front line, and fresh bomb-proof shelters were being dug all over Barcelona. There were frequent scares of air-raids and sea-raids; more often than not these were false alarms, but every time the sirens blew the lights all over the town blacked out for hours on end and timid people dived for the cellars. Police spies were everywhere. The jails were still crammed with prisoners left over from the May fighting, and others — always, of course. Anarchist and P.O.U.M. adherents — were disappearing into jail by ones and twos. So far as one could discover, no one was ever tried or even charged — not even charged with anything so definite as 'Trotskyism'; you were simply flung into jail and kept there, usually incommunicado. Bob Smillie was still in jail in Valencia. We could discover nothing except that neither the I.L.P. representative on the spot nor the lawyer who had been engaged, was permitted to see him. Foreigners from the International Column and other militias were getting into jail in larger and larger numbers. Usually they were arrested as deserters. It was typical of the general situation that nobody now knew for certain whether a militiaman was a volunteer or a regular soldier. A few months earlier anyone enlisting in the militia had been told that he was a volunteer and could, if he wished, get his discharge papers at any time when he was due for leave. Now it appeared that the Government had changed its mind, a militiaman was a regular soldier and counted as a deserter if he tried to go home. But even about this no one seemed certain. At some parts of the front the authorities were still issuing discharges. At the frontier these were sometimes recognized, sometimes not; if not, you were promptly thrown into jail. Later the number of foreign 'deserters' in jail swelled into hundreds, but most of them were repatriated when a fuss was made in their own countries.

Bands of armed Assault Guards roamed everywhere in the streets, the Civil Guards were still holding cafes and other buildings in strategic spots, and many of the P.S.U.C. buildings were still sandbagged and barricaded. At various points in the town there were posts manned by Civil Guards of Carabineros who stopped passers-by and demanded their papers. Everyone warned me not to show my P.O.U.M. militiaman's card but merely to show my passport and my

hospital ticket. Even to be known to have served in the P.O.U.M. militia was vaguely dangerous. P.O.U.M. militiamen who were wounded or on leave were penalized in petty ways — it was made difficult for them to draw their pay, for instance. La Batalla was still appearing, but it was censored almost out of existence, and Solidaridad and the other Anarchist papers were also heavily censored. There was a new rule that censored portions of a newspaper must not be left blank but filled up with other matter; as a result it was often impossible to tell when something had been cut out.

The food shortage, which had fluctuated throughout the War, was in one of its bad stages. Bread was scarce and the cheaper sorts were being adulterated with rice; the bread the soldiers were getting in the barracks was dreadful stuff like putty. Milk and sugar were very scarce and tobacco almost non-existent, except for the expensive smuggled cigarettes. There was an acute shortage of olive oil, which Spaniards use for half a dozen different purposes. The queues of women waiting to buy olive oil were controlled by mounted Civil Guards who sometimes amused themselves by backing their horses into the queue and trying to make them tread on the women's toes. A minor annoyance of the time was the lack of small change. The silver had been withdrawn and as yet no new coinage had been issued, so that there was nothing between the ten-centime piece and the note for two and a half pesetas, and all notes below ten pesetas were very scarce. For the poorest people this meant an aggravation of the food shortage. A woman with only a ten-peseta note in her possession might wait for hours in a queue outside the grocery and then be unable to buy anything after all because the grocer had no change and she could not afford to spend the whole note.

13 The purchasing value of the peseta was about fourpence.

It is not easy to convey the nightmare atmosphere of that time — the peculiar uneasiness produced by rumours that were always changing, by censored newspapers, and the constant presence of armed men. It is not easy to convey it because, at the moment, the thing essential to such an atmosphere does not exist in England. In England political intolerance is not yet taken for granted. There is political persecution in a petty way; if I were a coal-miner I would

not care to be known to the boss as a Communist; but the 'good party man', the gangster-gramophone of continental politics, is still a rarity, and the notion of 'liquidating' or 'eliminating' everyone who happens to disagree with you does not yet seem natural. It seemed only too natural in Barcelona. The 'Stalinists' were in the saddle, and therefore it was a matter of course that every 'Trotskyist' was in danger. The thing everyone feared was a thing which, after all, did not happen — a fresh outbreak of street-fighting, which, as before, would be blamed on the P.O.U.M. and the Anarchists. There were times when I caught my ears listening for the first shots. It was as though some huge evil intelligence were brooding over the town. Everyone noticed it and remarked upon it. And it was queer how everyone expressed it in almost the same words: 'The atmosphere of this place — it's horrible. Like being in a lunatic asylum.' But perhaps I ought not to say everyone. Some of the English visitors who flitted briefly through Spain, from hotel to hotel, seem not to have noticed that there was anything wrong with the general atmosphere. The Duchess of Atholl writes, I notice (Sunday Express, 17 October 1937):

I was in Valencia, Madrid, and Barcelona . . . perfect order prevailed in all three towns without any display of force. All the hotels in which I stayed were not only 'normal' and 'decent', but extremely comfortable, in spite of the shortage of butter and coffee.

It is a peculiarity of English travellers that they do not really believe in the existence of anything outside the smart hotels. I hope they found some butter for the Duchess of Atholl.

I was at the Sanatorium Maurin, one of the sanatoria run by the P.O.U.M. It was in the suburbs near Tibidabo, the queer-shaped mountain that rises abruptly behind Barcelona and is traditionally supposed to have been the hill from which Satan showed Jesus the countries of the earth (hence its name). The house had previously belonged to some wealthy bourgeois and had been seized at the time of the revolution. Most of the men there had either been invalided out of the line or had some wound that had permanently disabled them — amputated limbs, and so forth. There were several other Englishmen there: Williams, with a damaged leg, and Stafford Cottman, a boy of eighteen, who had been sent back from the

trenches with suspected tuberculosis, and Arthur Clinton, whose smashed left arm was still strapped on to one of those huge wire contraptions, nicknamed aeroplanes, which the Spanish hospitals were using. My wife was still staying at the Hotel Continental, and I generally came into Barcelona in the daytime. In the morning I used to attend the General Hospital for electrical treatment of my arm. It was a queer business — a series of prickly electric shocks that made the various sets of muscles jerk up and down — but it seemed to do some good; the use of my fingers came back and the pain grew somewhat less. Both of us had decided that the best thing we could do was to go back to England as soon as possible. I was extremely weak, my voice was gone, seemingly for good, and the doctors told me that at best it would be several months before I was fit to fight. I had got to start earning some money sooner or later, and there did not seem much sense in staying in Spain and eating food that was needed for other people. But my motives were mainly selfish. I had an overwhelming desire to get away from it all; away from the horrible atmosphere of political suspicion and hatred, from streets thronged by armed men, from air-raids, trenches, machine-guns, screaming trams, milkless tea, oil cookery, and shortage of cigarettes — from almost everything that I had learnt to associate with Spain.

The doctors at the General Hospital had certified me medically unfit, but to get my discharge I had to see a medical board at one of the hospitals near the front and then go to Sietamo to get my papers stamped at the P.O.U.M. militia headquarters. Kopp had just come back from the front, full of jubilation. He had just been in action and said that Huesca was going to be taken at last. The Government had brought troops from the Madrid front and were concentrating thirty thousand men, with aeroplanes in huge numbers. The Italians I had seen going up the line from Tarragona had attacked on the Jaca road but had had heavy casualties and lost two tanks. However, the town was bound to fall, Kopp said. (Alas! It didn't. The attack was a frightful mess — up and led to nothing except an orgy of lying in the newspapers.) Meanwhile Kopp had to go down to Valencia for an interview at the Ministry of War. He had a letter from General Pozas, now commanding the Army of the East — the usual letter, describing Kopp as a 'person of all confidence' and recommending him for a

special appointment in the engineering section (Kopp had been an engineer in civil life). He left for Valencia the same day as I left for Sietamo — 15 June.

It was five days before I got back to Barcelona. A lorry-load of us reached Sietamo about midnight, and as soon as we got to the P.O.U.M. headquarters they lined us up and began handling out rifles and cartridges, before even taking our names. It seemed that the attack was beginning and they were likely to call for reserves at any moment. I had my hospital ticket in my pocket, but I could not very well refuse to go with the others. I kipped down on the ground, with a cartridge-box for a pillow, in a mood of deep dismay. Being wounded had spoiled my nerve for the time being — I believe this usually happens — and the prospect of being under fire frightened me horribly. However, there was a bit of manana, as usual, we were not called out after all, and next morning I produced my hospital ticket and went in search of my discharge. It meant a series of confused, tiresome journeys. As usual they bandied one to and fro from hospital to hospital — Sietamo, Barbastro, Monzon, then back to Sietamo to get my discharge stamped, then down the line again via Barbastro and Lerida — and the convergence of troops on Huesca had monopolized all the transport and disorganized everything. I remember sleeping in queer places — once in a hospital bed, but once in a ditch, once on a very narrow bench which I fell off in the middle of the night, and once in a sort of municipal lodging-house in Barbastro. As soon as you got away from the railroad there was no way of travelling except by jumping chance lorries. You had to wait by the roadside for hours, sometimes three or four hours at a stretch, with knots of disconsolate peasants who carried bundles full of ducks and rabbits, waving to lorry after lorry. When finally you struck a lorry that was not chock full of men, loaves of bread, or ammunition-boxes the bumping over the vile roads wallowed you to pulp. No horse has ever thrown me so high as those lorries used to throw me. The only way of travelling was to crowd all together and cling to one another. To my humiliation I found that I was still too weak to climb on to a lorry without being helped.

I slept a night at Monzon Hospital, where I went to see my medical board. In the next bed to me there was an Assault Guard,

wounded over the left eye. He was friendly and gave me cigarettes. I said: 'In Barcelona we should have been shooting one another,' and we laughed over this. It was queer how the general spirit seemed to change when you got anywhere near the front line. All or nearly all of the vicious hatred of the political parties evaporated. During all the time I was at the front I never once remember any P.S.U.C. adherent showing me hostility because I was P.O.U.M. That kind of thing belonged in Barcelona or in places even remoter from the war. There were a lot of Assault Guards in Sietamo. They had been sent on from Barcelona to take part in the attack on Huesca. The Assault Guards were a corps not intended primarily for the front, and many of them had not been under fire before. Down in Barcelona they were lords of the street, but up here they were quintos (rookies) and palled up with militia children of fifteen who had been in the line for months.

At Monzon Hospital the doctor did the usual tongue-pulling and mirror — thrusting business, assured me in the same cheerful manner as the others that I should never have a voice again, and signed my certificate. While I waited to be examined there was going on inside the surgery some dreadful operation without anaesthetics — why without anaesthetics I do not know. It went on and on, scream after scream, and when I went in there were chairs flung about and on the floor were pools of blood and urine.

The details of that final journey stand out in my mind with strange clarity. I was in a different mood, a more observing mood, than I had been in for months past. I had got my discharge, stamped with the seal of the 29th Division, and the doctor's certificate in which I was 'declared useless'. I was free to go back to England; consequently I felt able, almost for the first time, to look at Spain. I had a day to put in to Barbastro, for there was only one train a day. Previously I had seen Barbastro in brief glimpses, and it had seemed to me simply a part of the war — a grey, muddy, cold place, full of roaring lorries and shabby troops. It seemed queerly different now. Wandering through it I became aware of pleasant tortuous streets, old stone bridges, wine shops with great oozy barrels as tall as a man, and intriguing semi-subterranean shops where men were making cartwheels, daggers, wooden spoons, and goatskin water-bottles. I

watched a man making a skin bottle and discovered with great interest, what I had never known before, that they are made with the fur inside and the fur is not removed, so that you are really drinking distilled goat's hair. I had drunk out of them for months without knowing this. And at the back of the town there was a shallow jade-green river, and rising out of it a perpendicular cliff of rock, with houses built into the rock, so that from your bedroom window you could spit straight into the water a hundred feet below. Innumerable doves lived in the holes in the cliff. And in Lerida there were old crumbling buildings upon whose cornices thousands upon thousands of swallows had built their nests, so that at a little distance the crusted pattern of nests was like some florid moulding of the rococo period. It was queer how for nearly six months past I had had no eyes for such things. With my discharge papers in my pocket I felt like a human being again, and also a little like a tourist. For almost the first time I felt that I was really in Spain, in a country that I had longed all my life to visit. In the quiet back streets of Lerida and Barbastro I seemed to catch a momentary glimpse, a sort of far-off rumour of the Spain that dwells in everyone's imagination. White sierras, goatherds, dungeons of the Inquisition, Moorish palaces, black winding trains of mules, grey olive trees and groves of lemons, girls in black mantillas, the wines of Malaga and Alicante, cathedrals, cardinals, bull-fights, gypsies, serenades — in short, Spain. Of all Europe it was the country that had had most hold upon my imagination. It seemed a pity that when at last I had managed to come here I had seen only this north-eastern corner, in the middle of a confused war and for the most part in winter.

It was late when I got back to Barcelona, and there were no taxis. It was no use trying to get to the Sanatorium Maurin, which was right outside the town, so I made for the Hotel Continental, stopping for dinner on the way. I remember the conversation I had with a very fatherly waiter about the oak jugs, bound with copper, in which they served the wine. I said I would like to buy a set of them to take back to England. The waiter was sympathetic. 'Yes, beautiful, were they not? But impossible to buy nowadays. Nobody was manufacturing them any longer — nobody was manufacturing anything. This war — such a pity!' We agreed that the war was a pity. Once again I felt

like a tourist. The waiter asked me gently, had I liked Spain; would I come back to Spain? Oh, yes, I should come back to Spain. The peaceful quality of this conversation sticks in my memory, because of what happened immediately afterwards.

When I got to the hotel my wife was sitting in the lounge. She got up and came towards me in what struck me as a very unconcerned manner; then she put an arm round my neck and, with a sweet smile for the benefit of the other people in the lounge, hissed in my ear:

'Get out!'

'What?'

'Get out of here at once!'

'What?'

'Don't keep standing here! You must get outside quickly!'

'What? Why? What do you mean?'

She had me by the arm and was already leading me towards the stairs. Half-way down we met a Frenchman — I am not going to give his name, for though he had no connexion with the P.O.U.M. he was a good friend to us all during the trouble. He looked at me with a concerned face.

'Listen! You mustn't come in here. Get out quickly and hide yourself before they ring up the police.'

And behold! at the bottom of the stairs one of the hotel staff, who was a P.O.U.M. member (unknown to the management, I fancy), slipped furtively out of the lift and told me in broken English to get out. Even now I did not grasp what had happened.

'What the devil is all this about?' I said, as soon as we were on the pavement.

'Haven't you heard?'

'No. Heard what? I've heard nothing.'

'The P.O.U.M.'S been suppressed. They've seized all the buildings. Practically everyone's in prison. And they say they're shooting people already.'

So that was it. We had to have somewhere to talk. All the big cafes on the Ramblas were thronged with police, but we found a quiet cafe in a side street. My wife explained to me what had happened while I was away.

On 15 June the police had suddenly arrested Andres Nin in his

office, and the same evening had raided the Hotel Falcon and arrested all the people in it, mostly militiamen on leave. The place was converted immediately into a prison, and in a very little while it was filled to the brim with prisoners of all kinds. Next day the P.O.U.M. was declared an illegal organization and all its offices, book-stalls, sanatoria, Red Aid centres, and so forth were seized. Meanwhile the police were arresting everyone they could lay hands on who was known to have any connexion with the P.O.U.M. Within a day or two all or almost all of the forty members of the Executive Committee were in prison. Possibly one or two had escaped into hiding, but the police were adopting the trick (extensively used on both sides in this war) of seizing a man's wife as a hostage if he disappeared. There was no way of discovering how many people had been arrested. My wife had heard that it was about four hundred in Barcelona alone. I have since thought that even at that time the numbers must have been greater. And the most fantastic people had been arrested. In some cases the police had even gone to the length of dragging wounded militiamen out of the hospitals.

It was all profoundly dismaying. What the devil was it all about? I could understand their suppressing the P.O.U.M., but what were they arresting people for? For nothing, so far as one could discover. Apparently the suppression of the P.O.U.M. had a retrospective effect; the P.O.U.M. was now illegal, and therefore one was breaking the law by having previously belonged to it. As usual, none of the arrested people had been charged. Meanwhile, however, the Valencia Communist papers were naming with the story of a huge 'Fascist plot', radio communication with the enemy, documents signed in invisible ink, etc., etc. I have dealt with this story earlier. The significant thing was that it was appearing only in the Valencia papers; I think I am right in saying that there was not a single word about it, or about the suppression of the P.O.U.M., in any Barcelona papers, Communist, Anarchist, or Republican. We first learned the precise nature of the charges against the P.O.U.M. leaders not from any Spanish paper but from the English papers that reached Barcelona a day or two later. What we could not know at this time was that the Government was not responsible for the charge of treachery and espionage, and that members of the Government were

later to repudiate it. We only vaguely knew that the P.O.U.M. leaders, and presumably all the rest of us, were accused of being in Fascist pay. And already the rumours were flying round that people were being secretly shot in jail. There was a lot of exaggeration about this, but it certainly happened in some cases, and there is not much doubt that it happened in the case of Nin. After his arrest Nin was transferred to Valencia and thence to Madrid, and as early as 21 June the rumour reached Barcelona that he had been shot. Later the rumour took a more definite shape: Nin had been shot in prison by the secret police and his body dumped into the street. This story came from several sources, including Federico Montsenys, an ex-member of the Government. From that day to this Nin has never been heard of alive again. When, later, the Government were questioned by delegates from various countries, they shilly-shallied and would say only that Nin had disappeared and they knew nothing of his whereabouts. Some of the newspapers produced a tale that he had escaped to Fascist territory. No evidence was given in support of it, and Irujo, the Minister of Justice, later declared that the Espagne news-agency had falsified his official communique. In any case it is most unlikely that a political prisoner of Nin's importance would be allowed to escape. Unless at some future time he is produced alive, I think we must take it that he was murdered in prison.

14 See the reports of the Maxton delegation which I referred to in Chapter II.

The tale of arrests went on and on, extending over months, until the number of political prisoners, not counting Fascists, swelled into thousands. One noticeable thing was the autonomy of the lower ranks of the police. Many of the arrests were admittedly illegal, and various people whose release had been ordered by the Chief of Police were re — arrested at the jail gate and carried off to 'secret prisons'. A typical case is that of Kurt Landau and his wife. They were arrested about 17 June, and Landau immediately 'disappeared'. Five months later his wife was still in jail, untried and without news of her husband. She declared a hunger-strike, after which the Minister of Justice, sent word to assure her that her husband was dead. Shortly afterwards she was released, to be almost immediately re-arrested and flung into prison again. And it was noticeable that the police, at

any rate at first, seemed completely indifferent as to any effect their actions might have upon the war. They were quite ready to arrest military officers in important posts without getting permission beforehand. About the end of June Jose Rovira, the general commanding the 29th Division, was arrested somewhere near the front line by a party of police who had been sent from Barcelona. His men sent a delegation to protest at the Ministry of War. It was found that neither the Ministry of War, nor Ortega, the chief of Police, had even been informed of Rovira's arrest. In the whole business the detail that most sticks in my throat, though perhaps it is not of great importance, is that all news of what was happening was kept from the troops at the front. As you will have seen, neither I nor anyone else at the front had heard anything about the suppression of the P.O.U.M. All the P.O.U.M. militia headquarters, Red Aid centres, and so forth were functioning as usual, and as late as 20 June and as far down the line as Lerida, only about 100 miles from Barcelona, no one had heard what was happening. All word of it was kept out of the Barcelona papers (the Valencia papers, which were running the spy stories, did not reach the Aragon front), and no doubt one reason for arresting all the P.O.U.M. militiamen on leave in Barcelona was to prevent them from getting back to the front with the news. The draft with which I had gone up the line on 15 June must have been about the last to go. I am still puzzled to know how the thing was kept secret, for the supply lorries and so forth were still passing to and fro; but there is no doubt that it was kept secret, and, as I have since learned from a number of others, the men in the front line heard nothing till several days later. The motive for all this is clear enough. The attack on Huesca was beginning, the P.O.U.M. militia was still a separate unit, and it was probably feared that if the men knew what was happening they would refuse to fight. Actually nothing of the kind happened when the news arrived. In the intervening days there must have been numbers of men who were killed without ever learning that the newspapers in the rear were calling them Fascists. This kind of thing is a little difficult to forgive. I know it was the usual policy to keep bad news from the troops, and perhaps as a rule that is justified. But it is a different matter to send men into battle and not even tell them that behind their backs their party is being

suppressed, their leaders accused of treachery, and their friends and relatives thrown into prison.

My wife began telling me what had happened to our various friends. Some of the English and other foreigners had got across the frontier. Williams and Stafford Cottman had not been arrested when the Sanatorium Maurin was raided, and were in hiding somewhere. So was John Mc-Nair, who had been in France and had re-entered Spain after the P.O.U.M. was declared illegal — a rash thing to do, but he had not cared to stay in safety while his comrades were in danger. For the rest it was simply a chronicle of 'They've got so and so' and 'They've got so and so'. They seemed to have 'got' nearly everyone. It took me aback to hear that they had also 'got' George Kopp.

'What! Kopp? I thought he was in Valencia.'

It appeared that Kopp had come back to Barcelona; he had a letter from the Ministry of War to the colonel commanding the engineering operations on the eastern front. He knew that the P.O.U.M. had been suppressed, of course, but probably it did not occur to him that the police could be such fools as to arrest him when he was on his way to the front on an urgent military mission. He had come round to the Hotel Continental to fetch his kit-bags; my wife had been out at the time, and the hotel people had managed to detain him with some lying story while they rang up the police. I admit I was angry when I heard of Kopp's arrest. He was my personal friend, I had served under him for months, I had been under fire with him, and I knew his history. He was a man who had sacrificed everything — family, nationality, livelihood — simply to come to Spain and fight against Fascism. By leaving Belgium without permission and joining a foreign army while he was on the Belgian Army reserve, and, earlier, by helping to manufacture munitions illegally for the Spanish Government, he had piled up years of imprisonment for himself if he should ever return to his own country. He had been in the line since October 1936, had worked his way up from militiaman to major, had been in action I do not know how many times, and had been wounded once. During the May trouble, as I had seen for myself, he had prevented fighting locally and probably saved ten or twenty lives. And all they could do in return was to fling him into jail. It is

waste of time to be angry, but the stupid malignity of this kind of thing does try one's patience.

Meanwhile they had not 'got' my wife. Although she had remained at the Continental the police had made no move to arrest her. It was fairly obvious that she was being used as a decoy duck. A couple of nights earlier, however, in the small hours of the morning, six of the plain — clothes police had invaded our room at the hotel and searched it. They had seized every scrap of paper we possessed, except, fortunately, our passports and cheque-book. They had taken my diaries, all our books, all the press-cuttings that had been piling up for months past (I have often wondered what use those press-cuttings were to them), all my war souvenirs, and all our letters. (Incidentally, they took away a number of letters I had received from readers. Some of them had not been answered, and of course I have not the addresses. If anyone who wrote to me about my last book, and did not get an answer, happens to read these lines, will he please accept this as an apology?) I learned afterwards that the police had also seized various belongings that I had left at the Sanatorium Maunn. They even carried off a bundle of my dirty linen. Perhaps they thought it had messages written on it in invisible ink.

It was obvious that it would be safer for my wife to stay at the hotel, at any rate for the time being. If she tried to disappear they would be after her immediately. As for myself, I should have to go straight into hiding. The prospect revolted me. In spite of the innumerable arrests it was almost impossible for me to believe that I was in any danger. The whole thing seemed too meaningless. It was the same refusal to take this idiotic onslaught seriously that had led Kopp into jail. I kept saying, but why should anyone want to arrest me? What had I done? I was not even a party member of the P.O.U.M. Certainly I had carried arms during the May fighting, but so had (at a guess) forty or fifty thousand people. Besides, I was badly in need of a proper night's sleep. I wanted to risk it and go back to the hotel. My wife would not hear of it. Patiently she explained the state of affairs. It did not matter what I had done or not done. This was not a round-up of criminals; it was merely a reign of terror. I was not guilty of any definite act, but I was guilty of 'Trotskyism'. The fact that I had served in the P.O.U.M. militia was

quite enough to get me into prison. It was no use hanging on to the English notion that you are safe so long as you keep the law. Practically the law was what the police chose to make it. The only thing to do was to lie low and conceal the fact that I had anything to do with the P.O.U.M. We went through the papers in my pockets. My wife made me tear up my militiaman's card, which had P.O.U.M. on it in big letters, also a photo of a group of militiamen with a P.O.U.M. flag in the background; that was the kind of thing that got you arrested nowadays. I had to keep my discharge papers, however. Even these were a danger, for they bore the seal of the 29th Division, and the police would probably know that the 29th Division was the P.O.U.M.; but without them I could be arrested as a deserter.

The thing we had got to think of now was getting out of Spain. There was no sense in staying here with the certainty of imprisonment sooner or later. As a matter of fact both of us would greatly have liked to stay, just to see what happened. But I foresaw that Spanish prisons would be lousy places (actually they were a lot worse than I imagined), once in prison you never knew when you would get out, and I was in wretched health, apart from the pain in my arm. We arranged to meet next day at the British Consulate, where Cottman and McNair were also coming. It would probably take a couple of days to get our passports in order. Before leaving Spain you had to have your passport stamped in three separate places — by the Chief of Police, by the French Consul, and by the Catalan immigration authorities. The Chief of Police was the danger, of course. But perhaps the British Consul could fix things up without letting it be known that we had anything to do with the P.O.U.M. Obviously there must be a list of foreign 'Trotskyist' suspects, and very likely our names were on it, but with luck we might get to the frontier before the list. There was sure to be a lot of muddle and manana. Fortunately this was Spain and not Germany. The Spanish secret police had some of the spirit of the Gestapo, but not much of its Competence.

So we parted. My wife went back to the hotel and I wandered off into the darkness to find somewhere to sleep. I remember feeling sulky and bored. I had so wanted a night in bed! There was nowhere I could go, no house where I could take refuge. The P.O.U.M. had

practically no underground organization. No doubt the leaders had always realized that the party was likely to be suppressed, but they had never expected a wholesale witch-hunt of this description. They had expected it so little, indeed, that they were actually continuing the alterations to the P.O.U.M. buildings (among other things they were constructing a cinema in the Executive Building, which had previously been a bank) up to the very day when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed. Consequently the rendezvous and hiding-places which every revolutionary party ought to possess as a matter of course did not exist. Goodness knows how many people — people whose homes had been raided by the police — were sleeping in the streets that night. I had had five days of tiresome journeys, sleeping in impossible places, my arm was hurting damnably, and now these fools were chasing me to and fro and I had got to sleep on the ground again. That was about as far as my thoughts went. I did not make any of the correct political reflections. I never do when things are happening. It seems to be always the case when I get mixed up in war or politics — I am conscious of nothing save physical discomfort and a deep desire for this damned nonsense to be over. Afterwards I can see the significance of events, but while they are happening I merely want to be out of them — an ignoble trait, perhaps.

I walked a long way and fetched up somewhere near the General Hospital. I wanted a place where I could lie down without some nosing policeman finding me and demanding my papers. I tried an air-raid shelter, but it was newly dug and dripping with damp. Then I came upon the ruins of a church that had been gutted and burnt in the revolution. It was a mere shell, four roofless walls surrounding piles of rubble. In the half-darkness I poked about and found a kind of hollow where I could lie down. Lumps of broken masonry are not good to lie on, but fortunately it was a warm night and I managed to get several hours' sleep.

Chapter 14

THE worst of being wanted by the police in a town like Barcelona is that everything opens so late. When you sleep out of doors you always wake about dawn, and none of the Barcelona cafes opens much before nine. It was hours before I could get a cup of coffee or a shave. It seemed queer, in the barber's shop, to see the Anarchist notice still on the wall, explaining that tips were prohibited. 'The Revolution has struck off our chains,' the notice said. I felt like telling the barbers that their chains would soon be back again if they didn't look out.

I wandered back to the centre of the town. Over the P.O.U.M. buildings the red flags had been torn down, Republican flags were floating in their place, and knots of armed Civil Guards were lounging in the doorways. At the Red Aid centre on the corner of the Plaza de Gataluna the police had amused themselves by smashing most of the windows. The P.O.U.M. book-stalls had been emptied of books and the notice-board farther down the Ramblas had been plastered with an anti-P.O.U.M. cartoon — the one representing the mask and the Fascist face beneath. Down at the bottom of the Ramblas, near the quay, I came upon a queer sight; a row of militiamen, still ragged and muddy from the front, sprawling exhaustedly on the chairs placed there for the bootblacks. I knew who they were — indeed, I recognized one of them. They were P.O.U.M. militiamen who had come down the line on the previous day to find that the P.O.U.M. had been suppressed, and had had to spend the night in the streets because their homes had been raided. Any P.O.U.M. militiaman who returned to Barcelona at this time had the choice of going straight into hiding or into jail — not a pleasant reception after three or four months in the line.

It was a queer situation that we were in. At night one was a hunted fugitive, but in the daytime one could live an almost normal life. Every house known to harbour P.O.U.M. supporters was — or at any rate was likely to be — under observation, and it was impossible to go to a hotel or boarding-house, because it had been decreed that on the arrival of a stranger the hotel-keeper must inform the police

immediately. Practically this meant spending the night out of doors. In the daytime, on the other hand, in a town the size of Barcelona, you were fairly safe. The streets were thronged by Civil Guards, Assault Guards, Carabineros, and ordinary police, besides God knows how many spies in plain clothes; still, they could not stop everyone who passed, and if you looked normal you might escape notice. The thing to do was to avoid hanging round P.O.U.M. buildings and going to cafes and restaurants where the waiters knew you by sight. I spent a long time that day, and the next, in having a bath at one of the public baths. This struck me as a good way of putting in the time and keeping out of sight. Unfortunately the same idea occurred to a lot of people, and a few days later — after I left Barcelona — the police raided one of the public baths and arrested a number of 'Trotskyists' in a state of nature.

Half-way up the Ramblas I ran into one of the wounded men from the Sanatorium Maurin. We exchanged the sort of invisible wink that people were exchanging at that time, and managed in an unobtrusive way to meet in a cafe farther up the street. He had escaped arrest when the Maurin was raided, but, like the others, had been driven into the street. He was in shirt-sleeves — had had to flee without his jacket — and had no money. He described to me how one of the Civil Guards had torn the large coloured portrait of Maurin from the wall and kicked it to pieces. Maurin (one of the founders of the P.O.U.M.) was a prisoner in the hands of the Fascists and at that time was believed to have been shot by them.

I met my wife at the British Consulate at ten o'clock. McNair and Cottman turned up shortly afterwards. The first thing they told me was that Bob Smillie was dead. He had died in prison at Valencia — of what, nobody knew for certain. He had been buried immediately, and the I.L.P. representative on the spot, David Murray, had been refused permission to see his body.

Of course I assumed at once that Smillie had been shot. It was what everyone believed at the time, but I have since thought that I may have been wrong. Later the cause of his death was given out as appendicitis, and we heard afterwards from another prisoner who had been released that Smillie had certainly been ill in prison. So perhaps the appendicitis story was true. The refusal to let Murray see his

body may have been due to pure spite. I must say this, however. Bob Smillie was only twenty-two years old and physically he was one of the toughest people I have met. He was, I think, the only person I knew, English or Spanish, who went three months in the trenches without a day's illness. People so tough as that do not usually die of appendicitis if they are properly looked after. But when you saw what the Spanish jails were like — the makeshift jails used for political prisoners — you realized how much chance there was of a sick man getting proper attention. The jails were places that could only be described as dungeons. In England you would have to go back to the eighteenth century to find anything comparable. People were penned together in small rooms where there was barely space for them to lie down, and often they were kept in cellars and other dark places. This was not as a temporary measure — there were cases of people being kept four and five months almost without sight of daylight. And they were fed on a filthy and insufficient diet of two plates of soup and two pieces of bread a day. (Some months later, however, the food seems to have improved a little.) I am not exaggerating; ask any political suspect who was imprisoned in Spain. I have had accounts of the Spanish jails from a number of separate sources, and they agree with one another too well to be disbelieved; besides, I had a few glimpses into one Spanish jail myself. Another English friend who was imprisoned later writes that his experiences in jail 'make Smillie's case easier to understand'. Smillie's death is not a thing I can easily forgive. Here was this brave and gifted boy, who had thrown up his career at Glasgow University in order to come and fight against Fascism, and who, as I saw for myself, had done his job at the front with faultless courage and willingness; and all they could find to do with him was to fling him into jail and let him die like a neglected animal. I know that in the middle of a huge and bloody war it is no use making too much fuss over an individual death. One aeroplane bomb in a crowded street causes more suffering than quite a lot of political persecution. But what angers one about a death like this is its utter pointlessness. To be killed in battle — yes, that is what one expects; but to be flung into jail, not even for any imaginary offence, but simply owing to dull blind spite, and then left to die in solitude — that is a different matter. I fail to see how this

kind of thing — and it is not as though Smillie's case were exceptional — brought victory any nearer.

My wife and I visited Kopp that afternoon. You were allowed to visit prisoners who were not incommunicado, though it was not safe to do so more than once or twice. The police watched the people who came and went, and if you visited the jails too often you stamped yourself as a friend of 'Trotskyists' and probably ended in jail yourself. This had already happened to a number of people.

Kopp was not incommunicado and we got a permit to see him without difficulty. As they led us through the steel doors into the jail, a Spanish militiaman whom I had known at the front was being led out between two Civil Guards. His eye met mine; again the ghostly wink. And the first person we saw inside was an American militiaman who had left for home a few days earlier; his papers were in good order, but they had arrested him at the frontier all the same, probably because he was still wearing corduroy breeches and was therefore identifiable as a militiaman. We walked past one another as though we had been total strangers. That was dreadful. I had known him. for months, had shared a dug-out with him, he had helped to carry me down the line when I was wounded; but it was the only thing one could do. The blue — clad guards were snooping everywhere. It would be fatal to recognize too many people.

The so-called jail was really the ground floor of a shop. Into two rooms each measuring about twenty feet square, close on a hundred people were penned. The place had the real eighteenth-century Newgate Calendar appearance, with its frowsy dirt, its huddle of human bodies, its lack of furniture — just the bare stone floor, one bench, and a few ragged blankets — and its murky light, for the corrugated steel shutters had been drawn over the windows. On the grimy walls revolutionary slogans— 'Visca P.O.U.M.!' 'Viva la Revolucion!' and so forth — had been scrawled. The place had been used as a dump for political prisoners for months past. There was a deafening racket of voices. This was the visiting hour, and the place was so packed with people that it was difficult to move. Nearly all of them were of the poorest of the working-class population. You saw women undoing pitiful packets of food which they had brought for their imprisoned men-folk. There were several of the wounded men

from the Sanatorium Maurin among the prisoners. Two of them had amputated legs; one of them had been brought to prison without his crutch and was hopping about on one foot. There was also a boy of not more than twelve; they were even arresting children, apparently. The place had the beastly stench that you always get when crowds of people are penned together without proper sanitary arrangements.

Kopp elbowed his way through the crowd to meet us. His plump fresh — coloured face looked much as usual, and in that filthy place he had kept his uniform neat and had even contrived to shave. There was another officer in the uniform of the Popular Army among the prisoners. He and Kopp saluted as they struggled past one another; the gesture was pathetic, somehow. Kopp seemed in excellent spirits. 'Well, I suppose we shall all be shot,' he said cheerfully. The word 'shot' gave me a sort of inward shudder. A bullet had entered my own body recently and the feeling of it was fresh in my memory; it is not nice to think of that happening to anyone you know well. At that time I took it for granted that all the principal people in the P.O.U.M., and Kopp among them, would be shot. The first rumour of Nin's death had just filtered through, and we knew that the P.O.U.M. were being accused of treachery and espionage. Everything pointed to a huge frame-up trial followed by a massacre of leading 'Trotskyists.' It is a terrible thing to see your friend in jail and to know yourself impotent to help him. For there was nothing that one could do; useless even to appeal to the Belgian authorities, for Kopp had broken the law of his own country by coming here. I had to leave most of the talking to my wife; with my squeaking voice I could not make myself heard in the din. Kopp was telling us about the friends he had made among the other prisoners, about the guards, some of whom were good fellows, but some of whom abused and beat the more timid prisoners, and about the food, which was 'pig-wash'. Fortunately we had thought to bring a packet of food, also cigarettes. Then Kopp began telling us about the papers that had been taken from him when he was arrested. Among them was his letter from the Ministry of War, addressed to the colonel commanding engineering operations in the Army of the East. The police had seized it and refused to give it back; it was said to be lying in the Chief of Police's office. It might make a very great difference if it were recovered.

I saw instantly how important this might be. An official letter of that kind, bearing the recommendation of the Ministry of War and of General Pozas, would establish Kopp's bona fides. But the trouble was to prove that the letter existed; if it were opened in the Chief of Police's office one could be sure that some nark or other would destroy it. There was only one person who might possibly be able to get it back, and that was the officer to whom it was addressed. Kopp had already thought of this, and he had written a letter which he wanted me to smuggle out of the jail and post. But it was obviously quicker and surer to go in person. I left my wife with Kopp, rushed out, and, after a long search, found a taxi. I knew that time was everything. It was now about half past five, the colonel would probably leave his office at six, and by tomorrow the letter might be God knew where — destroyed, perhaps, or lost somewhere in the chaos of documents that was presumably piling up as suspect after suspect was arrested. The colonel's office was at the War Department down by the quay. As I hurried up the steps the Assault Guard on duty at the door barred the way with his long bayonet and demanded 'papers'. I waved my discharge ticket at him; evidently he could not read, and he let me pass, impressed by the vague mystery of' papers'. Inside, the place was a huge complicated warren running round a central courtyard, with hundreds of offices on each floor; and, as this was Spain, nobody had the vaguest idea where the office I was looking for was. I kept repeating: 'El coronet — , jefe de ingenieros, Ejercito de Este!' People smiled and shrugged their shoulders gracefully. Everyone who had an opinion sent me in a different direction; up these stairs, down those, along interminable passages which turned out to be blind alleys. And time was slipping away. I had the strangest sensation of being in a nightmare: the rushing up and down flights of stairs, the mysterious people coming and going, the glimpses through open doors of chaotic offices with papers strewn everywhere and typewriters clicking; and time slipping away and a life perhaps in the balance.

However, I got there in time, and slightly to my surprise I was granted a hearing. I did not see Colonel — , but his aide-de-camp or secretary, a little slip of an officer in smart uniform, with large and squinting eyes, came out to interview me in the ante-room. I began to

pour forth my story. I had come on behalf of my superior officer. Major Jorge Kopp, who was on an urgent mission to the front and had been arrested by mistake. The letter to Colonel — was of a confidential nature and should be recovered without delay. I had served with Kopp for months, he was an officer of the highest character, obviously his arrest was a mistake, the police had confused him with someone else, etc., etc., etc. I kept piling it on about the urgency of Kopp's mission to the front, knowing that this was the strongest point. But it must have sounded a strange tale, in my villainous Spanish which elapsed into French at every crisis. The worst was that my voice gave out almost at once and it was only by violent straining that I could produce a sort of croak. I was in dread that it would disappear altogether and the little officer would grow tired of trying to listen to me. I have often wondered what he thought was wrong with my Voice — whether he thought I was drunk or merely suffering from a guilty conscience.

However, he heard me patiently, nodded his head a great number of times, and gave a guarded assent to what I said. Yes, it sounded as though there might have been a mistake. Clearly the matter should be looked into. Manana — I protested. Not manana! The matter was urgent; Kopp was due at the front already. Again the officer seemed to agree. Then came the question I was dreading:

'This Major Kopp — what force was he serving in?'

The terrible word had to come out: 'In the P.O.U.M. militia.'

'P.O.U.M.!'

I wish I could convey to you the shocked alarm in his voice. You have got to remember how the P.O.U.M. was regarded at that moment. The spy — scare was at its height; probably all good Republicans did believe for a day or two that the P.O.U.M. was a huge spying organization in German pay. To have to say such a thing to an officer in the Popular Army was like going into the Cavalry Club immediately after the Red Letter scare and announcing yourself a Communist. His dark eyes moved obliquely across my face. Another long pause, then he said slowly:

'And you say you were with him at the front. Then you were serving in the P.O.U.M. militia yourself?'

'Yes.'

He turned and dived into the colonel's room. I could hear an agitated conversation. 'It's all up,' I thought. We should never get Kopp's letter back. Moreover I had had to confess that I was in the P.O.U.M. myself, and no doubt they would ring up the police and get me arrested, just to add another Trotskyist to the bag. Presently, however, the officer reappeared, fitting on his cap, and sternly signed to me to follow. We were going to the Chief of Police's office. It was a long way, twenty minutes' walk. The little officer marched stiffly in front with a military step. We did not exchange a single word the whole way. When we got to the Chief of Police's office a crowd of the most dreadful-looking scoundrels, obviously police narks, informers, and spies of every kind, were hanging about outside the door. The little officer went in; there was a long, heated conversation. You could hear voices furiously raised; you pictured violent gestures, shrugging of the shoulders, hangings on the table. Evidently the police were refusing to give the letter up. At last, however, the officer emerged, flushed, but carrying a large official envelope. It was Kopp's letter. We had won a tiny victory — which, as it turned out, made not the slightest difference. The letter was duly delivered, but Kopp's military superiors were quite unable to get him out of jail.

The officer promised me that the letter should be delivered. But what about Kopp? I said. Could we not get him released? He shrugged his shoulders. That was another matter. They did not know what Kopp had been arrested for. He would only tell me that the proper inquiries would be made. There was no more to be said; it was time to part. Both of us bowed slightly. And then there happened a strange and moving thing. The little officer hesitated a moment, then stepped across, and shook hands with me.

I do not know if I can bring home to you how deeply that action touched me. It sounds a small thing, but it was not. You have got to realize what was the feeling of the time — the horrible atmosphere of suspicion and hatred, the lies and rumours circulating everywhere, the posters screaming from the hoardings that I and everyone like me was a Fascist spy. And you have got to remember that we were standing outside the Chief of Police's office, in front of that filthy gang of tale-bearers and agents provocateurs, any one of whom might know that I was 'wanted' by the police. It was like publicly

shaking hands with a German during the Great War. I suppose he had decided in some way that I was not really a Fascist spy; still, it was good of him to shake hands.

I record this, trivial though it may sound, because it is somehow typical of Spain — of the flashes of magnanimity that you get from Spaniards in the worst of circumstances. I have the most evil memories of Spain, but I have very few bad memories of Spaniards. I only twice remember even being seriously angry with a Spaniard, and on each occasion, when I look back, I believe I was in the wrong myself. They have, there is no doubt, a generosity, a species of nobility, that do not really belong to the twentieth century. It is this that makes one hope that in Spain even Fascism may take a comparatively loose and bearable form. Few Spaniards possess the damnable efficiency and consistency that a modern totalitarian state needs. There had been a queer little illustration of this fact a few nights earlier, when the police had searched my wife's room. As a matter of fact that search was a very interesting business, and I wish I had seen it, though perhaps it is as well that I did not, for I might not have kept my temper.

The police conducted the search in the recognized Ogpu or Gestapo style. In the small hours of the morning there was a pounding on the door, and six men marched in, switched on the light, and immediately took up various positions about the room, obviously agreed upon beforehand. They then searched both rooms (there was a bathroom attached) with inconceivable thoroughness. They sounded the walls, took up the mats, examined the floor, felt the curtains, probed under the bath and the radiator, emptied every drawer and suitcase and felt every garment and held it up to the light. They impounded all papers, including the contents of the waste-paper basket, and all our books into the bargain. They were thrown into ecstasies of suspicion by finding that we possessed a French translation of Hitler's Mein Kampf. If that had been the only book they found our doom would have been sealed. It is obvious that a person who reads Mein Kampf must be a Fascist. The next moment, however, they came upon a copy of Stalin's pamphlet. Ways of Liquidating Trotskyists and other Double Dealers, which reassured them somewhat. In one drawer there was a number of packets of

cigarette papers. They picked each packet to pieces and examined each paper separately, in case there should be messages written on them. Altogether they were on the job for nearly two hours. Yet all this time they never searched the bed. My wife was lying in bed all the while; obviously there might have been half a dozen sub — machine-guns under the mattress, not to mention a library ofTrotskyist documents under the pillow. Yet the detectives made no move to touch the bed, never even looked underneath it. I cannot believe that this is a regular feature of the Ogpu routine. One must remember that the police were almost entirely under Communist control, and these men were probably Communist Party members themselves. But they were also Spaniards, and to turn a woman out of bed was a little too much for them. This part of the job was silently dropped, making the whole search meaningless.

That night McNair, Cottman, and I slept in some long grass at the edge of a derelict building-lot. It was a cold night for the time of year and no one slept much. I remember the long dismal hours of loitering about before one could get a cup of coffee. For the first time since I had been in Barcelona I went to have a look at the cathedral — a modern cathedral, and one of the most hideous buildings in the world. It has four crenellated spires exactly the shape of hock bottles. Unlike most of the churches in Barcelona it was not damaged during the revolution — it was spared because of its 'artistic value', people said. I think the Anarchists showed bad taste in not blowing it up when they had the chance, though they did hang a red and black banner between its spires. That afternoon my wife and I went to see Kopp for the last time. There was nothing that we could do for him, absolutely nothing, except to say good-bye and leave money with Spanish friends who would take him food and cigarettes. A little while later, however, after we had left Barcelona, he was placed incommunicado and not even food could be sent to him. That night, walking down the Ramblas, we passed the Cafe Moka, which the Civil Guards were still holding in force. On an impulse I went in and spoke to two of them who were leaning against the counter with their rifles slung over their shoulders. I asked them if they knew which of their comrades had been on duty here at the time of the May fighting. They did not know, and, with the usual Spanish vagueness, did not

know how one could find out. I said that my friend Jorge Kopp was in prison and would perhaps be put on trial for something in connexion with the May fighting; that the men who were on duty here would know that he had stopped the fighting and saved some of their lives; they ought to come forward and give evidence to that effect. One of the men I was talking to was a dull, heavy-looking man who kept shaking his head because he could not hear my voice in the din of the traffic. But the other was different. He said he had heard of Kopp's action from some of his comrades; Kopp was buen chico (a good fellow). But even at the time I knew that it was all useless. If Kopp were ever tried, it would be, as in all such trials, with faked evidence. If he has been shot (and I am afraid it is quite likely), that will be his epitaph: the buen chico of the poor Civil Guard who was part of a dirty system but had remained enough of a human being to know a decent action when he saw one.

It was an extraordinary, insane existence that we were leading. By night we were criminals, but by day we were prosperous English visitors — that was our pose, anyway. Even after a night in the open, a shave, a bath, and a shoe-shine do wonders with your appearance. The safest thing at present was to look as bourgeois as possible. We frequented the fashionable residential quarter of the town, where our faces were not known, went to expensive restaurants, and were very English with the waiters. For the first time in my life I took to writing things on walls. The passage-ways of several smart restaurants had 'Visca P.O.U.M.!' scrawled on them as large as I could write it. All the while, though I was technically in hiding, I could not feel myself in danger. The whole thing seemed too absurd. I had the ineradicable English belief that' they' cannot arrest you unless you have broken the law. It is a most dangerous belief to have during a political pogrom. There was a warrant out for McNair's arrest, and the chances were that the rest of us were on the list as well. The arrests, raids, searchings were continuing without pause; practically everyone we knew, except those who were still at the front, was in jail by this time. The police were even boarding the French ships that periodically took off refugees and seizing suspected 'Trotskyists'.

Thanks to the kindness of the British consul, who must have had a very trying time during that week, we had managed to get our

passports into order. The sooner we left the better. There was a train that was due to leave for Port Bou at half past seven in the evening and might normally be expected to leave at about half past eight. We arranged that my wife should order a taxi beforehand and then pack her bags, pay her bill, and leave the hotel at the last possible moment. If she gave the hotel people too much notice they would be sure to send for the police. I got down to the station at about seven to find that the train had already gone — it had left at ten to seven. The engine — driver had changed his mind, as usual. Fortunately we managed to warn my wife in time. There was another train early the following morning. McNair, Cottman, and I had dinner at a little restaurant near the station and by cautious questioning discovered that the restaurant — keeper was a C.N.T. member and friendly. He let us a three-bedded room and forgot to warn the police. It was the first time in five nights that I had been able to sleep with my clothes off.

Next morning my wife slipped out of the hotel successfully. The train was about an hour late in starting. I filled in the time by writing a long letter to the Ministry of War, telling them about Kopp's case — that without a doubt he had been arrested by mistake, that he was urgently needed at the front, that countless people would testify that he was innocent of any offence, etc., etc., etc. I wonder if anyone read that letter, written on pages torn out of a note-book in wobbly handwriting (my fingers were still partly paralysed) and still more wobbly Spanish. At any rate, neither this letter nor anything else took effect. As I write, six months after the event, Kopp (if he has not been shot) is still in jail, untried and uncharged. At the beginning we had two or three letters from him, smuggled out by released prisoners and posted in France. They all told the same story — imprisonment in filthy dark dens, bad and insufficient food, serious illness due to the conditions of imprisonment, and refusal of medical attention. I have had all this confirmed from several other sources, English and French. More recently he disappeared into one of the 'secret prisons' with which it seems impossible to make any kind of communication. His case is the case of scores or hundreds of foreigners and no one knows how many thousands of Spaniards.

In the end we crossed the frontier without incident. The train had

a first class and a dining-car, the first I had seen in Spain. Until recently there had been only one class on the trains in Catalonia. Two detectives came round the train taking the names of foreigners, but when they saw us in the dining-car they seemed satisfied that we were respectable. It was queer how everything had changed. Only six months ago, when the Anarchists still reigned, it was looking like a proletarian that made you respectable. On the way down from Perpignan to Cerberes a French commercial traveller in my carriage had said to me in all solemnity: 'You mustn't go into Spain looking like that. Take off that collar and tie. They'll tear them off you in Barcelona.' He was exaggerating, but it showed how Catalonia was regarded. And at the frontier the Anarchist guards had turned back a smartly dressed Frenchman and his wife, solely — I think — because they looked too bourgeois. Now it was the other way about; to look bourgeois was the one salvation. At the passport office they looked us up in the card — index of suspects, but thanks to the inefficiency of the police our names were not listed, not even McNair's. We were searched from head to foot, but we possessed nothing incriminating, except my discharge — papers, and the carabineros who searched me did not know that the 29th Division was the P.O.U.M. So we slipped through the barrier, and after just six months I was on French soil again. My only souvenirs of Spain were a goatskin water-bottle and one of those tiny iron lamps in which the Aragon peasants bum olive oil — lamps almost exactly the shape of the terra-cotta lamps that the Romans used two thousand years ago — which I had picked up in some ruined hut, and which had somehow got stuck in my luggage.

After all, it turned out that we had come away none too soon. The very first newspaper we saw announced McNair's arrest for espionage. The Spanish authorities had been a little premature in announcing this. Fortunately, 'Trotskyism'is not extraditable.

I wonder what is the appropriate first action when you come from a country at war and set foot on peaceful soil. Mine was to rush to the tobacco-kiosk and buy as many cigars and cigarettes as I could stuff" into my pockets. Then we all went to the buffet and had a cup of tea, the first tea with fresh milk in it that we had had for many months. It was several days before I could get used to the idea that you could buy cigarettes whenever you wanted them. I always half-

expected to see the tobacconists' doors barred and the forbidding notice 'No hay tabaco' in the window.

McNair and Cottman were going on to Paris. My wife and I got off the train at Banyuls, the first station up the line, feeling that we would like a rest. We were not too well received in Banyuls when they discovered that we had come from Barcelona. Quite a number of times I was involved in the same conversation: 'You come from Spain? Which side were you fighting on? The Government? Oh!' — and then a marked coolness. The little town seemed solidly pro-Franco, no doubt because of the various Spanish Fascist refugees who had arrived there from time to time. The waiter at the cafe I frequented was a pro-Franco Spaniard and used to give me lowering glances as he served me with an aperitif. It was otherwise in Perpignan, which was stiff with Government partisans and where all the different factions were caballing against one another almost as in Barcelona. There was one cafe where the word 'P.O.U.M.' immediately procured you French friends and smiles from the waiter.

I think we stayed three days in Banyuls. It was a strangely restless time. In this quiet fishing-town, remote from bombs, machine-guns, food-queues, propaganda, and intrigue, we ought to have felt profoundly relieved and thankful. We felt nothing of the kind. The things we had seen in Spain did not recede and fall into proportion now that we were away from them; instead they rushed back upon us and were far more vivid than before. We thought, talked, dreamed incessantly of Spain. For months past we had been telling ourselves that 'when we get out of Spain' we would go somewhere beside the Mediterranean and be quiet for a little while and perhaps do a little fishing, but now that we were here it was merely a bore and a disappointment. It was chilly weather, a persistent wind blew off the sea, the water was dull and choppy, round the harbour's edge a scum of ashes, corks, and fish-guts bobbed against the stones. It sounds like lunacy, but the thing that both of us wanted was to be back in Spain. Though it could have done no good to anybody, might indeed have done serious harm, both of us wished that we had stayed to be imprisoned along with the others. I suppose I have failed to convey more than a little of what those months in Spain meant to me. I have recorded some of the outward events, but I cannot record the feeling

they have left me with. It is all mixed up with sights, smells, and sounds that cannot be conveyed in writing: the smell of the trenches, the mountain dawns stretching away into inconceivable distances, the frosty crackle of bullets, the roar and glare of bombs; the clear cold light of the Barcelona mornings, and the stamp of boots in the barrack yard, back in December when people still believed in the revolution; and the food-queues and the red and black flags and the faces of Spanish militiamen; above all the faces of militiamen — men whom I knew in the line and who are now scattered Lord knows where, some killed in battle, some maimed, some in prison — most of them, I hope, still safe and sound. Good luck to them all; I hope they win their war and drive all the foreigners out of Spain, Germans, Russians, and Italians alike. This war, in which I played so ineffectual a part, has left me with memories that are mostly evil, and yet I do not wish that I had missed it. When you have had a glimpse of such a disaster as this — and however it ends the Spanish war will turn out to have been an appalling disaster, quite apart from the slaughter and physical suffering — the result is not necessarily disillusionment and cynicism. Curiously enough the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings. And I hope the account I have given is not too misleading. I believe that on such an issue as this no one is or can be completely truthful. It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan. In case I have not said this somewhere earlier in the book I will say it now: beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact, and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events. And beware of exactly the same things when you read any other book on this period of the Spanish war.

Because of the feeling that we ought to be doing something, though actually there was nothing we could do, we left Banyuls earlier than we had intended. With every mile that you went northward France grew greener and softer. Away from the mountain and the vine, back to the meadow and the elm. When I had passed through Paris on my way to Spain it had seemed to me decayed and gloomy, very different from the Paris I had known eight years earlier,

when living was cheap and Hitler was not heard of. Half the cafes I used to know were shut for lack of custom, and everyone was obsessed with the high cost of living and the fear of war. Now, after poor Spain, even Paris seemed gay and prosperous. And the Exhibition was in full swing, though we managed to avoid visiting it.

And then England — southern England, probably the sleekest landscape in the world. It is difficult when you pass that way, especially when you are peacefully recovering from sea-sickness with the plush cushions of a boat-train carriage under your bum, to believe that anything is really happening anywhere. Earthquakes in Japan, famines in China, revolutions in Mexico? Don't worry, the milk will be on the doorstep tomorrow morning, the New Statesman will come out on Friday. The industrial towns were far away, a smudge of smoke and misery hidden by the curve of the earth's surface. Down here it was still the England I had known in my childhood: the railway-cuttings smothered in wild flowers, the deep meadows where the great shining horses browse and meditate, the slow-moving streams bordered by willows, the green bosoms of the elms, the larkspurs in the cottage gardens; and then the huge peaceful wilderness of outer London, the barges on the miry river, the familiar streets, the posters telling of cricket matches and Royal weddings, the men in bowler hats, the pigeons in Trafalgar Square, the red buses, the blue policemen — all sleeping the deep, deep sleep of England, from which I sometimes fear that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs.

The Poetry

Orwell's home in Hampstead

GEORGE ORWELL: THE POET

Orwell is least well- known for writing poetry and the quality of the work is seldom judged the equal of his essays or novels. He began composing poems before becoming a novelist, journalist and essayist. One of his early poems, written when he was still a schoolboy, called 'Awake Young Men of England' is a rallying cry for men to enlist for World War I and not be 'cowards indeed'. The poem offers an interesting insight to Orwell's attitude to war as a boy and while he certainly lost the strong Nationalist streak as an adult, he resolutely opposed the British far left stance of Pacifism towards World War II. He believed that it only aided Fascism by hampering the war effort of the Allies. Orwell often employed humour in his poems evidenced by his 'Ironic Poem about Prostitution' which is a witty verse about meeting a Burmese woman.

The Spanish Civil War had a profound effect on Orwell and he wrote 'The Italian Soldier Shook My Hand' in remembrance of an Italian soldier he met the day he signed up to fight against Franco. Orwell did not see the soldier again, but was certain that he had been killed, if not by the Nationalists, then by the Soviet backed communist factions. Orwell wrote the poem 'The Pagan' in 1918 for his friend Jacinta Buddicom about an argument her family had with Oxford High School about their agnosticism. 'Summer-like for an instant', which appeared in the New Adelphi in 1933 describes a brief reprieve to the oncoming cold and expresses the 'sorrow' Orwell feels at the prospect of winter and death. Contained within Orwell's poetry readers may discover traces of many of the themes that dominate his famous novels and non-fiction works.

Orwell, c. 1932

LIST OF POEMS

Awake young men of England
The Italian soldier shook my hand
Kitchener
Romance
Sometimes in the middle autumn days
A Dressed Man
A Little Poem
The Pagan
The Lesser Evil
Ironic Poem about Prostitution
Summer-like for an instant
On a Ruined Farm near the His Master's Voice Gramophone Factory

Awake young men of England

Oh! give me the strength of the Lion
The wisdom of Reynard the Fox
And then I'll hurl troops at the Germans
And give them the hardest of knocks.
Oh! think of the War lord's mailed fist,
That is striking at England today:
And think of the lives that our soldiers
Are fearlessly throwing away.
Awake! Oh you young men of England,
For if when your country's in need,
You do not enlist by the thousand,
You truly are cowards indeed.

The Italian soldier shook my hand

The Italian soldier shook my hand
Beside the guard-room table;
The strong hand and the subtle hand
Whose palms are only able
To meet within the sound of guns,
But oh! what peace I knew then
In gazing on his battered face
Purer than any woman's!
For the flyblown words that make me spew
Still in his ears were holy,
And he was born knowing what I had learned
Out of books and slowly.
The treacherous guns had told their tale
And we both had bought it,
But my gold brick was made of gold —
Oh! who ever would have thought it?
Good luck go with you, Italian soldier!
But luck is not for the brave;
What would the world give back to you?
Always less than you gave.
Between the shadow and the ghost,
Between the white and the red,
Between the bullet and the lie,
Where would you hide your head?
For where is Manuel Gonzalez,
And where is Pedro Aguilar,
And where is Ramon Fenellosa?
The earthworms know where they are.
Your name and your deeds were forgotten
Before your bones were dry,
And the lie that slew you is buried
Under a deeper lie;
But the thing that I saw in your face
No power can disinherit:

No bomb that ever burst
Shatters the crystal spirit.

Kitchener

No stone is set to mark his nation's loss
No stately tomb enshrines his noble breast;
Not e'en the tribute of a wooden cross
Can mark his hero's rest.
He needs them not, his name untarnished stands,
Remindful of the mighty deeds he worked,
Footprints of one, upon time's changeful sands,
Who ne'er his duty shirked.
Who follows in his steps no danger shuns,
Nor stoops to conquer by shameful deed,
An honest and and unselfish race he runs,
From fear and malice freed.

Romance

When I was young and had no sense
In far-off Mandalay
I lost my heart to a Burmese girl
As lovely as the day.
Her skin was gold, her hair was jet,
Her teeth were ivory;
I said ‘For twenty silver pieces,
Maiden, sleep with me.’
She looked at me, so pure, so sad,
The loveliest thing alive,
And in her lisping, virgin voice,
Stood out for twenty-five.

Sometimes in the middle autumn days

Sometimes in the middle autumn days,
The windless days when the swallows have flown,
And the sere elms brood in the mist,
Each tree a being, rapt, alone,
I know, not as in barren thought,
But wordlessly, as the bones know,
What quenching of my brain, what numbness,
Wait in the dark grave where I go.
And I see the people thronging the street,
The death-marked people, they and I
Goalless, rootless, like leaves drifting,
Blind to the earth and to the sky;
Nothing believing, nothing loving,
Not in joy nor in pain, not heeding the stream
Of precious life that flows within us,
But fighting, toiling as in a dream.
So shall we in the rout of life
Some thought, some faith, some meaning save,
And speak it once before we go
In silence to the silent grave...

A Dressed Man

A dressed man and a naked man
Stood by the kip-house fire,
Watching the sooty cooking-pots
That bubble on the wire;
And bidding tanners up and down,
Bargaining for a deal,
Naked skin for empty skin,
Clothes against a meal.
‘Ten bob it is,’ the dressed man said,
‘These boots cost near a pound,
This coat’s a blanket of itself.
When you kip on the frosty ground.’
‘One dollar,’ said the nakd man,
‘And that’s a hog too dear;
I’ve seen a man strip off his shirt
For a fag and a pot of beer.’
‘Eight and a tanner,’ the dressed man said,
‘And my life-work is yours,
All I’ve earned at the end of a life
Knocking at farmers’ doors;
Turnips, apples, hops and peas,
And the spike when times are slack,
Fifty years I’ve tobied it
For these clothes upon my back.’
‘Take seven,’ said the naked man,
‘It’s cold and the spikes are shut;
Better be naked here in kip
Than dressed in Lambeth Cut.’
‘One tanner more,’ the dressed man said,
‘One tanner says the word,
Off comes my coat of ratcatcher
And my breeches of velvet cord;
Now pull my shirt over my head,
I’m naked sole to crown,

And that's the end of fifty years
Tobying up and down.'
A minute and they had changed about,
And each had his desire;
A dressed man and a naked man
Stood by the kip-house fire.

A Little Poem

A happy vicar I might have been
Two hundred years ago
To preach upon eternal doom
And watch my walnuts grow;
But born, alas, in an evil time,
I missed that pleasant haven,
For the hair has grown on my upper lip
And the clergy are all clean-shaven.
And later still the times were good,
We were so easy to please,
We rocked our troubled thoughts to sleep
On the bosoms of the trees.
All ignorant we dared to own
The joys we now dissemble;
The greenfinch on the apple bough
Could make my enemies tremble.
But girl's bellies and apricots,
Roach in a shaded stream,
Horses, ducks in flight at dawn,
All these are a dream.
It is forbidden to dream again;
We maim our joys or hide them:
Horses are made of chromium steel
And little fat men shall ride them.
I am the worm who never turned,
The eunuch without a harem;
Between the priest and the commissar
I walk like Eugene Aram;
And the commissar is telling my fortune
While the radio plays,
But the priest has promised an Austin Seven,
For Duggie always pays.
I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls,
And woke to find it true;

I wasn’t born for an age like this;
Was Smith? Was Jones? Were you?

The Pagan

So here are you, and here am I,
Where we may thank our gods to be;
Above the earth, beneath the sky,
Naked souls alive and free.
The autumn wind goes rustling by
And stirs the stubble at our feet;
Out of the west it whispering blows,
Stops to caress and onward goes,
Bringing its earthy odours sweet.
See with what pride the the setting sun
Kinglike in gold and purple dies,
And like a robe of rainbow spun
Tinges the earth with shades divine.
That mystic light is in your eyes
And ever in your heart will shine.

The Lesser Evil

EMPTY as death and slow as pain
The days went by on leaden feet;
And parson's week had come again
As I walked down the little street.

Without, the weary doves were calling,
The sun burned on the banks of mud;
Within, old maids were caterwauling
A dismal tale of thorns and blood.

I thought of all the church bells ringing
In towns that Christian folks were in;
I heard the godly maidens singing;
I turned into the house of sin.

The house of sin was dark & mean,
With dying flowers round the door;
They spat their betel juice between
The rotten bamboos of the floor.

Why did I come, the woman cried,
So seldom to her beds of ease?
When I was not, her spirit died,
And would I give her ten rupees.

The weeks went by, and many a day
That black-haired woman did implore
Me as I hurried on my way
To come more often than before.

The days went by like dead leaves falling
And parson's week came round again.
Once more devout old maids were bawling
Their ugly rhymes of death and pain.

The woman waited for me there
As down the little street I trod;
And musing upon her oily hair,
I turned into the house of God.

Ironic Poem about Prostitution

WHEN I was young and had no sense
In far-off Mandalay
I lost my heart to a Burmese girl
As lovely as the day.

Her skin was gold, her hair was jet,
Her teeth were ivory;
I said, “for twenty silver pieces,
Maiden, sleep with me”.

She looked at me, so pure, so sad,
The loveliest thing alive,
And in her lisping, virgin voice,
Stood out for twenty-five.

Summer-like for an instant

Summer-like for an instant the autumn sun bursts out,
And the light through the turning elms is green and clear;
It slants down the path and ragged marigolds glow
Fiery again, last flames of the dying year.
A blue-tit darts with a flash of wings, to feed
Where the coconut hangs on the pear tree over the well;
He digs at the meat like a tiny pickaxe tapping
With his needle-sharp beak as he clings to the swinging shell.
Then he runs up the trunk, sure-footed and sleek like a mouse,
And perches to sun himself; all his body and brain
Exult in the sudden sunlight, gladly believing
That the cold is over and summer is here again.
But I see the umber clouds that drive for the sun,
And a sorrow no argument ever can make away
Goes through my heart as I think of the nearing winter,
And the transient light that gleams like the ghost of May;
And the bird unaware, blessing the summer eternal,
Joyfully labouring, proud in his strength, gay-plumed,
Unaware of the hawk and the snow and the frost-bound nights,
And of his death foredoomed.

On a Ruined Farm near the His Master's Voice Gramophone Factory

As I stand at the lichened gate
With warring worlds on either hand —
To left the black and budless trees,
The empty sties, the barns that stand
Like tumbling skeletons — and to right
The factory-towers, white and clear
Like distant, glittering cities seen
From a ship's rail — as I stand here,
I feel, and with a sharper pang,
My mortal sickness; how I give
My heart to weak and stuffless ghosts,
And with the living cannot live.
The acid smoke has soured the fields,
And browned the few and windworn flowers;
But there, where steel and concrete soar
In dizzy, geometric towers —
There, where the tapering cranes sweep round,
And great wheels turn, and trains roar by
Like strong, low-headed brutes of steel —
There is my world, my home; yet why
So alien still? For I can neither
Dwell in that world, nor turn again
To scythe and spade, but only loiter
Among the trees the smoke has slain.
Yet when the trees were young, men still
Could choose their path — the winged soul,
Not cursed with double doubts, could fly,
Arrow-like to a foreseen goal;
And they who planned those soaring towers,
They too have set their spirit free;
To them their glittering world can bring
Faith, and accepted destiny;
But none to me as I stand here

Between two countries, both-ways torn,
And moveless still, like Buridan’s donkey
Between the water and the corn.

Selected Non-Fiction

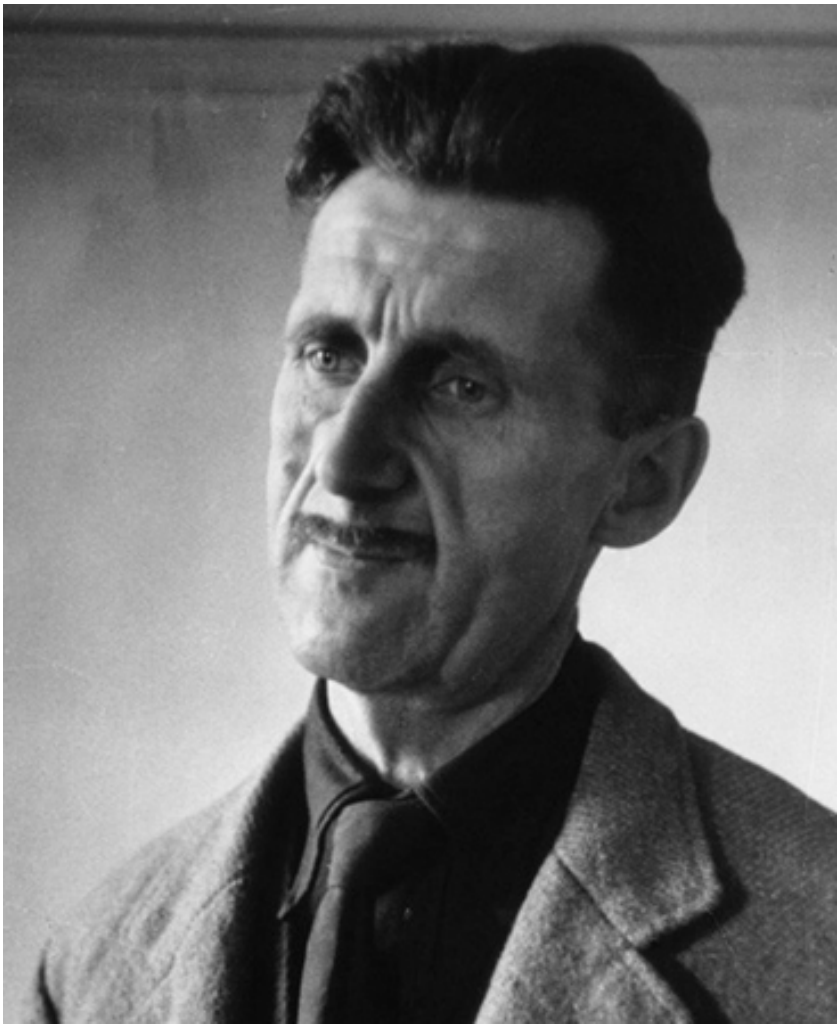
University College Hospital — where Orwell died

GEORGE ORWELL: THE ESSAYIST

Orwell was a political journalist and literary critic, who wrote a great number of essays on wide-ranging topics. His work was published in literary and political journals including the *New Adelphi* and *Horizon*. Orwell's 1931 essay 'The Spike' details twenty-four hours spent staying at a 'spike'; the hunger, the tramps, the filth and the cruelty of being confined to a cell for ten hours with nothing to do. 'How the Poor Die' also focuses on the horrors and indignities of poverty and the inhumane way those without money are treated. As a literary critic Orwell wrote about how W. B. Yeats' style of writing reflected his political and philosophical views. Orwell links Yeats' belief in the occult to supporting Fascism and argues that the 'relationship between Fascism and the literary intelligentsia badly needs investigating'. Orwell also composed essays on literary figures such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling and Leo Tolstoy. One of his better known pieces is 'Politics and the English Language' written in 1946, where Orwell complains that the modern style of writing is vague, and that writers do not pick out words for clarity but employ Latinised phrases which avoid concreteness and specific meaning. He argues that this is particularly true in political writings where unpalatable truths are hidden in euphemisms and 'clear shady vagueness'. Many of Orwell's essays are political in nature and he addresses the topics of Nationalism, Socialism, the atomic bomb and Ghandi.

While Orwell wrote political essays on the Spanish Civil War, 'The Future of a Ruined Germany' and 'Anti-Semitism in Britain', he also revealed his beliefs through vivid recollections of a man being hanged and an elephant shooting expedition. 'A Hanging' which was published in 1931 is a chilling account of an execution in Burma where Orwell concedes that 'till that moment I had never realised what it meant to destroy a healthy, conscious man'. In 'Revenge is Sour' Orwell recalls witnessing Nazi prisoners of war being beaten by a Viennese Jew and reflects that while he understands the desire for revenge it is ultimately futile and unsatisfying. Orwell's collection of essays is vast and eclectic

enough to include ‘Some Thoughts on The Common Toad’, ‘Books vs. Cigarettes’ and a work entitled ‘A Nice Cup of Tea’ which is a thousand words on how to make a proper cup of tea discussing whether the milk or tea should be poured first and forbidding the use of sugar. Orwell’s journalism and political works remain highly respected in the present day and provide a record of his dedication to social justice. The famous essay ‘Why I Write’ details his motives for pursuing the art which he describes as being driven by a sense of injustice and a love of the aesthetic experience.



Orwell, c. 1947

LIST OF ESSAYS

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NOTES ON NATIONALISM (1945)
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THE SPORTING SPIRIT
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CONFESSIONS OF A BOOK REVIEWER
DECLINE OF THE ENGLISH MURDER
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WHY I WRITE (1946)
LEAR, TOLSTOY AND THE FOOL
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WRITERS AND LEVIATHAN (1948)
REFLECTIONS ON GANDHI

THE SPIKE

It was late-afternoon. Forty-nine of us, forty-eight men and one woman, lay on the green waiting for the spike to open. We were too tired to talk much. We just sprawled about exhaustedly, with home-made cigarettes sticking out of our scrubby faces. Overhead the chestnut branches were covered with blossom, and beyond that great woolly clouds floated almost motionless in a clear sky. Littered on the grass, we seemed dingy, urban riff-raff. We defiled the scene, like sardine-tins and paper bags on the seashore.

What talk there was ran on the Tramp Major of this spike. He was a devil, everyone agreed, a tartar, a tyrant, a bawling, blasphemous, uncharitable dog. You couldn't call your soul your own when he was about, and many a tramp had he kicked out in the middle of the night for giving a back answer. When You, came to be searched, he fair held you upside down and shook you. If you were caught with tobacco there was bell to. Pay, and if you went in with money (which is against the law) God help you.

I had eightpence on me. 'For the love of Christ, mate,' the old hands advised me, 'don't you take it in. You'd get seven days for going into the spike with eightpence!'

So I buried my money in a hole under the hedge, marking the spot with a lump of flint. Then we set about smuggling our matches and tobacco, for it is forbidden to take these into nearly all spikes, and one is supposed to surrender them at the gate. We hid them in our socks, except for the twenty or so per cent who had no socks, and had to carry the tobacco in their boots, even under their very toes. We stuffed our ankles with contraband until anyone seeing us might have imagined an outbreak of elephantiasis. But is an unwritten law that even the sternest Tramp Majors do not search below the knee, and in the end only one man was caught. This was Scotty, a little hairy tramp with a bastard accent sired by cockney out of Glasgow. His tin of cigarette ends fell out of his sock at the wrong moment, and was impounded.

At six, the gates swung open and we shuffled in. An official at the gate entered our names and other particulars in the register and took

our bundles away from us. The woman was sent off to the workhouse, and we others into the spike. It was a gloomy, chilly, limewashed place, consisting only of a bathroom and dining-room and about a hundred narrow stone cells. The terrible Tramp Major met us at the door and herded us into the bathroom to be stripped and searched. He was a gruff, soldierly man of forty, who gave the tramps no more ceremony than sheep at the dipping-pond, shoving them this way and that and shouting oaths in their faces. But when he came to myself, he looked hard at me, and said:

'You are a gentleman?'

'I suppose so,' I said.

He gave me another long look. 'Well, that's bloody bad luck, guv'nor,' he said, 'that's bloody bad luck, that is.' And thereafter he took it into his head to treat me with compassion, even with a kind of respect.

It was a disgusting sight, that bathroom. All the indecent secrets of our underwear were exposed; the grime, the rents and patches, the bits of string doing duty for buttons, the layers upon layers of fragmentary garments, some of them mere collections of holes, held together by dirt. The room became a press of steaming nudity, the sweaty odours of the tramps competing with the sickly, sub-faecal stench native to the spike. Some of the men refused the bath, and washed only their 'toe-rags', the horrid, greasy little clouts which tramps bind round their feet. Each of us had three minutes in which to bathe himself. Six greasy, slippery roller towels had to serve for the lot of us.

When we had bathed our own clothes were taken away from us, and we were dressed in the workhouse shirts, grey cotton things like nightshirts, reaching to the middle of the thigh. Then we were sent into the dining-room, where supper was set out on the deal tables. It was the invariable spike meal, always the same, whether breakfast, dinner or supper–half a pound of bread, a bit of margarine, and a pint of so-called tea. It took us five minutes to gulp down the cheap, noxious food. Then the Tramp Major served us with three cotton blankets each, and drove us off to our cells for the night. The doors were locked on the outside a little before seven in the evening, and would stay locked for the next twelve hours.

The cells measured eight feet by five, and, had no lighting apparatus except a tiny, barred window high up in the wall, and a spyhole in the door. There were no bugs, and we had bedsteads and straw palliasses, rare luxuries both. In many spikes one sleeps on a wooden shelf, and in some on the bare floor, with a rolled-up coat for pillow. With a cell to myself, and a bed, I was hoping for a sound night's rest. But I did not get it, for there is always something wrong in the spike, and the peculiar shortcoming here, as I discovered immediately, was the cold. May had begun, and in honour of the season–a little sacrifice to the gods of spring, perhaps–the authorities had cut off the steam from the hot pipes. The cotton blankets were almost useless. One spent the night in turning from side to side, falling asleep for ten minutes and waking half frozen, and watching for dawn.

As always happens in the spike, I had at last managed to fall comfortably asleep when it was time to get up. The Tramp. Major came marching down the passage with his heavy tread, unlocking the doors and yelling to us to show a leg. Promptly the passage was full of squalid shirt-clad figures rushing for the bathroom, for there was Only One tub full of water between us all in the morning, and it was first come first served. When I arrived twenty tramps had already washed their faces. I gave one glance at the black scum on top of the water, and decided to go dirty for the day.

We hurried into our clothes, and then went to the dining-room to bolt our breakfast. The bread was much worse than usual, because the military-minded idiot of a Tramp Major had cut it into slices overnight, so that it was as hard as ship's biscuit. But we were glad of our tea after the cold, restless night. I do not know what tramps would do without tea, or rather the stuff they miscall tea. It is their food, their medicine, their panacea for all evils. Without the half goon or so of it that they suck down a day, I truly believe they could not face their existence.

After breakfast we had to undress again for the medical inspection, which is a precaution against smallpox. It was three quarters of an hour before the doctor arrived, and one had time now to look about him and see what manner of men we were. It was an instructive sight. We stood shivering naked to the waist in two long

ranks in the passage. The filtered light, bluish and cold, lighted us up with unmerciful clarity. No one can imagine, unless he has seen such a thing, what pot-bellied, degenerate curs we looked. Shock heads, hairy, crumpled faces, hollow chests, flat feet, sagging muscles– every kind of malformation and physical rottenness were there. All were flabby and discoloured, as all tramps are under their deceptive sunburn. Two or three figures wen there stay ineradicably in my mind. Old 'Daddy', aged seventy-four, with his truss, and his red, watering eyes, a herring-gutted starveling with sparse beard and sunken cheeks, looking like the corpse of Lazarus in some primitive picture: an imbecile, wandering hither and thither with vague giggles, coyly pleased because his trousers constantly slipped down and left him nude. But few of us were greatly better than these; there were not ten decently built men among us, and half, I believe, should have been in hospital.

This being Sunday, we were to be kept in the spike over the week-end. As soon as the doctor had gone we were herded back to the dining-room, and its door shut upon us. It was a lime-washed, stone-floored room, unspeakably dreary with its furniture of deal boards and benches, and its prison smell. The windows were so high up that one could not look outside, and the sole ornament was a set of Rules threatening dire penalties to any casual who misconducted himself. We packed the room so tight that one could not move an elbow without jostling somebody. Already, at eight o'clock in the morning, we were bored with our captivity. There was nothing to talk about except the petty gossip of the road, the good and bad spikes, the charitable and uncharitable counties, the iniquities of the police and the Salvation Army. Tramps hardly ever get away from these subjects; they talk, as it were, nothing but shop. They have nothing worthy to be called conversation, bemuse emptiness of belly leaves no speculation in their souls. The world is too much with them. Their next meal is never quite secure, and so they cannot think of anything except the next meal.

Two hours dragged by. Old Daddy, witless with age, sat silent, his back bent like a bow and his inflamed eyes dripping slowly on to the floor. George, a dirty old tramp notorious for the queer habit of sleeping in his hat, grumbled about a parcel of tommy that he had

lost on the toad. Bill the moocher, the best built man of us all, a Herculean sturdy beggar who smelt of beer even after twelve hours in the spike, told tales of mooching, of pints stood him in the boozers, and of a parson who had peached to the police and got him seven days. William and, Fred, two young, ex-fishermen from Norfolk, sang a sad song about Unhappy Bella, who was betrayed and died in the snow. The imbecile drivelled, about an imaginary toff, who had once given him two hundred and fifty-seven golden sovereigns. So the time passed, with dun talk and dull obscenities. Everyone was smoking, except Scotty, whose tobacco had been seized, and he was so miserable in his smokeless state that I stood him the makings of a cigarette. We smoked furtively, hiding our cigarettes like schoolboys when we heard the Tramp Major's step, for smoking though connived at, was officially forbidden.

Most of the tramps spent ten consecutive hours in this dreary room. It is hard to imagine how they put up with 11. I have come to think that boredom is the worst of all a tramp's evils, worse than hunger and discomfort, worse even than the constant feeling of being socially disgraced. It is a silly piece of cruelty to confine an ignorant man all day with nothing to do; it is like chaining a dog in a barrel, only an educated man, who has consolations within himself, can endure confinement. Tramps, unlettered types as nearly all of them are, face their poverty with blank, resourceless minds. Fixed for ten hours on a comfortless bench, they know no way of occupying themselves, and if they think at all it is to whimper about hard luck and pine for work. They have not the stuff in them to endure the horrors of idleness. And so, since so much of their lives is spent in doing nothing, they suffer agonies from boredom.

I was much luckier than the others, because at ten o'clock the Tramp Major picked me out for the most coveted of all jobs in the spike, the job of helping in the workhouse kitchen. There was not really any work to be done there, and I was able to make off and hide in a shed used for storing potatoes, together with some workhouse paupers who were skulking to avoid the Sunday-morning service. There was a stove burning there, and comfortable packing cases to sit on, and back numbers of the FAMILY HERALD, and even a copy of RAFFLES from the workhouse library. It was paradise after the

spike.

Also, I had my dinner from the workhouse table, and it was one of the biggest meals I have ever eaten. A tramp does not see such a meal twice in the year, in the spike or out of it. The paupers told me that they always gorged to the bursting point on Sundays, and went hungry six days of the week. When the meal was over the cook set me to do the washing-up, and told me to throw away the food that remained. The wastage was astonishing; great dishes of beef, and bucketfuls of broad and vegetables, were pitched away like rubbish, and then defiled with tea-leaves. I filled five dustbins to overflowing with good food. And while I did so my follow tramps were sitting two hundred yards away in the spike, their bellies half filled with the spike dinner of the everlasting bread and tea, and perhaps two cold boiled potatoes each in honour of Sunday. It appeared that the food was thrown away from deliberate policy, rather than that it should be given to the tramps.

At three I left the workhouse kitchen and went back to the spike. The, boredom in that crowded, comfortless room was now unbearable. Even smoking had ceased, for a tramp's only tobacco is picked-up cigarette ends, and, like a browsing beast, he starves if he is long away from the pavement-pasture. To occupy the time I talked with a rather superior tramp, a young carpenter who wore a collar and tie, and was on the road, he said, for lack of a set of tools. He kept a little aloof from the other tramps, and held himself more like a free man than a casual. He had literary tastes, too, and carried one of Scott's novels on all his wanderings. He told me he never entered a spike unless driven there by hunger, sleeping under hedges and behind ricks in preference. Along the south coast he had begged by day and slept in bathing-machines for weeks at a time.

We talked of life on the road. He criticized the system which makes a tramp spend fourteen hours a day in the spike, and the other ten in walking and dodging the police. He spoke of his own case–six months at the public charge for want of three pounds' worth of tools. It was idiotic, he said.

Then I told him about the wastage of food in the workhouse kitchen, and what I thought of it. And at that he changed his tune immediately. I saw that I had awakened the pew-renter who sleeps in

every English workman. Though he had been famished, along with the rest, he at once saw reasons why the food should have been thrown away rather than given to the tramps. He admonished me quite severely.

'They have to do it,' he said. 'If they made these places too pleasant you'd have all the scum of the country flocking into them. It's only the bad food as keeps all that scum away. These tramps are too lazy to work, that's all that's wrong with them. You don't want to go encouraging of them. They're scum.'

I produced arguments to prove him wrong, but he would not listen. He kept repeating:

'You don't want to have any pity on these tramps–scum, they are. You don't want to judge them by the same standards as men like you and me. They're scum, just scum.'

It was interesting to see how subtly he disassociated himself from his fellow tramps. He has been on the road six months, but in the sight of God, he seemed to imply, he was not a tramp. His body might be in the spike, but his spirit soared far away, in the pure aether of the middle classes.

The clock's hands crept round with excruciating slowness. We were too bored even to talk now, the only sound was of oaths and reverberating yawns. One would force his eyes away from the clock for what seemed an age, and then look back again to see that the hands had advanced three minutes. Ennui clogged our souls like cold mutton fat. Our bones ached because of it. The clock's hands stood at four, and supper was not till six, and there was nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon.

At last six o'clock did come, and the Tramp Major and his assistant arrived with supper. The yawning tramps brisked up like lions at feeding-time. But the meal was a dismal disappointment. The bread, bad enough in the morning, was now positively uneatable; it was so hard that even the strongest jaws could make little impression on it. The older men went almost supperless, and not a man could finish his portion, hungry though most of us were. When we had finished, the blankets were served out immediately, and we were hustled off once more to the bare, chilly cells.

Thirteen hours went by. At seven we were awakened, and rushed

forth to squabble over the water in the bathroom, and bolt our ration of bread and tea. Our time in the spike was up, but we could riot go until the doctor had examined us again, for the authorities have a terror of smallpox and its distribution by tramps. The doctor kept us waiting two hours this time, and it was ten o'clock before we finally escaped.

At last it was time to go, and we were let out into the yard. How bright everything looked, and how sweet the winds did blow, after the gloomy, reeking spike! The Tramp Major handed each man his bundle of confiscated possessions, and a hunk of bread and cheese for midday dinner, and then we took the road, hastening to get out of sight of the spike and its discipline, This was our interim of freedom. After a day and two nights of wasted time we had eight hours or so to take our recreation, to scour the roads for cigarette ends, to beg, and to look for work. Also, we had to make our ten, fifteen, or it might be twenty miles to the next spike, where the game would begin anew.

I disinterred my eightpence and took the road with Nobby, a respectable, downhearted tramp who carried a spare pair of boots and visited all the Labour Exchanges. Our late companions were scattering north, south, cast and west, like bugs into a mattress. Only the imbecile loitered at the spike gates, until the Tramp Major had to chase him away.

Nobby and I set out for Croydon. It was a quiet road, there were no cars passing, the blossom covered the chestnut trees like great wax candles. Everything was so quiet and smelt so clean, it was hard to realize that only a few minutes ago we had been packed with that band of prisoners in a stench of drains and soft soap. The others had all disappeared; we two seemed to be the only tramps on the road.

Then I heard a hurried step behind me, and felt a tap on my arm. It was little Scotty, who had run panting after us. He pulled a rusty tin box from his pocket. He wore a friendly smile, like a man who is repaying an obligation.

'Here y'are, mate,' he said cordially. 'I owe you some fag ends. You stood me a smoke yesterday. The Tramp Major give me back my box of fag ends when we come out this morning. One good turn deserves another–here y'are.'

And he put four sodden, debauched, loathly cigarette ends into my hand.

A HANGING (1931)

It was in Burma, a sodden morning of the rains. A sickly light, like yellow tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard. We were waiting outside the condemned cells, a row of sheds fronted with double bars, like small animal cages. Each cell measured about ten feet by ten and was quite bare within except for a plank bed and a pot of drinking water. In some of them brown silent men were squatting at the inner bars, with their blankets draped round them. These were the condemned men, due to be hanged within the next week or two.

One prisoner had been brought out of his cell. He was a Hindu, a puny wisp of a man, with a shaven head and vague liquid eyes. He had a thick, sprouting moustache, absurdly too big for his body, rather like the moustache of a comic man on the films. Six tall Indian warders were guarding him and getting him ready for the gallows. Two of them stood by with rifles and fixed bayonets, while the others handcuffed him, passed a chain through his handcuffs and fixed it to their belts, and lashed his arms tight to his sides. They crowded very close about him, with their hands always on him in a careful, caressing grip, as though all the while feeling him to make sure he was there. It was like men handling a fish which is still alive and may jump back into the water. But he stood quite unresisting, yielding his arms limply to the ropes, as though he hardly noticed what was happening.

Eight o'clock struck and a bugle call, desolately thin in the wet air, floated from the distant barracks. The superintendent of the jail, who was standing apart from the rest of us, moodily prodding the gravel with his stick, raised his head at the sound. He was an army doctor, with a grey toothbrush moustache and a gruff voice. "For God's sake hurry up, Francis," he said irritably. "The man ought to have been dead by this time. Aren't you ready yet?"

Francis, the head jailer, a fat Dravidian in a white drill suit and gold spectacles, waved his black hand. "Yes sir, yes sir," he bubbled. "All iss satisfactorily prepared. The hangman iss waiting. We shall proceed."

"Well, quick march, then. The prisoners can't get their breakfast till this job's over."

We set out for the gallows. Two warders marched on either side of the prisoner, with their rifles at the slope; two others marched close against him, gripping him by arm and shoulder, as though at once pushing and supporting him. The rest of us, magistrates and the like, followed behind. Suddenly, when we had gone ten yards, the procession stopped short without any order or warning. A dreadful thing had happened–a dog, come goodness knows whence, had appeared in the yard. It came bounding among us with a loud volley of barks, and leapt round us wagging its whole body, wild with glee at finding so many human beings together. It was a large woolly dog, half Airedale, half pariah. For a moment it pranced round us, and then, before anyone could stop it, it had made a dash for the prisoner, and jumping up tried to lick his face. Everyone stood aghast, too taken aback even to grab at the dog.

"Who let that bloody brute in here?" said the superintendent angrily. "Catch it, someone!"

A warder, detached from the escort, charged clumsily after the dog, but it danced and gambolled just out of his reach, taking everything as part of the game. A young Eurasian jailer picked up a handful of gravel and tried to stone the dog away, but it dodged the stones and came after us again. Its yaps echoed from the jail wails. The prisoner, in the grasp of the two warders, looked on incuriously, as though this was another formality of the hanging. It was several minutes before someone managed to catch the dog. Then we put my handkerchief through its collar and moved off once more, with the dog still straining and whimpering.

It was about forty yards to the gallows. I watched the bare brown back of the prisoner marching in front of me. He walked clumsily with his bound arms, but quite steadily, with that bobbing gait of the Indian who never straightens his knees. At each step his muscles slid neatly into place, the lock of hair on his scalp danced up and down, his feet printed themselves on the wet gravel. And once, in spite of the men who gripped him by each shoulder, he stepped slightly aside to avoid a puddle on the path.

It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it

means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle, I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All the organs of his body were working–bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming–all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would still be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live. His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned–reasoned even about puddles. He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone–one mind less, one world less.

The gallows stood in a small yard, separate from the main grounds of the prison, and overgrown with tall prickly weeds. It was a brick erection like three sides of a shed, with planking on top, and above that two beams and a crossbar with the rope dangling. The hangman, a grey-haired convict in the white uniform of the prison, was waiting beside his machine. He greeted us with a servile crouch as we entered. At a word from Francis the two warders, gripping the prisoner more closely than ever, half led, half pushed him to the gallows and helped him clumsily up the ladder. Then the hangman climbed up and fixed the rope round the prisoner's neck.

We stood waiting, five yards away. The warders had formed in a rough circle round the gallows. And then, when the noose was fixed, the prisoner began crying out on his god. It was a high, reiterated cry of "Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!", not urgent and fearful like a prayer or a cry for help, but steady, rhythmical, almost like the tolling of a bell. The dog answered the sound with a whine. The hangman, still standing on the gallows, produced a small cotton bag like a flour bag and drew it down over the prisoner's face. But the sound, muffled by the cloth, still persisted, over and over again: "Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!"

The hangman climbed down and stood ready, holding the lever. Minutes seemed to pass. The steady, muffled crying from the prisoner went on and on, "Ram! Ram! Ram!" never faltering for an instant. The superintendent, his head on his chest, was slowly poking

the ground with his stick; perhaps he was counting the cries, allowing the prisoner a fixed number–fifty, perhaps, or a hundred. Everyone had changed colour. The Indians had gone grey like bad coffee, and one or two of the bayonets were wavering. We looked at the lashed, hooded man on the drop, and listened to his cries–each cry another second of life; the same thought was in all our minds: oh, kill him quickly, get it over, stop that abominable noise!

Suddenly the superintendent made up his mind. Throwing up his head he made a swift motion with his stick. "Chalo!" he shouted almost fiercely.

There was a clanking noise, and then dead silence. The prisoner had vanished, and the rope was twisting on itself. I let go of the dog, and it galloped immediately to the back of the gallows; but when it got there it stopped short, barked, and then retreated into a corner of the yard, where it stood among the weeds, looking timorously out at us. We went round the gallows to inspect the prisoner's body. He was dangling with his toes pointed straight downwards, very slowly revolving, as dead as a stone.

The superintendent reached out with his stick and poked the bare body; it oscillated, slightly. "HE'S all right," said the superintendent. He backed out from under the gallows, and blew out a deep breath. The moody look had gone out of his face quite suddenly. He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Eight minutes past eight. Well, that's all for this morning, thank God."

The warders unfixed bayonets and marched away. The dog, sobered and conscious of having misbehaved itself, slipped after them. We walked out of the gallows yard, past the condemned cells with their waiting prisoners, into the big central yard of the prison. The convicts, under the command of warders armed with lathis, were already receiving their breakfast. They squatted in long rows, each man holding a tin pannikin, while two warders with buckets marched round ladling out rice; it seemed quite a homely, jolly scene, after the hanging. An enormous relief had come upon us now that the job was done. One felt an impulse to sing, to break into a run, to snigger. All at once everyone began chattering gaily.

The Eurasian boy walking beside me nodded towards the way we had come, with a knowing smile: "Do you know, sir, our friend (he

meant the dead man), when he heard his appeal had been dismissed, he pissed on the floor of his cell. From fright.–Kindly take one of my cigarettes, sir. Do you not admire my new silver case, sir? From the boxwallah, two rupees eight annas. Classy European style."

Several people laughed–at what, nobody seemed certain.

Francis was walking by the superintendent, talking garrulously. "Well, sir, all hass passed off with the utmost satisfactoriness. It wass all finished–flick! like that. It iss not always so–oah, no! I have known cases where the doctor wass obliged to go beneath the gallows and pull the prisoner's legs to ensure decease. Most disagreeable!"

"Wriggling about, eh? That's bad," said the superintendent.

"Ach, sir, it iss worse when they become refractory! One man, I recall, clung to the bars of hiss cage when we went to take him out. You will scarcely credit, sir, that it took six warders to dislodge him, three pulling at each leg. We reasoned with him. 'My dear fellow,' we said, 'think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!' But no, he would not listen! Ach, he wass very troublesome!"

I found that I was laughing quite loudly. Everyone was laughing. Even the superintendent grinned in a tolerant way. "You'd better all come out and have a drink," he said quite genially. "I've got a bottle of whisky in the car. We could do with it."

We went through the big double gates of the prison, into the road. "Pulling at his legs!" exclaimed a Burmese magistrate suddenly, and burst into a loud chuckling. We all began laughing again. At that moment Francis's anecdote seemed extraordinarily funny. We all had a drink together, native and European alike, quite amicably. The dead man was a hundred yards away.

BOOKSHOP MEMORIES (1936)

When I worked in a second-hand bookshop–so easily pictured, if you don't work in one, as a kind of paradise where charming old gentlemen browse eternally among calf-bound folios–the thing that chiefly struck me was the rarity of really bookish people. Our shop had an exceptionally interesting stock, yet I doubt whether ten per cent of our customers knew a good book from a bad one. First edition snobs were much commoner than lovers of literature, but oriental students haggling over cheap textbooks were commoner still, and vague-minded women looking for birthday presents for their nephews were commonest of all.

Many of the people who came to us were of the kind who would be a nuisance anywhere but have special opportunities in a bookshop. For example, the dear old lady who 'wants a book for an invalid' (a very common demand, that), and the other dear old lady who read such a nice book in 1897 and wonders whether you can find her a copy. Unfortunately she doesn't remember the title or the author's name or what the book was about, but she does remember that it had a red cover. But apart from these there are two well-known types of pest by whom every second-hand bookshop is haunted. One is the decayed person smelling of old bread-crusts who comes every day, sometimes several times a day, and tries to sell you worthless books. The other is the person who orders large quantities of books for which he has not the smallest intention of paying. In our shop we sold nothing on credit, but we would put books aside, or order them if necessary, for people who arranged to fetch them away later. Scarcely half the people who ordered books from us ever came back. It used to puzzle me at first. What made them do it? They would come in and demand some rare and expensive book, would make us promise over and over again to keep it for them, and then would vanish never to return. But many of them, of course, were unmistakable paranoiacs. They used to talk in a grandiose manner about themselves and tell the most ingenious stories to explain how they had happened to come out of doors without any money–stories which, in many cases, I am sure they themselves believed. In a town

like London there are always plenty of not quite certifiable lunatics walking the streets, and they tend to gravitate towards bookshops, because a bookshop is one of the few places where you can hang about for a long time without spending any money. In the end one gets to know these people almost at a glance. For all their big talk there is something moth-eaten and aimless about them. Very often, when we were dealing with an obvious paranoiac, we would put aside the books he asked for and then put them back on the shelves the moment he had gone. None of them, I noticed, ever attempted to take books away without paying for them; merely to order them was enough–it gave them, I suppose, the illusion that they were spending real money.

Like most second-hand bookshops we had various sidelines. We sold second-hand typewriters, for instance, and also stamps–used stamps, I mean. Stamp-collectors are a strange, silent, fish-like breed, of all ages, but only of the male sex; women, apparently, fail to see the peculiar charm of gumming bits of coloured paper into albums. We also sold sixpenny horoscopes compiled by somebody who claimed to have foretold the Japanese earthquake. They were in sealed envelopes and I never opened one of them myself, but the people who bought them often came back and told us how 'true' their horoscopes had been. (Doubtless any horoscope seems 'true' if it tells you that you are highly attractive to the opposite sex and your worst fault is generosity.) We did a good deal of business in children's books, chiefly 'remainders'. Modern books for children are rather horrible things, especially when you see them in the mass. Personally I would sooner give a child a copy of Petronius Arbiter than PETER PAN, but even Barrie seems manly and wholesome compared with some of his later imitators. At Christmas time we spent a feverish ten days struggling with Christmas cards and calendars, which are tiresome things to sell but good business while the season lasts. It used to interest me to see the brutal cynicism with which Christian sentiment is exploited. The touts from the Christmas card firms used to come round with their catalogues as early as June. A phrase from one of their invoices sticks in my memory. It was: '2 doz. Infant Jesus with rabbits'.

But our principal sideline was a lending library–the usual

'twopenny no-deposit' library of five or six hundred volumes, all fiction. How the book thieves must love those libraries! It is the easiest crime in the world to borrow a book at one shop for twopence, remove the label and sell it at another shop for a shilling. Nevertheless booksellers generally find that it pays them better to have a certain number of books stolen (we used to lose about a dozen a month) than to frighten customers away by demanding a deposit.

Our shop stood exactly on the frontier between Hampstead and Camden Town, and we were frequented by all types from baronets to bus-conductors. Probably our library subscribers were a fair cross-section of London's reading public. It is therefore worth noting that of all the authors in our library the one who 'went out' the best was–Priestley? Hemingway? Walpole? Wodehouse? No, Ethel M. Dell, with Warwick Deeping a good second and Jeffrey Farnol, I should say, third. Dell's novels, of course, are read solely by women, but by women of all kinds and ages and not, as one might expect, merely by wistful spinsters and the fat wives of tobacconists. It is not true that men don't read novels, but it is true that there are whole branches of fiction that they avoid. Roughly speaking, what one might call the AVERAGE novel–the ordinary, good-bad, Galsworthy-and-water stuff which is the norm of the English novel–seems to exist only for women. Men read either the novels it is possible to respect, or detective stories. But their consumption of detective stories is terrific. One of our subscribers to my knowledge read four or five detective stories every week for over a year, besides others which he got from another library. What chiefly surprised me was that he never read the same book twice. Apparently the whole of that frightful torrent of trash (the pages read every year would, I calculated, cover nearly three quarters of an acre) was stored for ever in his memory. He took no notice of titles or author's names, but he could tell by merely glancing into a book whether be had 'had it already'.

In a lending library you see people's real tastes, not their pretended ones, and one thing that strikes you is how completely the 'classical' English novelists have dropped out of favour. It is simply useless to put Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Trollope, etc. into the ordinary lending library; nobody takes them out. At the mere sight of a nineteenth-century novel people say, 'Oh, but that's OLD!'

and shy away immediately. Yet it is always fairly easy to SELL Dickens, just as it is always easy to sell Shakespeare. Dickens is one of those authors whom people are 'always meaning to' read, and, like the Bible, he is widely known at second hand. People know by hearsay that Bill Sikes was a burglar and that Mr Micawber had a bald head, just as they know by hearsay that Moses was found in a basket of bulrushes and saw the 'back parts' of the Lord. Another thing that is very noticeable is the growing unpopularity of American books. And another–the publishers get into a stew about this every two or three years–is the unpopularity of short stories. The kind of person who asks the librarian to choose a book for him nearly always starts by saying 'I don't want short stories', or 'I do not desire little stories', as a German customer of ours used to put it. If you ask them why, they sometimes explain that it is too much fag to get used to a new set of characters with every story; they like to 'get into' a novel which demands no further thought after the first chapter. I believe, though, that the writers are more to blame here than the readers. Most modern short stories, English and American, are utterly lifeless and worthless, far more so than most novels. The short stories which are stories are popular enough, VIDE D. H. Lawrence, whose short stories are as popular as his novels.

Would I like to be a bookseller DE MÉTIER? On the whole–in spite of my employer's kindness to me, and some happy days I spent in the shop–no.

Given a good pitch and the right amount of capital, any educated person ought to be able to make a small secure living out of a bookshop. Unless one goes in for 'rare' books it is not a difficult trade to learn, and you start at a great advantage if you know anything about the insides of books. (Most booksellers don't. You can get their measure by having a look at the trade papers where they advertise their wants. If you don't see an ad. for Boswell's DECLINE AND FALL you are pretty sure to see one for THE MILL ON THE FLOSS by T. S. Eliot.) Also it is a humane trade which is not capable of being vulgarized beyond a certain point. The combines can never squeeze the small independent bookseller out of existence as they have squeezed the grocer and the milkman. But the hours of work are very long–I was only a part-time employee, but my

employer put in a seventy-hour week, apart from constant expeditions out of hours to buy books–and it is an unhealthy life. As a rule a bookshop is horribly cold in winter, because if it is too warm the windows get misted over, and a bookseller lives on his windows. And books give off more and nastier dust than any other class of objects yet invented, and the top of a book is the place where every bluebottle prefers to die.

But the real reason why I should not like to be in the book trade for life is that while I was in it I lost my love of books. A bookseller has to tell lies about books, and that gives him a distaste for them; still worse is the fact that he is constantly dusting them and hauling them to and fro. There was a time when I really did love books–loved the sight and smell and feel of them, I mean, at least if they were fifty or more years old. Nothing pleased me quite so much as to buy a job lot of them for a shilling at a country auction. There is a peculiar flavour about the battered unexpected books you pick up in that kind of collection: minor eighteenth-century poets, out-of-date gazeteers, odd volumes of forgotten novels, bound numbers of ladies' magazines of the sixties. For casual reading–in your bath, for instance, or late at night when you are too tired to go to bed, or in the odd quarter of an hour before lunch–there is nothing to touch a back number of the Girl's Own Paper. But as soon as I went to work in the bookshop I stopped buying books. Seen in the mass, five or ten thousand at a time, books were boring and even slightly sickening. Nowadays I do buy one occasionally, but only if it is a book that I want to read and can't borrow, and I never buy junk. The sweet smell of decaying paper appeals to me no longer. It is too closely associated in my mind with paranoiac customers and dead bluebottles.

SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT (1936)

In Moulmein, in lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people–the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically–and secretly, of course–I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been Bogged with bamboos–all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage

against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, IN SAECULA SAECULORUM, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism–the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful IN TERROREM. Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone "must." It had been chained up, as tame elephants always are when their attack of "must" is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout, the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violences upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm-leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy, stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began

questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of "Go away, child! Go away this instant!" and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie, almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelt the elephant.

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he

was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant–I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary–and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eight yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant–it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery–and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of "must" was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes-faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward,

irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd–seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing–no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a LARGE animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged, I could shoot; if he took no notice of me, it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I

was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of "natives"; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do.

There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim. The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole, actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick–one never does when a shot goes home–but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time–it might have been five seconds, I dare say–he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but

climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open–I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast Lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were bringing dahs and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn

shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

DOWN THE MINE (1937) (FROM "THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER")

Our civilization, pace Chesterton, is founded on coal, more completely than one realizes until one stops to think about it. The machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent upon coal. In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is not grimy is supported. For this reason the actual process by which coal is extracted is well worth watching, if you get the chance and are willing to take the trouble.

When you go down a coal-mine it is important to try and get to the coal face when the 'fillers' are at work. This is not easy, because when the mine is working visitors are a nuisance and are not encouraged, but if you go at any other time, it is possible to come away with a totally wrong impression. On a Sunday, for instance, a mine seems almost peaceful. The time to go there is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal dust, and when you can actually see what the miners have to do. At those times the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are if there–heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust.

When you have finally got there–and getting there is a in itself: I will explain that in a moment–you crawl through the last line of pit props and see opposite you a shiny black wall three or four feet high. This is the coal face. Overhead is the smooth ceiling made by the rock from which the coal has been cut; underneath is the rock again, so that the gallery you are in is only as high as the ledge of coal itself, probably not much more than a yard. The first impression of all, overmastering everything else for a while, is the frightful, deafening din from the conveyor belt which carries the coal away. You cannot see very far, because the fog of coal dust throws back the

beam of your lamp, but you can see on either side of you the line of half-naked kneeling men, one to every four or five yards, driving their shovels under the fallen coal and flinging it swiftly over their left shoulders. They are feeding it on to the conveyor belt, a moving rubber, belt a couple of feet wide which runs a yard or two behind them. Down this belt a glittering river of coal races constantly. In a big mine it is carrying away several tons of coal every minute. It bears it off to some place in the main roads where it is shot into tubs holding half a tun, and thence dragged to the cages and hoisted to the outer air.

It is impossible to watch the 'fillers' at work without feeling a pang of envy for their toughness. It is a dreadful job that they do, an almost superhuman job by the standard of an ordinary person. For they are not only shifting monstrous quantities of coal, they are also doing, it in a position that doubles or trebles the work. They have got to remain kneeling all the while–they could hardly rise from their knees without hitting the ceiling–and you can easily see by trying it what a tremendous effort this means. Shovelling is comparatively easy when you are standing up, because you can use your knee and thigh to drive the shovel along; kneeling down, the whole of the strain is thrown upon your arm and belly muscles. And the other conditions do not exactly make things easier. There is the heat–it varies, but in some mines it is suffocating–and the coal dust that stuffs up your throat and nostrils and collects along your eyelids, and the unending rattle of the conveyor belt, which in that confined space is rather like the rattle of a machine gun. But the fillers look and work as though they were made of iron. They really do look like iron hammered iron statues–under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realize what splendid men, they are. Most of them are small (big men are at a disadvantage in that job) but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere. In the hotter mines they wear only a pair of thin drawers, clogs and knee-pads; in the hottest mines of all, only the clogs and knee-pads. You can hardly tell by the look of them whether they are

young or old. They may be any age up to sixty or even sixty-five, but when they are black and naked they all look alike. No one could do their work who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for a guardsman at that, just a few pounds of extra flesh on the waist-line, and the constant bending would be impossible. You can never forget that spectacle once you have seen it–the line of bowed, kneeling figures, sooty black all over, driving their, huge shovels under the coal with stupendous force and speed. They are on the job for seven and a half hours, theoretically without a break, for there is no time 'off'. Actually they, snatch a quarter of an hour or so at some time during the shift to eat the food they have brought with them, usually a hunk of bread and dripping and a bottle of cold tea. The first time I was watching the 'fillers' at work I put my hand upon some dreadful slimy thing among the coal dust. It was a chewed quid of tobacco. Nearly all the miners chew tobacco, which is said to be good against thirst.

Probably you have to go down several coal-mines before you can get much grasp of the processes that are going on round you. This is chiefly because the mere effort of getting from place to place; makes it difficult to notice anything else, In some ways it is even disappointing, or at least is unlike what you have, expected. You get into the cage, which is a steel box about as wide as a telephone box and two or three times as long. It holds ten men, but they pack it like pilchards in a tin, and a tall man cannot stand upright in it. The steel door shuts upon you, and somebody working the winding gear above drops you into the void. You have the usual momentary qualm in your belly and a bursting sensation in the cars, but not much sensation of movement till you get near the bottom, when the cage slows down so abruptly that you could swear it is going upwards again. In the middle of the run the cage probably touches sixty miles an hour; in some of the deeper mines it touches even more. When you crawl out at the bottom you are perhaps four hundred yards underground. That is to say you have a tolerable-sized mountain on top of you; hundreds of yards of solid rock, bones of extinct beasts, subsoil, flints, roots of growing things, green grass and cows grazing on it–all this suspended over your head and held back only by wooden props as thick as the calf of your leg. But because of the

speed at which the cage has brought you down, and the complete blackness through which you have travelled, you hardly feel yourself deeper down than you would at the bottom of the Piccadilly tube.

What is surprising, on the other hand, is the immense horizontal distances that have to be travelled underground. Before I had been down a mine I had vaguely imagined the miner stepping out of the cage and getting to work on a ledge of coal a few yards away. I had not realized that before he even gets to work he may have had to creep along passages as long as from London Bridge to Oxford Circus. In the beginning, of course, a mine shaft is sunk somewhere near a seam of coal; But as that seam is worked out and fresh seams are followed up, the workings get further and further from the pit bottom. If it is a mile from the pit bottom to the coal face, that is probably an average distance; three miles is a fairly normal one; there are even said to be a few mines where it is as much as five miles. But these distances bear no relation to distances above ground. For in all that mile or three miles as it may be, there is hardly anywhere outside the main road, and not many places even there, where a man can stand upright.

You do not notice the effect of this till you have gone a few hundred yards. You start off, stooping slightly, down the dim-lit gallery, eight or ten feet wide and about five high, with the walls built up with slabs of shale, like the stone walls in Derbyshire. Every yard or two there are wooden props holding up the beams and girders; some of the girders have buckled into fantastic curves under which you have to duck. Usually it is bad going underfoot–thick dust or jagged chunks of shale, and in some mines where there is water it is as mucky as a farm-yard. Also there is the track for the coal tubs, like a miniature railway track with sleepers a foot or two apart, which is tiresome to walk on. Everything is grey with shale dust; there is a dusty fiery smell which seems to be the same in all mines. You see mysterious machines of which you never learn the purpose, and bundles of tools slung together on wires, and sometimes mice darting away from the beam of the lamps. They are surprisingly common, especially in mines where there are or have been horses. It would be interesting to know how they got there in the first place; possibly by falling down the shaft–for they say a mouse can fall any distance

uninjured, owing to its surface area being so large relative to its weight. You press yourself against the wall to make way for lines of tubs jolting slowly towards the shaft, drawn by an endless steel cable operated from the surface. You creep through sacking curtains and thick wooden doors which, when they are opened, let out fierce blasts of air. These doors are an important part of the ventilation system. The exhausted air is sucked out of one shaft by means of fans, and the fresh air enters the other of its own accord. But if left to itself the air will take the shortest way round, leaving the deeper workings unventilated; so all the short cuts have to be partitioned off.

At the start to walk stooping is rather a joke, but it is a joke that soon wears off. I am handicapped by being exceptionally tall, but when the roof falls to four feet or less it is a tough job for anybody except a dwarf or a child. You not only have to bend double, you have also got to keep your head up all the while so as to see the beams and girders and dodge them when they come. You have, therefore, a constant crick in the neck, but this is nothing to the pain in your knees and thighs. After half a mile it becomes (I am not exaggerating) an unbearable agony. You begin to wonder whether you will ever get to the end–still more, how on earth you are going to get back. Your pace grows slower and slower. You come to a stretch of a couple of hundred yards where it is all exceptionally low and you have to work yourself along in a squatting position. Then suddenly the roof opens out to a mysterious height–scene of and old fall of rock, probably–and for twenty whole yards you can stand upright. The relief is overwhelming. But after this there is another low stretch of a hundred yards and then a succession of beams which you have to crawl under. You go down on all fours; even this is a relief after the squatting business. But when you come to the end of the beams and try to get up again, you find that your knees have temporarily struck work and refuse to lift you. You call a halt, ignominiously, and say that you would like to rest for a minute or two. Your guide (a miner) is sympathetic. He knows that your muscles are not the same as his. ‘Only another four hundred yards,’ he says encouragingly; you feel that he might as well say another four hundred miles. But finally you do somehow creep as far as the coal face. You have gone a mile and taken the best part of an hour; a

miner would do it in not much more than twenty minutes. Having got there, you have to sprawl in the coal dust and get your strength back for several minutes before you can even watch the work in progress with any kind of intelligence.

Coming back is worse than going, not only because you are already tired out but because the journey back to the shaft is slightly uphill. You get through the low places at the speed of a tortoise, and you have no shame now about calling a halt when your knees give way. Even the lamp you are carrying becomes a nuisance and probably when you stumble you drop it; whereupon, if it is a Davy lamp, it goes out. Ducking the beams becomes more and more of an effort, and sometimes you forget to duck. You try walking head down as the miners do, and then you bang your backbone. Even the miners bang their backbones fairly often. This is the reason why in very hot mines, where it is necessary to go about half naked, most of the miners have what they call 'buttons down the back'–that is, a permanent scab on each vertebra. When the track is down hill the miners sometimes fit their clogs, which are hollow under-neath, on to the trolley rails and slide down. In mines where the 'travelling' is very bad all the miners carry sticks about two and a half feet long, hollowed out below the handle. In normal places you keep your hand on top of the stick and in the low places you slide your hand down into the hollow. These sticks are a great help, and the wooden crash-helmets–a comparatively recent invention–are a godsend. They look like a French or Italian steel helmet, but they are made of some kind of pith and very light, and so strong, that you can take a violent blow on the head without feeling it. When finally you get back to the surface you have been perhaps three hours underground and travelled two miles, and you, are more exhausted than you would be by a twenty-five-mile walk above ground. For a week afterwards your thighs are so stiff that coming downstairs is quite a difficult feat; you have to work your way down in a peculiar sidelong manner, without bending the knees. Your miner friends notice the stiffness of your walk and chaff you about it. ('How'd ta like to work down pit, eh?' etc.) Yet even a miner who has been long away front work–from illness, for instance–when he comes back to the pit, suffers badly for the first few days.

It may seem that I am exaggerating, though no one who has been down an old-fashioned pit (most of the pits in England are old-fashioned) and actually gone as far as the coal face, is likely to say so. But what I want to emphasize is this. Here is this frightful business of crawling to and fro, which to any normal person is a hard day's work in itself; and it is not part of the miner's work at all, it is merely an extra, like the City man's daily ride in the Tube. The miner does that journey to and fro, and sandwiched in between there are seven and a half hours of savage work. I have never travelled much more than a mile to the coal face; but often it is three miles, in which case I and most people other than coal-miners would never get there at all. This is the kind of point that one is always liable to miss. When you think of the coal-mine you think of depth, heat, darkness, blackened figures hacking at walls of coal; you don't think, necessarily, of those miles of creeping to and fro. There is the question of time, also. A miner's working shift of seven and a half hours does not sound very long, but one has got to add on to it at least an hour a day for 'travelling', more often two hours and sometimes three. Of course, the 'travelling' is not technically work and the miner is not paid for it; but it is as like work as makes no difference. It is easy to say that miners don't mind all this. Certainly, it is not the same for them as it would be for you or me. They have done it since childhood, they have the right muscles hardened, and they can move to and fro underground with a startling and rather horrible agility. A miner puts his head down and runs, with a long swinging stride, through places where I can only stagger. At the workings you see them on all fours, skipping round the pit props almost like dogs. But it is quite a mistake to think that they enjoy it. I have talked about this to scores of miners and they all admit that the 'travelling' is hard work; in any case when you hear them discussing a pit among themselves the 'travelling' is always one of the things they discuss. It is said that a shift always returns from work faster than it goes; nevertheless the miners all say that it is the coming away after a hard day's work, that is especially irksome. It is part of their work and they are equal to it, but certainly it is an effort. It is comparable, perhaps, to climbing a smallish mountain before and after your day's work.

When you have been down in two or three pits you begin to get some grasp of the processes that are going on underground. (I ought to say, by the way, that I know nothing whatever about the technical side of mining: I am merely describing what I have seen.) Coal lies in thin seams between enormous layers of rock, so that essentially the process of getting it out is like scooping the central layer from a Neapolitan ice. In the old days the miners used to cut straight into the coal with pick and crowbar–a very slow job because coal, when lying in its virgin state, is almost as hard as rock. Nowadays the preliminary work is done by an electrically-driven coal-cutter, which in principle is an immensely tough and powerful band-saw, running horizontally instead of vertically, with teeth a couple of inches long and half an inch or an inch thick. It can move backwards or forwards on its own power, and the men operating it can rotate it this way or that. Incidentally it makes one of the most awful noises I have ever heard, and sends forth clouds of coal dust which make it impossible to see more than two to three feet and almost impossible to breathe. The machine travels along the coal face cutting into the base of the coal and undermining it to the depth of five feet or five feet and a half; after this it is comparatively easy to extract the coal to the depth to which it has been undermined. Where it is 'difficult getting', however, it has also to be loosened with explosives. A man with an electric drill, like a rather small version of the drills used in street-mending, bores holes at intervals in the coal, inserts blasting powder, plugs it with clay, goes round the corner if there is one handy (he is supposed to retire to twenty-five yards distance) and touches off the charge with an electric current. This is not intended to bring the coal out, only to loosen it. Occasionally, of course, the charge is too powerful, and then it not only brings the coal out but brings the roof down as well.

After the blasting has been done the 'fillers' can tumble the coal out, break it up and shovel it on to the conveyor belt. It comes out first in monstrous boulders which may weigh anything up to twenty tons. The conveyor belt shoots it on to tubs, and the tubs are shoved into the main road and hitched on to an endlessly revolving steel cable which drags them to the cage. Then they are hoisted, and at the surface the coal is sorted by being run over screens, and if necessary

is washed as well. As far as possible the 'dirt'–the shale, that is–is used for making the roads below. All what cannot be used is sent to the surface and dumped; hence the monstrous 'dirt-heaps', like hideous grey mountains, which are the characteristic scenery of the coal areas. When the coal has been extracted to the depth to which the machine has cut, the coal face has advanced by five feet. Fresh props are put in to hold up the newly exposed roof, and during the next shift the conveyor belt is taken to pieces, moved five feet forward and re-assembled. As far as possible the three operations of cutting, blasting and extraction are done in three separate shifts, the cutting in the afternoon, the blasting at night (there is a law, not always kept, that forbids its being done when other men are working near by), and the 'filling' in the morning shift, which lasts from six in the morning until half past one.

Even when you watch the process of coal-extraction you probably only watch it for a short time, and it is not until you begin making a few calculations that you realize what a stupendous task the 'fillers' are performing. Normally each o man has to clear a space four or five yards wide. The cutter has undermined the coal to the depth of five feet, so that if the seam of coal is three or four feet high, each man has to cut out, break up and load on to the belt something between seven and twelve cubic yards of coal. This is to say, taking a cubic yard as weighing twenty-seven hundred-weight, that each man is shifting coal at a speed approaching two tons an hour. I have just enough experience of pick and shovel work to be able to grasp what this means. When I am digging trenches in my garden, if I shift two tons of earth during the afternoon, I feel that I have earned my tea. But earth is tractable stuff compared with coal, and I don't have to work kneeling down, a thousand feet underground, in suffocating heat and swallowing coal dust with every breath I take; nor do I have to walk a mile bent double before I begin. The miner's job would be as much beyond my power as it would be to perform on a flying trapeze or to win the Grand National. I am not a manual labourer and please God I never shall be one, but there are some kinds of manual work that I could do if I had to. At a pitch I could be a tolerable road-sweeper or an inefficient gardener or even a tenth-rate farm hand. But by no conceivable amount of effort or training could I become a coal-

miner, the work would kill me in a few weeks.

Watching coal-miners at work, you realize momentarily what different universes people inhabit. Down there where coal is dug is a sort of world apart which one can quite easily go through life without ever hearing about. Probably majority of people would even prefer not to hear about it. Yet it is the absolutely necessary counterpart of our world above. Practically everything we do, from eating an ice to crossing the Atlantic, and from baking a loaf to writing a novel, involves the use of coal, directly or indirectly. For all the arts of peace coal is needed; if war breaks out it is needed all the more. In time of revolution the miner must go on working or the revolution must stop, for revolution as much as reaction needs coal. Whatever may be happening on the surface, the hacking and shovelling have got to continue without a pause, or at any rate without pausing for more than a few weeks at the most. In order that Hitler may march the goose-step, that the Pope may denounce Bolshevism, that the cricket crowds may assemble at Lords, that the poets may scratch one another's backs, coal has got to be forthcoming. But on the whole we are not aware of it; we all know that we 'must have coal', but we seldom or never remember what coal-getting involves. Here am I sitting writing in front of my comfortable coal fire. It is April but I still need a fire. Once a fortnight the coal cart drives up to the door and men in leather jerkins carry the coal indoors in stout sacks smelling of tar and shoot it clanking into the coal-hole under the stairs. It is only very rarely, when I make a definite mental-effort, that I connect this coal with that far-off labour in the mines. It is just 'coal'–something that I have got to have; black stuff that arrives mysteriously from nowhere in particular, like manna except that you have to pay for it. You could quite easily drive a car right across the north of England and never once remember that hundreds of feet below the road you are on the miners are hacking at the coal. Yet in a sense it is the miners who are driving your car forward. Their lamp-lit world down there is as necessary to the daylight world above as the root is to the flower.

It is not long since conditions in the mines were worse than they are now. There are still living a few very old women who in their youth have worked underground, with the harness round their waists,

and a chain that passed between their legs, crawling on all fours and dragging tubs of coal. They used to go on doing this even when they were pregnant. And even now, if coal could not be produced without pregnant women dragging it to and fro, I fancy we should let them do it rather than deprive ourselves of coal. But-most of the time, of course, we should prefer to forget that they were doing it. It is so with all types of manual work; it keeps us alive, and we are oblivious of its existence. More than anyone else, perhaps, the miner can stand as the type of the manual worker, not only because his work is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so vitally necessary and yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as it were, that we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins. In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal-miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an 'intellectual' and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the Times Lit. Supp., and the poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants–all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.

NORTH AND SOUTH (FROM "THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER") (1937)

As you travel northward your eye, accustomed to the South or East, does not notice much difference until you are beyond Birmingham. In Coventry you might as well be in Finsbury Park, and the Bull Ring in Birmingham is not unlike Norwich Market, and between all the towns of the Midlands there stretches a villa-civilization indistinguishable from that of the South. It is only when you get a little further north, to the pottery towns and beyond, that you begin to encounter the real ugliness of industrialism–an ugliness so frightful and so arresting that you are obliged, as it were, to come to terms with it.

A slag-heap is at best a hideous thing, because it is so planless and functionless. It is something just dumped on the earth, like the emptying of a giant's dust-bin. On the outskirts of the mining towns there are frightful landscapes where your horizon is ringed completely round by jagged grey mountains, and underfoot is mud and ashes and over-head the steel cables where tubs of dirt travel slowly across miles of country. Often the slag-heaps are on fire, and at night you can see the red rivulets of fire winding this way and that, and also the slow-moving blue flames of sulphur, which always seem on the point of expiring and always spring out again. Even when a slag-heap sinks, as it does ultimately, only an evil brown grass grows on it, and it retains its hummocky surface. One in the slums of Wigan, used as a playground, looks like a choppy sea suddenly frozen; 'the flock mattress', it is called locally. Even centuries hence when the plough drives over the places where coal was once mined, the sites of ancient slag-heaps will still be distinguishable from an aeroplane.

I remember a winter afternoon in the dreadful environs of Wigan. All round was the lunar landscape of slag-heaps, and to the north, through the passes, as it were, between the mountains of slag, you could see the factory chimneys sending out their plumes of smoke. The canal path was a mixture of cinders and frozen mud, criss-crossed by the imprints of innumerable clogs, and all round, as far as

the slag-heaps in the distance, stretched the 'flashes'–pools of stagnant water that had seeped into the hollows caused by the subsidence of ancient pits. It was horribly cold. The 'flashes' were covered with ice the colour of raw umber, the bargemen were muffled to the eyes in sacks, the lock gates wore beards of ice. It seemed a world from which vegetation had been banished; nothing existed except smoke, shale, ice, mud, ashes, and foul water. But even Wigan is beautiful compared with Sheffield. Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World: its inhabitants, who want it to be pre-eminent in everything, very likely do make that claim for it. It has a population of half a million and it contains fewer decent buildings than the average East Anglian village of five hundred. And the stench! If at rare moments you stop smelling sulphur it is because you have begun smelling gas. Even the shallow river that runs through the town is-usually bright yellow with some chemical or other. Once I halted in the street and counted the factory chimneys I could see; there were thirty-three of them, but there would have been far more if the air had not been obscured by smoke. One scene especially lingers in my mind. A frightful patch of waste ground (somehow, up there, a patch of waste ground attains a squalor that would be impossible even in London) trampled bare of grass and littered with newspapers and old saucepans. To the right an isolated row of gaunt four-roomed houses, dark red, blackened by smoke. To the left an interminable vista of factory chimneys, chimney beyond chimney, fading away into a dim blackish haze. Behind me a railway embankment made of the slag from furnaces. In front, across the patch of waste ground, a cubical building of red and yellow brick, with the sign 'Thomas Grocock, Haulage Contractor'.

At night, when you cannot see the hideous shapes of the houses and the blackness of everything, a town like Sheffield assumes a kind of sinister magnificence. Sometimes the drifts of smoke are rosy with sulphur, and serrated flames, like circular saws, squeeze themselves out from beneath the cowls of the foundry chimneys. Through the open doors of foundries you see fiery serpents of iron being hauled to and fro by redlit boys, and you hear the whizz and thump of steam hammers and the scream of the iron under the blow. The pottery

towns are almost equally ugly in a pettier way. Right in among the rows of tiny blackened houses, part of the street as it were, are the 'pot banks'–conical brick chimneys like gigantic burgundy bottles buried in the soil and belching their smoke almost in your face. You come upon monstrous clay chasms hundreds of feet across and almost as deep, with little rusty tubs creeping on chain railways up one side, and on the other workmen clinging like samphire-gatherers and cutting into the face of the cliff with their picks. I passed that way in snowy weather, and even the snow was black. The best thing one can say for the pottery towns is that they are fairly small and stop abruptly. Less than ten miles away you can stand in un-defiled country, on the almost naked hills, and the pottery towns are only a smudge in the distance.

When you contemplate such ugliness as this, there are two questions that strike you. First, is it inevitable? Secondly, does it matter?

I do not believe that there is anything inherently and unavoidably ugly about industrialism. A factory or even a gasworks is not obliged of its own nature to be ugly, any more than a palace or a dog-kennel or a cathedral. It all depends on the architectural tradition of the period. The industrial towns of the North are ugly because they happen to have been built at a time when modern methods of steel-construction and smoke-abatement were unknown, and when everyone was too busy making money to think about anything else. They go on being ugly largely because the Northerners have got used to that kind of thing and do not notice it. Many of the people in Sheffield or Manchester, if they smelled the air along the Cornish cliffs, would probably declare that it had no taste in it. But since the war, industry has tended to shift southward and in doing so has grown almost comely. The typical post-war factory is not a gaunt barrack or an awful chaos of blackness and belching chimneys; it is a glittering white structure of concrete, glass, and steel, surrounded by green lawns and beds of tulips. Look at the factories you pass as you travel out of London on the G.W.R.; they may not be aesthetic triumphs but certainly they are not ugly in the same way as the Sheffield gasworks. But in any case, though the ugliness of industrialism is the most obvious thing about it and the thing every

newcomer exclaims against, I doubt whether it is centrally important. And perhaps it is not even desirable, industrialism being what it is, that it should learn to disguise itself as something else. As Mr Aldous Huxley has truly remarked, a dark Satanic mill ought to look like a dark Satanic mill and not like the temple of mysterious and splendid gods. Moreover, even in the worst of the industrial towns one sees a great deal that is not ugly in the narrow aesthetic sense. A belching chimney or a stinking slum is repulsive chiefly because it implies warped lives and ailing children. Look at it from a purely aesthetic standpoint and it may, have a certain macabre appeal. I find that anything outrageously strange generally ends by fascinating me even when I abominate it. The landscapes of Burma, which, when I was among them, so appalled me as to assume the qualities of nightmare, afterwards stayed so hauntingly in my mind that I was obliged to write a novel about them to get rid of them. (In all novels about the East the scenery is the real subject-matter.) It would probably be quite easy to extract a sort of beauty, as Arnold Bennett did, from the blackness of the industrial towns; one can easily imagine Baudelaire, for instance, writing a poem about a slag-heap. But the beauty or ugliness of industrialism hardly matters. Its real evil lies far deeper and is quite uneradicable. It is important to remember this, because there is always a temptation to think that industrialism is harmless so long as it is clean and orderly.

But when you go to the industrial North you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but still more because of the North-South antithesis which has been rubbed into us for such a long time past. There exists in England a curious cult of Northernness, sort of Northern snobbishness. A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know that he regards you as an inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain that it is only in the North that life is ‘real’ life, that the industrial work done in the North is the only ‘real’ work, that the North is inhabited by ‘real’ people, the South merely by rentiers and their parasites. The Northerner has ‘grit’, he is grim, ‘dour’, plucky, warm-hearted, and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate, and lazy–that at any rate is the theory. Hence the Southerner goes north, at any rate

for the first time, with the vague inferiority-complex of a civilized man venturing among savages, while the Yorkshireman, like the Scotchman, comes to London in the spirit of a barbarian out for loot. And feelings of this kind, which are the result of tradition, are not affected by visible facts. Just as an Englishman five feet four inches high and twenty-nine inches round the chest feels that as an Englishman he is the physical superior of Camera (Camera being a Dago), so also with the Northerner and the Southerner. I remember a weedy little Yorkshireman, who would almost certainly have run away if a fox-terrier had snapped at him, telling me that in the South of England he felt 'like a wild invader'. But the cult is often adopted by people who are not by birth Northerners themselves. A year or two ago a friend of mine, brought up in the South but now living in the North, was driving me through Suffolk in a car. We passed through a rather beautiful village. He glanced disapprovingly at the cottages and said:

'Of course most of the villages in Yorkshire are hideous; but the Yorkshiremen are splendid chaps. Down here it's just the other way about–beautiful villages and rotten people. All the people in those cottages there are worthless, absolutely worthless.'

I could not help inquiring whether he happened to know anybody in that village. No, he did not know them; but because this was East Anglia they were obviously worthless. Another friend of mine, again a Southerner by birth, loses no opportunity of praising the North to the detriment of the South. Here is an extract from one of his letters to me:

I am in Clitheroe, Lanes...I think running water is much more attractive in moor and mountain country than in the fat and sluggish South. 'The smug and silver Trent,' Shakespeare says; and the South–er the smugger, I say.

Here you have an interesting example of the Northern cult. Not only are you and I and everyone else in the South of England written off as 'fat and sluggish', but even water when it gets north of a certain latitude, ceases to be H2O and becomes something mystically superior. But the interest of this passage is that its writer is an extremely intelligent man of 'advanced' opinions who would have nothing but con-tempt for nationalism in its ordinary form. Put to

him some such proposition as 'One Britisher is worth three foreigners', and he would repudiate it with horror. But when it is a question of North versus South, he is quite ready to generalize. All nationalistic distinctions–all claims to be better than somebody else because you have a different-shaped skull or speak a different dialect–are entirely spurious, but they are important so long as people believe in them. There is no doubt about the Englishman's inbred conviction that those who live to the south of him are his inferiors; even our foreign policy is governed by it to some extent. I think, therefore, that it is worth pointing out when and why it came into being.

When nationalism first became a religion, the English looked at the map, and, noticing that their island lay very high in the Northern Hemisphere, evolved the pleasing theory that the further north you live the more virtuous you become. The histories I was given when I was a little boy generally started off by explaining in the naivest way that a cold climate made people energetic while a hot one made them lazy, and hence the defeat of the Spanish Armada. This nonsense about the superior energy of the English (actually the laziest people in Europe) has been current for at least a hundred years. 'Better is it for us', writes a Quarterly Reviewer of 1827, 'to be condemned to labour for our country's good than to luxuriate amid olives, vines, and vices.' 'Olives, vines, and vices' sums up the normal English attitude towards the Latin races. In the mythology of Garlyle, Creasey, etc., the Northerner ('Teutonic', later 'Nordic') is pictured as a hefty, vigorous chap with blond moustaches and pure morals, while the Southerner is sly, cowardly, and licentious. This theory was never pushed to its logical end, which would have meant assuming that the finest people in the world were the Eskimos, but it did involve admitting that the people who lived to the north of us were superior to ourselves. Hence, partly, the cult of Scotland and of Scotch things which has so deeply marked English life during the past fifty years. But it was the industrialization of the North that gave the North-South antithesis its peculiar slant. Until comparatively recently the northern part of England was the backward and feudal part, and such industry as existed was concentrated in London and the South-East. In the Civil War for instance, roughly speaking a war

of money versus feudalism, the North and West were for the King and the South and East for the Parliament. But with the increasing use of coal industry passed to the North, and there grew up a new type of man, the self-made Northern business man–the Mr Rouncewell and Mr Bounderby of Dickens. The Northern business man, with his hateful 'get on or get out' philosophy, was the dominant figure of the nineteenth century, and as a sort of tyrannical corpse he rules us still. This is the type edified by Arnold Bennett–the type who starts off with half a crown and ends up with fifty thousand pounds, and whose chief pride is to be an even greater boor after he has made his money than before. On analysis his sole virtue turns out to be a talent for making money. We were bidden to admire him because though he might be narrow-minded, sordid, ignorant, grasping, and uncouth, he had 'grit', he 'got on'; in other words, he knew how to make money.

This kind of cant is nowadays a pure anachronism, for the Northern business man is no longer prosperous. But traditions are not killed by facts, and the tradition of Northern' grit' lingers. It is still dimly felt that a Northerner will 'get on', i.e. make money, where a Southerner will fail. At the back of the mind of every Yorkshireman and every Scotchman who comes to London is a sort of Dick Whittington picture of himself as the boy who starts off by selling newspapers and ends up as Lord Mayor. And that, really, is at the bottom of his bumptiousness. But where one can make a great mistake is in imagining that this feeling extends to the genuine working class. When I first went to Yorkshire, some years ago, I imagined that I was going to a country of boors. I was used to the London Yorkshireman with his interminable harangues and his pride in the sup-posed raciness of his dialect (' "A stitch in time saves nine", as we say in the West Riding'), and I expected to meet with a good deal of rudeness. But I met with nothing of the kind, and least of all among the miners. Indeed the Lancashire and Yorkshire miners treated me with a kindness and courtesy that were even embarrassing; for if there is one type of man to whom I do feel myself inferior, it is a coal-miner. Certainly no one showed any sign of despising me for coming from a different part of the country. This has its importance when one remembers that the English regional

snobberies are nationalism in miniature; for it suggests that place-snobbery is not a working-class characteristic.

There is nevertheless a real difference between North and South, and there is at least a tinge of truth in that picture of Southern England as one enormous Brighton inhabited by lounge-lizards. For climatic reasons the parasitic dividend-drawing class tend to settle in the South. In a Lancashire cotton-town you could probably go for months on end without once hearing an 'educated' accent, whereas there can hardly be a town in the South of England where you could throw a brick without hitting the niece of a bishop. Consequently, with no petty gentry to set the pace, the bourgeoisification of the working class, though it is taking place in the North, is taking place more slowly. All the Northern accents, for instance, persist strongly, while the Southern ones are collapsing before the movies and the B.B.C. Hence your 'educated' accent stamps you rather as a foreigner than as a chunk of the petty gentry; and this is an immense advantage, for it makes it much easier to get into contact with the working class.

But is it ever possible to be really intimate with the working class? I shall have to discuss that later; I will only say here that I do not think it is possible. But undoubtedly it is easier in the North than it would be in the South to meet working-class people on approximately equal terms. It is fairly easy to live in a miner's house and be accepted as one of the family; with, say, a farm labourer in the Southern counties it probably would be impossible. I have seen just enough of the working class to avoid idealizing them, but I do know that you can learn a great deal in a working-class home, if only you can get there. The essential point is that your middle-class ideals and prejudices are tested by contact with others which are not necessarily better but are certainly different.

Take for instance the different attitude towards the family. A working-class family hangs together as a middle-class one does, but the relationship is far less tyrannical. A working man has not that deadly weight of family prestige hanging round his neck like a millstone. I have pointed out earlier that a middle-class person goes utterly to pieces under the influence of poverty; and this is generally due to the behaviour of his family–to the fact that he has scores of

relations nagging and badgering him night and day for failing to 'get on'. The fact that the working class know how to combine and the middle class don't is probably due to their different conceptions of family loyalty. You cannot have an effective trade union of middle-class workers, be-cause in times of strikes almost every middle-class wife would be egging her husband on to blackleg and get the other fellow's job. Another working-class characteristic, disconcerting at first, is their plain-spokenness towards anyone they regard as an equal. If you offer a working man something he doesn't want, he tells you that he doesn't want it; a middle-class person would accept it to avoid giving offence. And again, take the working-class attitude towards 'education'. How different it is from ours, and how immensely sounder! Working people often have a vague reverence for learning in others, but where 'education' touches their own lives they see through it and reject it by a healthy instinct. The time was when I used to lament over quite imaginary pictures of lads of fourteen dragged protesting from their lessons and set to work at dismal jobs. It seemed to me dreadful that the doom of a 'job' should descend upon anyone at fourteen. Of course I know now that there is not one working-class boy in a thousand who does not pine for the day when he will leave school. He wants to be doing real work, not wasting his time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography. To the working class, the notion of staying at school till you are nearly grown-up seems merely contemptible and unmanly. The idea of a great big boy of eighteen, who ought to be bringing a pound a week home to his parents, going to school in a ridiculous uniform and even being caned for not doing his lessons! Just fancy a working-class boy of eighteen allowing himself to be caned! He is a man when the other is still a baby. Ernest Pontifex, in Samuel Butler's Way of All Flesh, after he had had a few glimpses of real life, looked back on his public school and university education and found it a 'sickly, debilitating debauch'. There is much in middle-class life that looks sickly and debilitating when you see it from a working-class angle.

In a working-class home–I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes–you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to

find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages–an 'if which gets bigger and bigger–has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated' man. His home life seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape. I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best. Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat–it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted.

This scene is still reduplicated in a majority of English homes, though not in so many as before the war. Its happiness depends mainly upon one question–whether Father is in work. But notice that the picture I have called up, of a working-class family sitting round the coal fire after kippers and strong tea, belongs only to our own moment of time and could not belong either to the future or the past. Skip forward two hundred years into the Utopian future, and the scene is totally different. Hardly one of the things I have imagined will still be there. In that age when there is no manual labour and everyone is 'educated', it is hardly likely that Father will still be a rough man with enlarged hands who likes to sit in shirt-sleeves and says 'Ah wur coomin' oop street'. And there won't be a coal fire in the grate, only some kind of invisible heater. The furniture will be made of rubber, glass, and steel. If there are still such things as evening papers there will certainly be no racing news in them, for gambling will be meaningless in a world where there is no poverty and the horse will have vanished from the face of the earth. Dogs, too, will have been suppressed on grounds of hygiene. And there won't be so many children, either, if the birth-controllers have their way. But move backwards into the Middle Ages and you are in a world almost equally foreign. A windowless hut, a wood fire which smokes in your face because there is no chimney, mouldy bread, 'Poor John', lice, scurvy, a yearly child-birth and a yearly child-

death, and the priest terrifying you with tales of Hell.

Curiously enough it is not the triumphs of modern engineering, nor the radio, nor the cinematograph, nor the five thousand novels which are published yearly, nor the crowds at Ascot and the Eton and Harrow match, but the memory of working-class interiors–especially as I sometimes saw them in my childhood before the war, when England was still prosperous–that reminds me that our age has not been altogether a bad one to live in.

SPILLING THE SPANISH BEANS (1937)

The Spanish war has probably produced a richer crop of lies than any event since the Great War of 1914-18, but I honestly doubt, in spite of all those hecatombs of nuns who have been raped and crucified before the eyes of DAILY MAIL reporters, whether it is the pro-Fascist newspapers that have done the most harm. It is the left-wing papers, the NEWS CHRONICLE and the DAILY WORKER, with their far subtler methods of distortion, that have prevented the British public from grasping the real nature of the struggle.

The fact which these papers have so carefully obscured is that the Spanish Government (including the semi-autonomous Catalan Government) is far more afraid of the revolution than of the Fascists. It is now almost certain that the war will end with some kind of compromise, and there is even reason to doubt whether the Government, which let Bilbao fail without raising a finger, wishes to be too victorious; but there is no doubt whatever about the thoroughness with which it is crushing its own revolutionaries. For some time past a reign of terror–forcible suppression of political parties, a stifling censorship of the press, ceaseless espionage and mass imprisonment without trial–has been in progress. When I left Barcelona in late June the jails were bulging; indeed, the regular jails had long since overflowed and the prisoners were being huddled into empty shops and any other temporary dump that could be found for them. But the point to notice is that the people who are in prison now are not Fascists but revolutionaries; they are there not because their opinions are too much to the Right, but because they are too much to the Left. And the people responsible for putting them there are those dreadful revolutionaries at whose very name Garvin quakes in his galoshes–the Communists.

Meanwhile the war against Franco continues, but, except for the poor devils in the front-line trenches, nobody in Government Spain thinks of it as the real war. The real struggle is between revolution and counter-revolution; between the workers who are vainly trying to hold on to a little of what they won in 1936, and the Liberal-Communist bloc who are so successfully taking it away from them. It

is unfortunate that so few people in England have yet caught up with the fact that Communism is now a counter-revolutionary force; that Communists everywhere are in alliance with bourgeois reformism and using the whole of their powerful machinery to crush or discredit any party that shows signs of revolutionary tendencies. Hence the grotesque spectacle of Communists assailed as wicked 'Reds' by right-wing intellectuals who are in essential agreement with them. Mr Wyndham Lewis, for instance, ought to love the Communists, at least temporarily. In Spain the Communist-Liberal alliance has been almost completely victorious. Of all that the Spanish workers won for themselves in 1936 nothing solid remains, except for a few collective farms and a certain amount of land seized by the peasants last year; and presumably even the peasants will be sacrificed later, when there is no longer any need to placate them. To see how the present situation arose, one has got to look back to the origins of the civil war.

Franco's bid for power differed from those of Hitler and Mussolini in that it was a military insurrection, comparable to a foreign invasion, and therefore had not much mass backing, though Franco has since been trying to acquire one. Its chief supporters, apart from certain sections of Big Business, were the land-owning aristocracy and the huge, parasitic Church. Obviously a rising of this kind will array against it various forces which are not in agreement on any other point. The peasant and the worker hate feudalism and clericalism; but so does the 'liberal' bourgeois, who is not in the least opposed to a more modern version of Fascism, at least so long as it isn't called Fascism. The 'liberal' bourgeois is genuinely liberal up to the point where his own interests stop. He stands for the degree of progress implied in the phrase 'la carrière ouverte aux talents'. For clearly he has no chance to develop in a feudal society where the worker and the peasant are too poor to buy goods, where industry is burdened with huge taxes to pay for bishops' vestments, and where every lucrative job is given as a matter of course to the friend of the catamite of the duke's illegitimate son. Hence, in the face of such a blatant reactionary as Franco, you get for a while a situation in which the worker and the bourgeois, in reality deadly enemies, are fighting side by side. This uneasy alliance is known as the Popular Front (or,

in the Communist press, to give it a spuriously democratic appeal, People's Front). It is a combination with about as much vitality, and about as much right to exist, as a pig with two heads or some other Barnum and Bailey monstrosity.

In any serious emergency the contradiction implied in the Popular Front is bound to make itself felt. For even when the worker and the bourgeois are both fighting against Fascism, they are not fighting for the same things; the bourgeois is fighting for bourgeois democracy, i.e. capitalism, the worker, in so far as he understands the issue, for Socialism. And in the early days of the revolution the Spanish workers understood the issue very well. In the areas where Fascism was defeated they did not content themselves with driving the rebellious troops out of the towns; they also took the opportunity of seizing land and factories and setting up the rough beginnings of a workers' government by means of local committees, workers' militias, police forces, and so forth. They made the mistake, however (possibly because most of the active revolutionaries were Anarchists with a mistrust of all parliaments), of leaving the Republican Government in nominal control. And, in spite of various changes in personnel, every subsequent Government had been of approximately the same bourgeois-reformist character. At the beginning this seemed not to matter, because the Government, especially in Catalonia, was almost powerless and the bourgeoisie had to lie low or even (this was still happening when I reached Spain in December) to disguise themselves as workers. Later, as power slipped from the hands of the Anarchists into the hands of the Communists and right-wing Socialists, the Government was able to reassert itself, the bourgeoisie came out of hiding and the old division of society into rich and poor reappeared, not much modified. Henceforward every move, except a few dictated by military emergency, was directed towards undoing the work of the first few months of revolution. Out of the many illustrations I could choose, I will cite only one, the breaking-up of the old workers' militias, which were organized on a genuinely democratic system, with officers and men receiving the same pay and mingling on terms of complete equality, and the substitution of the Popular Army (once again, in Communist jargon, 'People's Army'), modelled as far as possible on an ordinary bourgeois army, with a

privileged officer-caste, immense differences of pay, etc. etc. Needless to say, this is given out as a military necessity, and almost certainly it does make for military efficiency, at least for a short period. But the undoubted purpose of the change was to strike a blow at equalitarianism. In every department the same policy has been followed, with the result that only a year after the outbreak of war and revolution you get what is in effect an ordinary bourgeois State, with, in addition, a reign of terror to preserve the status quo.

This process would probably have gone less far if the struggle could have taken place without foreign interference. But the military weakness of the Government made this impossible. In the face of France's foreign mercenaries they were obliged to turn to Russia for help, and though the quantity of arms sup–plied by Russia has been greatly exaggerated (in my first three months in Spain I saw only one Russian weapon, a solitary machine-gun), the mere fact of their arrival brought the Communists into power. To begin with, the Russian aeroplanes and guns, and the good military qualities of the international Brigades (not necessarily Communist but under Communist control), immensely raised the Communist prestige. But, more important, since Russia and Mexico were the only countries openly supplying arms, the Russians were able not only to get money for their weapons, but to extort terms as well. Put in their crudest form, the terms were: 'Crush the revolution or you get no more arms.' The reason usually given for the Russian attitude is that if Russia appeared to be abetting the revolution, the Franco-Soviet pact (and the hoped-for alliance with Great Britain) would be imperilled; it may be, also, that the spectacle of a genuine revolution in Spain would rouse unwanted echoes in Russia. The Communists, of course, deny that any direct pressure has been exerted by the Russian Government. But this, even if true, is hardly relevant, for the Communist Parties of all countries can be taken as carrying out Russian policy; and it is certain that the Spanish Communist Party, plus the right-wing Socialists whom they control, plus the Communist press of the whole world, have used all their immense and ever-increasing influence upon the side of counter-revolution.

In the first half of this article I suggested that the real struggle in Spain, on the Government side, has been between revolution and

counter-revolution; that the Government, though anxious enough to avoid being beaten by Franco, has been even more anxious to undo the revolutionary changes with which the outbreak of war was accompanied.

Any Communist would reject this suggestion as mistaken or wilfully dishonest. He would tell you that it is nonsense to talk of the Spanish Government crushing the revolution, because the revolution never happened; and that our job at present is to defeat Fascism and defend democracy. And in this connexion it is most important to see just how the Communist anti-revolutionary propaganda works. It is a mistake to think that this has no relevance in England, where the Communist Party is small and comparatively weak. We shall see its relevance quickly enough if England enters into an alliance with the U.S.S.R.; or perhaps even earlier, for the influence of the Communist Party is bound to increase–visibly is increasing–as more and more of the capitalist class realize that latter-day Communism is playing their game.

Broadly speaking, Communist propaganda depends upon terrifying people with the (quite real) horrors of Fascism. It also involves pretending–not in so many words, but by implication–that Fascism has nothing to do with capitalism. Fascism is just a kind of meaningless wickedness, an aberration, 'mass sadism', the sort of thing that would happen if you suddenly let loose an asylumful of homicidal maniacs. Present Fascism in this form, and you can mobilize public opinion against it, at any rate for a while, without provoking any revolutionary movement. You can oppose Fascism by bourgeois 'democracy, meaning capitalism. But meanwhile you have got to get rid of the troublesome person who points out that Fascism and bourgeois 'democracy' are Tweedledum and Tweedledee. You do it at the beginning by calling him an impracticable visionary. You tell him that he is confusing the issue, that he is splitting the anti-Fascist forces, that this is not the moment for revolutionary phrase-mongering, that for the moment we have got to fight against Fascism without inquiring too closely what we are fighting for. Later, if he still refuses to shut up, you change your tune and call him a traitor. More exactly, you call him a Trotskyist.

And what is a Trotskyist? This terrible word–in Spain at this

moment you can be thrown into jail and kept there indefinitely, without trial, on the mere rumour that you are a Trotskyist–is only beginning to be bandied to and fro in England. We shall be hearing more of it later. The word 'Trotskyist' (or 'Trotsky-Fascist') is generally used to mean a disguised Fascist who poses as an ultra-revolutionary in order to split the left-wing forces. But it derives its peculiar power from the fact that it means three separate things. It can mean one who, like Trotsky, wished for world revolution; or a member of the actual organization of which Trotsky is head (the only legitimate use of the word); or the disguised Fascist already mentioned. The three meanings can be telescoped one into the other at will. Meaning No. 1 may or may not carry with it meaning No. 2, and meaning No. 2 almost invariably carries with it meaning No. 3. Thus: 'XY has been heard to speak favourably of world revolution; therefore he is a Trotskyist; therefore he is a Fascist.' In Spain, to some extent even in England, ANYONE professing revolutionary Socialism (i.e. professing the things the Communist Party professed until a few years ago) is under suspicion of being a Trotskyist in the pay of Franco or Hitler.

The accusation is a very subtle one, because in any given case, unless one happened to know the contrary, it might be true. A Fascist spy probably WOULD disguise himself as a revolutionary. In Spain, everyone whose opinions are to the Left of those of the Communist Party is sooner or later discovered to be a Trotskyist or, at least, a traitor. At the beginning of the war the POUM, an opposition Communist party roughly corresponding to the English ILP., was an accepted party and supplied a minister to the Catalan Government, later it was expelled from the Government; then it was denounced as Trotskyist; then it was suppressed, every member that the police could lay their hands on being flung into jail.

Until a few months ago the Anarcho-Syndicalists were described as 'working loyally' beside the Communists. Then the Anarcho-Syndicalists were levered out of the Government; then it appeared that they were not working so loyally; now they are in the process of becoming traitors. After that will come the turn of the left-wing Socialists. Caballero, the left-wing Socialist ex-premier, until May 1937 the idol of the Communist press, is already in outer darkness, a

Trotskyist and 'enemy of the people'. And so the game continues. The logical end is a régime in which every opposition party and newspaper is suppressed and every dissentient of any importance is in jail. Of course, such a régime will be Fascism. It will not be the same as the fascism Franco would impose, it will even be better than Franco's fascism to the extent of being worth fighting for, but it will be Fascism. Only, being operated by Communists and Liberals, it will be called something different.

Meanwhile, can the war be won? The Communist influence has been against revolutionary chaos and has therefore, apart from the Russian aid, tended to produce greater military efficiency. If the Anarchists saved the Government from August to October 1936, the Communists have saved it from October onwards. But in organizing the defence they have succeeded in killing enthusiasm (inside Spain, not outside). They made a militarized conscript army possible, but they also made it necessary. It is significant that as early as January of this year voluntary recruiting had practically ceased. A revolutionary army can sometimes win by enthusiasm, but a conscript army has got to win with weapons, and it is unlikely that the Government will ever have a large preponderance of arms unless France intervenes or unless Germany and Italy decide to make off with the Spanish colonies and leave Franco in the lurch. On the whole, a deadlock seems the likeliest thing.

And does the Government seriously intend to win? It does not intend to lose, that is certain. On the other hand, an outright victory, with Franco in flight and the Germans and Italians driven into the sea, would raise difficult problems, some of them too obvious to need mentioning. There is no real evidence and one can only judge by the event, but I suspect that what the Government is playing for is a compromise that would leave the war situation essentially in being. All prophecies are wrong, therefore this one will be wrong, but I will take a chance and say that though the war may end quite soon or may drag on for years, it will end with Spain divided up, either by actual frontiers or into economic zones. Of course, such a compromise might be claimed as a victory by either side, or by both.

All that I have said in this article would seem entirely commonplace in Spain, or even in France. Yet in England, in spite of

the intense interest the Spanish war has aroused, there are very few people who have even heard of the enormous struggle that is going on behind the Government lines. Of course, this is no accident. There has been a quite deliberate conspiracy (I could give detailed instances) to prevent the Spanish situation from being understood. People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the ground that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda.

It is easy to see where such cowardice leads. If the British public had been given a truthful account of the Spanish war they would have had an opportunity of learning what Fascism is and how it can be combated. As it is, the News Chronicle version of Fascism as a kind of homicidal mania peculiar to Colonel Blimps bombinating in the economic void has been established more firmly than ever. And thus we are one step nearer to the great war 'against Fascism' (cf. 1914, 'against militarism') which will allow Fascism, British variety, to be slipped over our necks during the first week.

MARRAKECH (1939)

As the corpse went past the flies left the restaurant table in a cloud and rushed after it, but they came back a few minutes later.

The little crowd of mourners-all men and boys, no women–threaded their way across the market-place between the piles of pomegranates and the taxis and the camels, wailing a short chant over and over again. What really appeals to the flies is that the corpses here are never put into coffins, they are merely wrapped in a piece of rag and carried on a rough wooden bier on the shoulders of four friends. When the friends get to the burying-ground they hack an oblong hole a foot or two deep, dump the body in it and fling over it a little of the dried-up, lumpy earth, which is like broken brick. No gravestone, no name, no identifying mark of any kind. The burying-ground is merely a huge waste of hummocky earth, like a derelict building-lot. After a month or two no one can even be certain where his own relatives are buried.

When you walk through a town like this–two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing except the rags they stand up in–when you see how the people live, and still more how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings. All colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact. The people have brown faces–besides, there are so many of them! Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? They rise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone. And even the graves themselves soon fade back into the soil. Sometimes, out for a walk, as you break your way through the prickly pear, you notice that it is rather bumpy underfoot, and only a certain regularity in the bumps tells you that you are walking over skeletons.

I was feeding one of the gazelles in the public gardens.

Gazelles are almost the only animals that look good to eat when they are still alive, in fact, one can hardly look at their hindquarters

without thinking of mint sauce. The gazelle I was feeding seemed to know that this thought was in my mind, for though it took the piece of bread I was holding out it obviously did not like me. It nibbled rapidly at the bread, then lowered its head and tried to butt me, then took another nibble and then butted again. Probably its idea was that if it could drive me away the bread would somehow remain hanging in mid-air.

An Arab navvy working on the path nearby lowered his heavy hoe and sidled towards us. He looked from the gazelle to the bread and from the bread to the gazelle, with a sort of quiet amazement, as though he had never seen anything quite like this before. Finally he said shyly in French:

"*I* could eat some of that bread."

I tore off a piece and he stowed it gratefully in some secret place under his rags. This man is an employee of the Municipality.

When you go through the Jewish quarters you gather some idea of what the medieval ghettoes were probably like. Under their Moorish rulers the Jews were only allowed to own land in certain restricted areas, and after centuries of this kind of treatment they have ceased to bother about overcrowding. Many of the streets are a good deal less than six feet wide, the houses are completely windowless, and sore-eyed children cluster everywhere in unbelievable numbers, like clouds of flies. Down the centre of the street there is generally running a little river of urine.

In the bazaar huge families of Jews, all dressed in the long black robe and little black skull-cap, are working in dark fly-infested booths that look like caves. A carpenter sits cross-legged at a prehistoric lathe, turning chair-legs at lightning speed. He works the lathe with a bow in his right hand and guides the chisel with his left foot, and thanks to a lifetime of sitting in this position his left leg is warped out of shape. At his side his grandson, aged six, is already starting on the simpler parts of the job.

I was just passing the coppersmiths' booths when somebody noticed that I was lighting a cigarette. Instantly, from the dark holes all round, there was a frenzied rush of Jews, many of them old grandfathers with flowing grey beards, all clamouring for a cigarette. Even a blind man somewhere at the back of one of the booths heard a

rumour of cigarettes and came crawling out, groping in the air with his hand. In about a minute I had used up the whole packet. None of these people, I suppose, works less than twelve hours a day, and every one of them looks on a cigarette as a more or less impossible luxury.

As the Jews live in self-contained communities they follow the same trades as the Arabs, except for agriculture. Fruit-sellers, potters, silversmiths, blacksmiths, butchers, leather-workers, tailors, water-carriers, beggars, porters–whichever way you look you see nothing but Jews. As a matter of fact there are thirteen thousand of them, all living in the space of a few acres. A good job Hitler isn't here. Perhaps he is on his way, however. You hear the usual dark rumours about the Jews, not only from the Arabs but from the poorer Europeans.

"Yes, MON VIEUX, they took my job away from me and gave it to a Jew. The Jews! They're the real rulers of this country, you know. They've got all the money. They control the banks, finance–everything."

"But," I said, "isn't it a fact that the average Jew is a labourer working for about a penny an hour?"

"Ah, that's only for show! They're all money-lenders really. They're cunning, the Jews."

In just the same way, a couple of hundred years ago, poor old women used to be burned for witchcraft when they could not even work enough magic to get themselves a square meal.

All people who work with their hands are partly invisible, and the more important the work they do, the less visible they are. Still, a white skin is always fairly conspicuous. In northern Europe, when you see a labourer ploughing a field, you probably give him a second glance. In a hot country, anywhere south of Gibraltar or east of Suez, the chances are that you don't even see him. I have noticed this again and again. In a tropical landscape one's eye takes in everything except the human beings. It takes in the dried-up soil, the prickly pear, the palm-tree and the distant mountain, but it always misses the peasant hoeing at his patch. He is the same colour as the earth, and a great deal less interesting to look at.

It is only because of this that the starved countries of Asia and

Africa are accepted as tourist resorts. No one would think of running cheap trips to the Distressed Areas. But where the human beings have brown skins their poverty is simply not noticed. What does Morocco mean to a Frenchman? An orange-grove or a job in government service. Or to an Englishman? Camels, castles, palm-trees, Foreign Legionnaires, brass trays and bandits. One could probably live here for years without noticing that for nine-tenths of the people the reality of life is an endless, back-breaking struggle to wring a little food out of an eroded soil.

Most of Morocco is so desolate that no wild animal bigger than a hare can live on it. Huge areas which were once covered with forest have turned into a treeless waste where the soil is exactly like broken-up brick. Nevertheless a good deal of it is cultivated, with frightful labour. Everything is done by hand. Long lines of women, bent double like inverted capital Ls, work their way slowly across the fields, tearing up the prickly weeds with their hands, and the peasant gathering lucerne for fodder pulls it up stalk by stalk instead of reaping it, thus saving an inch or two on each stalk. The plough is a wretched wooden thing, so frail that one can easily carry it on one's shoulder, and fitted underneath with a rough iron spike which stirs the soil to a depth of about four inches. This is as much as the strength of the animals is equal to. It is usual to plough with a cow and a donkey yoked together. Two donkeys would not be quite strong enough, but on the other hand two cows would cost a little more to feed. The peasants possess no harrows, they merely plough the soil several times over in different directions, finally leaving it in rough furrows, after which the whole field has to be shaped with hoes into small oblong patches, to conserve water. Except for a day or two after the rare rainstorms there is never enough water. Along the edges of the fields channels are hacked out to a depth of thirty or forty feet to get at the tiny trickles which run through the subsoil.

Every afternoon a file of very old women passes down the road outside my house, each carrying a load of firewood. All of them are mummified with age and the sun, and all of them are tiny. It seems to be generally the case in primitive communities that the women, when they get beyond a certain age, shrink to the size of children. One day a poor old creature who could not have been more than four feet tall

crept past me under a vast load of wood. I stopped her and put a five-sou piece (a little more than a farthing) into her hand. She answered with a shrill wail, almost a scream, which was partly gratitude but mainly surprise. I suppose that from her point of view, by taking any notice of her, I seemed almost to be violating a law of nature. She accepted her status as an old woman, that is to say as a beast of burden. When a family is travelling it is quite usual to see a father and a grown-up son riding ahead on donkeys, and an old woman following on foot, carrying the baggage.

But what is strange about these people is their invisibility. For several weeks, always at about the same time of day, the file of old women had hobbled past the house with their firewood, and though they had registered themselves on my eyeballs I cannot truly say that I had seen them. Firewood was passing–that was how I saw it. It was only that one day I happened to be walking behind them, and the curious up-and-down motion of a load of wood drew my attention to the human being underneath it. Then for the first time I noticed the poor old earth-coloured bodies, bodies reduced to bones and leathery skin, bent double under the crushing weight. Yet I suppose I had not been five minutes on Moroccan soil before I noticed the overloading of the donkeys and was infuriated by it. There is no question that the donkeys are damnably treated. The Moroccan donkey is hardly bigger than a St Bernard dog, it carries a load which in the British army would be considered too much for a fifteen-hands mule, and very often its pack-saddle is not taken off its back for weeks together. But what is peculiarly pitiful is that it is the most willing creature on earth, it follows its master like a dog and does not need either bridle or halter. After a dozen years of devoted work it suddenly drops dead, whereupon its master tips it into the ditch and the village dogs have torn its guts out before it is cold.

This kind of thing makes one's blood boil, whereas–on the whole–the plight of the human beings does not. I am not commenting, merely pointing to a fact. People with brown skins are next door to invisible. Anyone can be sorry for the donkey with its galled back, but it is generally owing to some kind of accident if one even notices the old woman under her load of sticks.

As the storks flew northward the Negroes were marching

southward–a long, dusty column, infantry, screw-gun batteries and then more infantry, four or five thousand men in all, winding up the road with a clumping of boots and a clatter of iron wheels.

They were Senegalese, the blackest Negroes in Africa, so black that sometimes it is difficult to see whereabouts on their necks the hair begins. Their splendid bodies were hidden in reach-me-down khaki uniforms, their feet squashed into boots that looked like blocks of wood, and every tin hat seemed to be a couple of sizes too small. It was very hot and the men had marched a long way. They slumped under the weight of their packs and the curiously sensitive black faces were glistening with sweat.

As they went past a tall, very young Negro turned and caught my eye. But the look he gave me was not in the least the kind of look you might expect. Not hostile, not contemptuous, not sullen, not even inquisitive. It was the shy, wide-eyed Negro look, which actually is a look of profound respect. I saw how it was. This wretched boy, who is a French citizen and has therefore been dragged from the forest to scrub floors and catch syphilis in garrison towns, actually has feelings of reverence before a white skin. He has been taught that the white race are his masters, and he still believes it.

But there is one thought which every white man (and in this connection it doesn't matter twopence if he calls himself a Socialist) thinks when he sees a black army marching past. "How much longer can we go on kidding these people? How long before they turn their guns in the other direction?"

It was curious, really. Every white man there has this thought stowed somewhere or other in his mind. I had it, so had the other onlookers, so had the officers on their sweating chargers and the white NCOs marching in the ranks. It was a kind of secret which we all knew and were too clever to tell; only the Negroes didn't know it. And really it was almost like watching a flock of cattle to see the long column, a mile or two miles of armed men, flowing peacefully up the road, while the great white birds drifted over them in the opposite direction, glittering like scraps of paper.

BOYS' WEEKLIES AND FRANK RICHARDS'S REPLY (1940)

You never walk far through any poor quarter in any big town without coming upon a small newsagent's shop. The general appearance of these shops is always very much the same: a few posters for the DAILY MAIL and the NEWS OF THE WORLD outside, a poky little window with sweet-bottles and packets of Players, and a dark interior smelling of liquorice allsorts and festooned from floor to ceiling with vilely printed twopenny papers, most of them with lurid cover-illustrations in three colours.

Except for the daily and evening papers, the stock of these shops hardly overlaps at all with that of the big news-agents. Their main selling line is the twopenny weekly, and the number and variety of these are almost unbelievable. Every hobby and pastime–cage-birds, fretwork, carpentering, bees, carrier-pigeons, home conjuring, philately, chess–has at least one paper devoted to it, and generally several. Gardening and livestock-keeping must have at least a score between them. Then there are the sporting papers, the radio papers, the children's comics, the various snippet papers such as TIT-BITS, the large range of papers devoted to the movies and all more or less exploiting women's legs, the various trade papers, the women's story-papers (the ORACLE, SECRETS, PEG'S PAPER, etc. etc.), the needlework papers–these so numerous that a display of them alone will often fill an entire window–and in addition the long series of 'Yank Mags' (FIGHT STORIES, ACTION STORIES, WESTERN SHORT STORIES, etc.), which are imported shop-soiled from America and sold at twopence halfpenny or threepence. And the periodical proper shades off into the fourpenny novelette, the ALDINE BOXING NOVELS, the BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY, the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY and many others.

Probably the contents of these shops is the best available indication of what the mass of the English people really feels and thinks. Certainly nothing half so revealing exists in documentary form. Best-seller novels, for instance, tell one a great deal, but the novel is aimed almost exclusively at people above the £4-a-week

level. The movies are probably a very unsafe guide to popular taste, because the film industry is virtually a monopoly, which means that it is not obliged to study its public at all closely. The same applies to some extent to the daily papers, and most of all to the radio. But it does not apply to the weekly paper with a smallish circulation and specialized subject-matter. Papers like the EXCHANGE AND MART, for instance, or CAGE-BIRDS, or the ORACLE, or the PREDICTION, or the MATRIMONIAL TIMES, only exist because there is a definite demand for them, and they reflect the minds of their readers as a great national daily with a circulation of millions cannot possibly do.

Here I am only dealing with a single series of papers, the boys' twopenny weeklies, often inaccurately described as 'penny dreadfuls'. Falling strictly within this class there are at present ten papers, the GEM, MAGNET, MODERN BOY, TRIUMPH and CHAMPION, all owned by the Amalgamated Press, and the WIZARD, ROVER, SKIPPER, HOTSPUR and ADVENTURE, all owned by D. C. Thomson & Co. What the circulations of these papers are, I do not know. The editors and proprietors refuse to name any figures, and in any case the circulation of a paper carrying serial stories is bound to fluctuate widely. But there is no question that the combined public of the ten papers is a very large one. They are on sale in every town in England, and nearly every boy who reads at all goes through a phase of reading one or more of them. The GEM and MAGNET, which are much the oldest of these papers, are of rather different type from the rest, and they have evidently lost some of their popularity during the past few years. A good many boys now regard them as old fashioned and 'slow'. Nevertheless I want to discuss them first, because they are more interesting psychologically than the others, and also because the mere survival of such papers into the nineteen-thirties is a rather startling phenomenon.

The GEM and MAGNET are sister-papers (characters out of one paper frequently appear in the other), and were both started more than thirty years ago. At that time, together with Chums and the old B[oy's] O[wn] P[aper], they were the leading papers for boys, and they remained dominant till quite recently. Each of them carries every week a fifteen–or twenty-thousand-word school story,

complete in itself, but usually more or less connected with the story of the week before. The Gem in addition to its school story carries one or more adventure serial. Otherwise the two papers are so much alike that they can be treated as one, though the MAGNET has always been the better known of the two, probably because it possesses a really first-rate character in the fat boy. Billy Bunter.

The stories are stories of what purports to be public-school life, and the schools (Greyfriars in the MAGNET and St Jim's in the GEM) are represented as ancient and fashionable foundations of the type of Eton or Winchester. All the leading characters are fourth-form boys aged fourteen or fifteen, older or younger boys only appearing in very minor parts. Like Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee, these boys continue week after week and year after year, never growing any older. Very occasionally a new boy arrives or a minor character drops out, but in at any rate the last twenty-five years the personnel has barely altered. All the principal characters in both papers–Bob Cherry, Tom Merry, Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Billy Bunter and the rest of them–were at Greyfriars or St Jim's long before the Great War, exactly the same age as at present, having much the same kind of adventures and talking almost exactly the same dialect. And not only the characters but the whole atmosphere of both Gem and Magnet has been preserved unchanged, partly by means of very elaborate stylization. The stories in the Magnet are signed 'Frank Richards' and those in the GEM, 'Martin Clifford', but a series lasting thirty years could hardly be the work of the same person every week. Consequently they have to be written in a style that is easily imitated–an extraordinary, artificial, repetitive style, quite different from anything else now existing in English literature. A couple of extracts will do as illustrations. Here is one from the MAGNET:

Groan!

'Shut up, Bunter!'

Groan!

Shutting up was not really in Billy Bunter's line. He seldom shut up, though often requested to do so. On the present awful occasion the fat Owl of Greyfriars was less inclined than ever to shut up. And he did not shut up! He groaned, and groaned, and went on groaning.

Even groaning did not fully express Bunter's feelings. His feelings, in fact, were inexpressible.

There were six of them in the soup! Only one of the six uttered sounds of woe and lamentation. But that one, William George Bunter, uttered enough for the whole party and a little over.

Harry Wharton & Go. stood in a wrathy and worried group. They were landed and stranded, diddled, dished and done! etc., etc., etc.

Here is one from the Gem:

'Oh cwumbs!'

'Oh gum!'

'Oooogh!'

'Urrggh!'

Arthur Augustus sat up dizzily. He grabbed his handkerchief and pressed it to his damaged nose. Tom Merry sat up, gasping for breath. They looked at one another.

'Bai Jove! This is a go, deah boy!' gurgled Arthur Augustus. 'I have been thwown into quite a fluttah! Oogh! The wottahs! The wuffians! The feahful outsidahs! Wow!' etc., etc., etc.

Both of these extracts are entirely typical: you would find something like them in almost every chapter of every number, to-day or twenty-five years ago. The first thing that anyone would notice is the extraordinary amount of tautology (the first of these two passages contains a hundred and twenty-five words and could be compressed into about thirty), seemingly designed to spin out the story, but actually playing its part in creating the atmosphere. For the same reason various facetious expressions are repeated over and over again; 'wrathy', for instance, is a great favourite, and so is 'diddled, dished and done'. 'Oooogh!', 'Grooo!' and 'Yaroo!' (stylized cries of pain) recur constantly, and so does 'Ha! ha! ha!', always given a line to itself, so that sometimes a quarter of a column or thereabouts consists of 'Ha! ha! ha!' The slang ('Go and cat coke!', 'What the thump!', 'You frabjous ass!', etc. etc.) has never been altered, so that the boys are now using slang which is at least thirty years out of date. In addition, the various nicknames are rubbed in on every possible occasion. Every few lines we are reminded that Harry Wharton & Co. are 'the Famous Five', Bunter is always 'the fat Owl' or 'the Owl of the Remove', Vernon-Smith is always 'the Bounder of

Greyfriars', Gussy (the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy) is always 'the swell of St Jim's', and so on and so forth. There is a constant, untiring effort to keep the atmosphere intact and to make sure that every new reader learns immediately who is who. The result has been to make Greyfriars and St Jim's into an extraordinary little world of their own, a world which cannot be taken seriously by anyone over fifteen, but which at any rate is not easily forgotten. By a debasement of the Dickens technique a series of stereotyped 'characters' has been built up, in several cases very successfully. Billy Bunter, for instance, must be one of the best-known figures in English fiction; for the mere number of people who know him he ranks with Sexton Blake, Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes and a handful of characters in Dickens.

Needless to say, these stories are fantastically unlike life at a real public school. They run in cycles of rather differing types, but in general they are the clean-fun, knock-about type of story, with interest centring round horseplay, practical jokes, ragging roasters, fights, canings, football, cricket and food. A constantly recurring story is one in which a boy is accused of some misdeed committed by another and is too much of a sportsman to reveal the truth. The 'good' boys are 'good' in the clean-living Englishman tradition–they keep in hard training, wash behind their ears, never hit below the belt etc., etc.,–and by way of contrast there is a series of 'bad' boys, Racke, Crooke, Loder and others, whose badness consists in betting, smoking cigarettes and frequenting public-houses. All these boys are constantly on the verge of expulsion, but as it would mean a change of personnel if any boy were actually expelled, no one is ever caught out in any really serious offence. Stealing, for instance, barely enters as a motif. Sex is completely taboo, especially in the form in which it actually arises at public schools. Occasionally girls enter into the stories, and very rarely there is something approaching a mild flirtation, but it is entirely in the spirit of clean fun. A boy and a girl enjoy going for bicycle rides together–that is all it ever amounts to. Kissing, for instance, would be regarded as 'soppy'. Even the bad boys are presumed to be completely sexless. When the GEM and MAGNET were started, it is probable that there was a deliberate intention to get away from the guilty sex-ridden atmosphere that

pervaded so much of the earlier literature for boys. In the nineties the BOYS' OWN PAPER, for instance, used to have its correspondence columns full of terrifying warnings against masturbation, and books like ST WINIFRED'S and TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL-DAYS were heavy with homosexual feeling, though no doubt the authors were not fully aware of it. In the GEM and MAGNET sex simply does not exist as a problem. Religion is also taboo; in the whole thirty years' issue of the two papers the word 'God' probably does not occur, except in 'God save the King'. On the other hand, there has always been a very strong 'temperance' strain. Drinking and, by association, smoking are regarded as rather disgraceful even in an adult ('shady' is the usual word), but at the same time as something irresistibly fascinating, a sort of substitute for sex. In their moral atmosphere the GEM and MAGNET have a great deal in common with the Boy Scout movement, which started at about the same time.

All literature of this kind is partly plagiarism. Sexton Blake, for instance, started off quite frankly as an imitation of Sherlock Holmes, and still resembles him fairly strongly; he has hawk-like features, lives in Baker Street, smokes enormously and puts on a dressing-gown when he wants to think. The GEM and MAGNET probably owe something to the old school-story writers who were flourishing when they began, Gunby Hadath, Desmond Coke and the rest, but they owe more to nineteenth-century models. In so far as Greyfriars and St Jim's are like real schools at all, they are much more like Tom Brown's Rugby than a modern public school. Neither school has an O.T.G., for instance, games are not compulsory, and the boys are even allowed to wear what clothes they like. But without doubt the main origin of these papers is STALKY & CO. This book has had an immense influence on boys' literature, and it is one of those books which have a sort of traditional reputation among people who have never even seen a copy of it. More than once in boys' weekly papers I have come across a reference to STALKY & CO. in which the word was spelt 'Storky'. Even the name of the chief comic among the Greyfriars masters, Mr Prout, is taken from STALKY & CO., and so is much of the slang; 'jape', 'merry','giddy', 'bizney' (business), 'frabjous', 'don't' for 'doesn't'–all of them out of date even when GEM and MAGNET started. There are also traces of

earlier origins. The name 'Greyfriars' is probably taken from Thackeray, and Gosling, the school porter in the MAGNET, talks in an imitation of Dickens's dialect.

With all this, the supposed 'glamour' of public-school life is played for all it is worth. There is all the usual paraphernalia–lock-up, roll-call, house matches, fagging, prefects, cosy teas round the study fire, etc. etc.–and constant reference to the 'old school', the 'old grey stones' (both schools were founded in the early sixteenth century), the 'team spirit' of the 'Greyfriars men'. As for the snob-appeal, it is completely shameless. Each school has a titled boy or two whose titles are constantly thrust in the reader's face; other boys have the names of well-known aristocratic families, Talbot, Manners, Lowther. We are for ever being reminded that Gussy is the Honourable Arthur A. D'Arcy, son of Lord Eastwood, that Jack Blake is heir to 'broad acres', that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh (nicknamed Inky) is the Nabob of Bhanipur, that Vernon-Smith's father is a millionaire. Till recently the illustrations in both papers always depicted the boys in clothes imitated from those of Eton; in the last few years Greyfriars has changed over to blazers and flannel trousers, but St Jim's still sticks to the Eton jacket, and Gussy sticks to his top-hat. In the school magazine which appears every week as part of the MAGNET, Harry Wharton writes an article discussing the pocket-money received by the 'fellows in the Remove', and reveals that some of them get as much as five pounds a week! This kind of thing is a perfectly deliberate incitement to wealth-fantasy. And here it is worth noticing a rather curious fact, and that is that the school story is a thing peculiar to England. So far as I know, there are extremely few school stories in foreign languages. The reason, obviously, is that in England education is mainly a matter of status. The most definite dividing line between the petite-bourgeoisie and the working class is that the former pay for their education, and within the bourgeoisie there is another unbridgeable gulf between the 'public' school and the 'private' school. It is quite clear that there are tens and scores of thousands of people to whom every detail of life at a 'posh' public school is wildly thrilling and romantic. They happen to be outside that mystic world of quadrangles and house-colours, but they can yearn after it, day-dream about it, live mentally in it for

hours at a stretch. The question is, Who arc these people? Who reads the GEM and MAGNET?

Obviously one can never be quite certain about this kind of thing. All I can say from my own observation is this. Boys who are likely to go to public schools themselves generally read the GEM and MAGNET, but they nearly always stop reading them when they are about twelve; they may continue for another year from force of habit, but by that time they have ceased to take them seriously. On the other hand, the boys at very cheap private schools, the schools that are designed for people who can't afford a public school but consider the Council schools 'common', continue reading the GEM and MAGNET for several years longer. A few years ago I was a teacher at two of these schools myself. I found that not only did virtually all the boys read the GEM and MAGNET, but that they were still taking them fairly seriously when they were fifteen or even sixteen. These boys were the sons of shopkeepers, office employees and small business and professional men, and obviously it is this class that the GEM and MAGNET are aimed at. But they are certainly read by working-class boys as well. They are generally on sale in the poorest quarters of big towns, and I have known them to be read by boys whom one might expect to be completely immune from public-school 'glamour'. I have seen a young coal miner, for instance, a lad who had already worked a year or two underground, eagerly reading the GEM. Recently I offered a batch of English papers to some British legionaries of the French Foreign Legion in North Africa; they picked out the GEM and MAGNET first. Both papers are much read by girls, and the Pen Pals department of the GEM shows that it is read in every corner of the British Empire, by Australians, Canadians, Palestine Jews, Malays, Arabs, Straits Chinese, etc., etc. The editors evidently expect their readers to be aged round about fourteen, and the advertisements (milk chocolate, postage stamps, water pistols, blushing cured, home conjuring tricks, itching powder, the Phine Phun Ring which runs a needle into your friend's hand, etc., etc.) indicate roughly the same age; there are also the Admiralty advertisements, however, which call for youths between seventeen and twenty-two. And there is no question that these papers are also read by adults. It is quite common for people to write to the editor

and say that they have read every number of the GEM or MAGNET for the past thirty years. Here, for instance, is a letter from a lady in Salisbury:

I can say of your splendid yams of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, that they never fail to reach a high standard. Without doubt they are the finest stories of their type on the market to-day, which is saying a good deal. They seem to bring you face to face with Nature. I have taken the Magnet from the start, and have followed the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. with rapt interest. I have no sons, but two daughters, and there's always a rush to be the first to read the grand old paper. My husband, too, was a staunch reader of the Magnet until he was suddenly taken away from us.

It is well worth getting hold of some copies of the GEM and MAGNET, especially the GEM, simply to have a look at the correspondence columns. What is truly startling is the intense interest with which the pettiest details of life at Greyfriars and St Jim's are followed up. Here, for instance, are a few of the questions sent in by readers:

What age is Dick Roylance?' 'How old is St Jim's?' 'Can you give me a list of the Shell and their studies?' 'How much did D'Arcy's monocle cost?' 'How is it that fellows like Crooke are in the Shell and decent fellows like yourself are only in the Fourth?' 'What arc the Form captain's three chief duties?' 'Who is the chemistry master at St Jim's?' (From a girl) 'Where is St Jim's situated? COULD you tell me how to get there, as I would love to sec the building? Are you boys just "phoneys", as I think you are?'

It is clear that many of the boys and girls who write these letters are living a complete fantasy-life. Sometimes a boy will write, for instance, giving his age, height, weight, chest and bicep measurements and asking which member of the Shell or Fourth Form he most exactly resembles. The demand for a list of the studies on the Shell passage, with an exact account of who lives in each, is a very common one. The editors, of course, do everything in their power to keep up the illusion. In the GEM Jack Blake is supposed to write answers to correspondents, and in the MAGNET a couple of pages is always given up to the school magazine (the GREYFRIARS HERALD, edited by Harry Wharton), and there is another page in

which one or other character is written up each week. The stories run in cycles, two or three characters being kept in the foreground for several weeks at a time. First there will be a series of rollicking adventure stories, featuring the Famous Five and Billy Bunter; then a run of stories turning on mistaken identity, with Wibley (the make-up wizard) in the star part; then a run of more serious stories in which Vernon-Smith is trembling on the verge of expulsion. And here one comes upon the real secret of the GEM and MAGNET and the probable reason why they continue to be read in spite of their obvious out-of-dateness.

It is that the characters are so carefully graded as to give almost every type of reader a character he can identify himself with. Most boys' papers aim at doing this, hence the boy-assistant (Sexton Blake's Tinker, Nelson Lee's Nipper, etc.) who usually accompanies the explorer, detective or what-not on his adventures. But in these cases there is only one boy, and usually it is much the same type of boy. In the GEM and MAGNET there is a model for very nearly everybody. There is the normal athletic, high-spirited boy (Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Frank Nugent), a slightly rowdier version of this type (Bob Cherry), a more aristocratic version (Talbot, Manners), a quieter, more serious version (Harry Wharton), and a stolid, 'bulldog' version (Johnny Bull). Then there is the reckless, dare-devil type of boy (Vernon-Smith), the definitely 'clever', studious boy (Mark Linley, Dick Penfold), and the eccentric boy who is not good at games but possesses some special talent (Skinner Wibley). And there is the scholarship-boy (Tom Redwing), an important figure in this class of story because he makes it possible for boys from very poor homes to project themselves into the public-school atmosphere. In addition there are Australian, Irish, Welsh, Manx, Yorkshire and Lancashire boys to play upon local patriotism. But the subtlety of characterization goes deeper than this. If one studies the correspondence columns one sees that there is probably NO character in the GEM and MAGNET whom some or other reader does not identify with, except the out-and-out comics, Coker, Billy Bunter, Fisher T. Fish (the money-grabbing American boy) and, of course, the masters. Bunter, though in his origin he probably owed something to the fat boy in PICKWICK, is a real creation. His tight

trousers against which boots and canes are constantly thudding, his astuteness in search of food, his postal order which never turns up, have made him famous wherever the Union Jack waves. But he is not a subject for day-dreams. On the other hand, another seeming figure of fun, Gussy (the Honourable Arthur A. D'Arcy, 'the swell of St Jim's'), is evidently much admired. Like everything else in the GEM and MAGNET, Gussy is at least thirty years out of date. He is the 'knut' of the early twentieth century or even the 'masher' of the nineties ('Bai Jove, deah boy!' and 'Weally, I shall be obliged to give you a feahful thwashin'!'), the monocled idiot who made good on the fields of Mons and Le Gateau. And his evident popularity goes to show how deep the snob-appeal of this type is. English people are extremely fond of the titled ass (cf. Lord Peter Whimsey) who always turns up trumps in the moment of emergency. Here is a letter from one of Gussy's girl admirers;

I think you're too hard on Gussy. I wonder he's still In existence, the way you treat him. He's my hero. Did you know I write lyrics? How's this–to the tune of 'Goody Goody'?

Gonna get my gas-mask, join the ARP.
'Cos I'm wise to all those bombs you drop on me.
Gonna dig myself a trench
Inside the garden fence;
Gonna seal my windows up with tin
So the tear gas can't get in;
Gonna park my cannon right outside the kerb
With a note to Adolf Hitler: 'Don't disturb!'
And if I never fall in Nazi hands
That's soon enough for me
Gonna get my gas-mask, join the ARP.
P.S.–Do you get on well with girls?

I quote this in full because (dated April 1939) it is interesting as being probably the earliest mention of Hitler in the GEM. In the GEM there is also a heroic fat boy. Fatty Wynn, as a set-off against Bunter. Vernon-Smith, 'the Bounder of the Remove', a Byronic character, always on the verge of the sack, is another great favourite. And even some of the cads probably have their following. Loder, for instance, 'the rotter of the Sixth', is a cad, but he is also a highbrow

and given to saying sarcastic things about football and the team spirit. The boys of the Remove only think him all the more of a cad for this, but a certain type of boy would probably identify with him. Even Racke, Grooke & Co. are probably admired by small boys who think it diabolically wicked to smoke cigarettes. (A frequent question in the correspondence column; 'What brand of cigarettes does Racke smoke?')

Naturally the politics of the GEM and MAGNET are Conservative, but in a completely pre-1914 style, with no Fascist tinge. In reality their basic political assumptions are two: nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny. In the GEM of 1939 Frenchmen are still Froggies and Italians are still Dagoes. Mossoo, the French master at Greyfriars, is the usual comic-paper Frog, with pointed beard, pegtop trousers, etc. Inky, the Indian boy, though a rajah, and therefore possessing snob-appeal, is also the comic babu of the PUNCH tradition. ("The rowfulness is not the proper caper, my esteemed Bob," said Inky. "Let dogs delight in the barkfulness and bitefulness, but the soft answer is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks.") Fisher T. Fish is the old-style stage Yankee ("Waal, I guess", etc.) dating from a peroid of Anglo-American jealousy. Wun Lung, the Chinese boy (he has rather faded out of late, no doubt because some of the MAGNET'S readers are Straits Chinese), is the nineteenth-century pantomime Chinaman, with saucer-shaped hat, pigtail and pidgin-English. The assumption all along is not only that foreigners are comics who are put there for us to laugh at, but that they can be classified in much the same way as insects. That is why in all boys' papers, not only the GEM and MAGNET, a Chinese is invariably portrayed with a pigtail. It is the thing you recognize him by, like the Frenchman's beard or the Italian's barrel-organ. In papers of this kind it occasionally happens that when the setting of a story is in a foreign country some attempt is made to describe the natives as individual human beings, but as a rule it is assumed that foreigners of any one race are all alike and will conform more or less exactly to the following patterns:

FRENCHMAN: Excitable. Wears beard, gesticulates wildly.

SPANIARD, Mexican, etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

ARAB, Afghan, etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

CHINESE: Sinister, treacherous. Wears pigtail.

ITALIAN: Excitable. Grinds barrel-organ or carries stiletto.

SWEDE, Dane, etc.: Kind-hearted, stupid.

NEGRO: Comic, very faithful.

The working classes only enter into the GEM and MAGNET as comics or semi-villains (race-course touts, etc.). As for class-friction, trade unionism, strikes, slumps, unemployment, Fascism and civil war–not a mention. Somewhere or other in the thirty years' issue of the two papers you might perhaps find the word 'Socialism', but you would have to look a long time for it. If the Russian Revolution is anywhere referred to, it will be indirectly, in the word 'Bolshy' (meaning a person of violent disagreeable habits). Hitler and the Nazis are just beginning to make their appearance, in the sort of reference I quoted above. The war-crisis of September 1938 made just enough impression to produce a story in which Mr Vernon-Smith, the Bounder's millionaire father, cashed in on the general panic by buying up country houses in order to sell them to 'crisis scuttlers'. But that is probably as near to noticing the European situation as the GEM and MAGNET will come, until the war actually starts. That does not mean that these papers are unpatriotic–quite the contrary! Throughout the Great War the GEM and MAGNET were perhaps the most consistently and cheerfully patriotic papers in England. Almost every week the boys caught a spy or pushed a conchy into the army, and during the rationing period 'EAT LESS BREAD' was printed in large type on every page. But their patriotism has nothing whatever to do with power-politics or 'ideological' warfare. It is more akin to family loyalty, and actually it gives one a valuable clue to the attitude of ordinary people, especially the huge untouched block of the middle class and the better-off working class. These people are patriotic to the middle of their bones, but they do not feel that what happens in foreign countries is any of their business. When England is in danger they rally to its defence as a matter of course, but in between-times they are not interested. After all, England is always in the right and England always wins, so why worry? It is an attitude that has been shaken during the past twenty years, but not so deeply as is

sometimes supposed. Failure to understand it is one of the reasons why Left Wing political parties are seldom able to produce an acceptable foreign policy.

The mental world of the GEM and MAGNET, therefore, is something like this:

The year is 1910–or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study on the Remove passage after an exciting game of football which was won by an odd goal in the last half-minute. There is a cosy fire in the study, and outside the wind is whistling. The ivy clusters thickly round the old grey stones. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim grey battleships of the British Fleet are steaming up the Channel and at the outposts of Empire the monocled Englishmen are holding the niggers at bay. Lord Mauleverer has just got another fiver and we are all settling down to a tremendous tea of sausages, sardines, crumpets, potted meat, jam and doughnuts. After tea we shall sit round the study fire having a good laugh at Billy Bunter and discussing the team for next week's match against Rook-wood. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever. That approximately is the atmosphere.

But now turn from the GEM and MAGNET to the more up-to-date papers which have appeared since the Great War. The truly significant thing is that they have more points of resemblance to the GEM and MAGNET than points of difference. But it is better to consider the differences first.

There are eight of these newer papers, the MODERN BOY, TRIUMPH, CHAMPION, WIZARD, ROVER, SKIPPER, HOTSPUR and ADVENTURE. All of these have appeared since the Great War, but except for the MODERN BOY none of them is less than five years old. Two papers which ought also to be mentioned briefly here; though they are not strictly in the same class as the rest, are the DETECTIVE WEEKLY and the THRILLER, both owned by the Amalgamated Press. The DETECTIVE WEEKLY has taken over Sexton Blake. Both of these papers admit a certain amount of sex-interest into their stories, and though certainly read by boys; they are

not aimed at them exclusively. All the others are boys' papers pure and simple, and they are sufficiently alike to be considered together. There does not seem to be any notable difference between Thomson's publications and those of the Amalgamated Press.

As soon as one looks at these papers one sees their technical superiority to the GEM and MAGNET. To begin with, they have the great advantage of not being written entirely by one person. Instead of one long complete story, a number of the WIZARD or HOTSPUR consists of half a dozen or more serials, none of which goes on for ever. Consequently there is far more variety and far less padding, and none of the tiresome stylization and facetiousness of the GEM and MAGNET. Look at these two extracts, for example:

Billy Bunter groaned.

A quarter of an hour had elapsed out of the two hours that Bunter was booked for extra French.

In a quarter of an hour there were only fifteen minutes! But every one of those minutes seemed inordinately long to Bunter. They seemed to crawl by like tired snails.

Looking at the clock in Classroom No. 10 the fat Owl could hardly believe that only fifteen minutes had passed. It seemed more like fifteen hours, if not fifteen days!

Other fellows were in extra French as well as Bunter. They did not matter. Bunter did! (The Magnet)

* * *

After a terrible climb, hacking out handholds in the smooth ice every step of the way up. Sergeant Lionheart Logan of the Mounties was now clinging like a human fly to the face of an icy cliff, as smooth and treacherous as a giant pane of glass.

An Arctic blizzard, in all its fury, was buffeting his body, driving the blinding snow into his face, seeking to tear his fingers loose from their handholds and dash him to death on the jagged boulders which lay at the foot of the cliff a hundred feet below.

Crouching among those boulders were eleven villainous trappers who had done their best to shoot down Lionheart and his companion, Constable Jim Rogers–until the blizzard had blotted the two Mounties out of sight from below. (The Wizard)

The second extract gets you some distance with the story, the first

takes a hundred words to tell you that Bunter is in the detention class. Moreover, by not concentrating on school stories (in point of numbers the school story slightly predominates in all these papers, except the THRILLER and DETECTIVE WEEKLY), the WIZARD, HOTSPUR, etc., have far greater opportunities for sensationalism. Merely looking at the cover illustrations of the papers which I have on the table in front of me, here are some of the things I see. On one a cowboy is clinging by his toes to the wing of an aeroplane in mid-air and shooting down another aeroplane with his revolver. On another a Chinese is swimming for his life down a sewer with a swarm of ravenous-looking rats swimming after him. On another an engineer is lighting a stick of dynamite while a steel robot feels for him with its claws. On another a man in airman's costume is fighting barehanded against a rat somewhat larger than a donkey. On another a nearly naked man of terrific muscular development has just seized a lion by the tail and flung it thirty yards over the wall of an arena, with the words, 'Take back your blooming lion!' Clearly no school story can compete with this kind of thing. From time to time the school buildings may catch fire or the French master may turn out to be the head of an international anarchist gang, but in a general way the interest must centre round cricket, school rivalries, practical jokes, etc. There is not much room for bombs, death-rays, sub-machine guns, aeroplanes, mustangs, octopuses, grizzly bears or gangsters.

Examination of a large number of these papers shows that, putting aside school stories, the favourite subjects are Wild West, Frozen North, Foreign Legion, crime (always from the detective's angle), the Great War (Air Force or Secret Service, not the infantry), the Tarzan motif in varying forms, professional football, tropical exploration, historical romance (Robin Hood, Cavaliers and Round-heads, etc.) and scientific invention. The Wild West still leads, at any rate as a setting, though the Red Indian seems to be fading out. The one theme that is really new is the scientific one. Death-rays, Martians, invisible men, robots, helicopters and interplanetary rockets figure largely: here and there there are even far-off rumours of psychotherapy and ductless glands. Whereas the GEM and MAGNET derive from Dickens and Kipling, the WIZARD,

CHAMPION, MODERN BOY, etc., owe a great deal to H. G. Wells, who, rather than Jules Verne, is the father of 'Scientifiction'. Naturally it is the magical Martian aspect of science that is most exploited, but one or two papers include serious articles on scientific subjects, besides quantities of informative snippets. (Examples: 'A Kauri tree in Queensland, Australia, is over 12,000 years old'; 'Nearly 50,000 thunderstorms occur every day'; 'Helium gas costs £1 per 1000 cubic feet'; 'There are over 500 varieties of spiders in Great Britain'; 'London firemen use 14,000,000 gallons of water annually', etc., etc.) There is a marked advance in intellectual curiosity and, on the whole, in the demand made on the reader's attention. In practice the GEM and MAGNET and the post-war papers are read by much the same public, but the mental age aimed at seems to have risen by a year or two years–an improvement probably corresponding to the improvement in elementary education since 1909.

The other thing that has emerged in the post-war boys' papers, though not to anything like the extent one would expect, is bully-worship and the cult of violence.

If one compares the GEM and MAGNET with a genuinely modern paper, the thing that immediately strikes one is the absence of the leader-principle. There is no central dominating character; instead there are fifteen or twenty characters, all more or less on an equality, with whom readers of different types can identify. In the more modern papers this is not usually the case. Instead of identifying with a schoolboy of more or less his own age, the reader of the SKIPPER, HOTSPUR, etc., is led to identify with a G-man, with a Foreign Legionary, with some variant of Tarzan, with an air ace, a master spy, an explorer, a pugilist–at any rate with some single all-powerful character who dominates everyone about him and whose usual method of solving any problem is a sock on the jaw. This character is intended as a superman, and as physical strength is the form of power that boys can best understand, he is usually a sort of human gorilla; in the Tarzan type of story he is sometimes actually a giant, eight or ten feet high. At the same time the scenes of violence in nearly all these stories are remarkably harmless and unconvincing. There is a great difference in tone between even the

most bloodthirsty English paper and the threepenny Yank Mags, FIGHT STORIES, ACTION STORIES, etc. (not strictly boys' papers, but largely read by boys). In the Yank Mags you get real blood-lust, really gory descriptions of the all-in, jump-on-his-testicles style fighting, written in a jargon that has been perfected by people who brood endlessly on violence. A paper like FIGHT STORIES, for instance, would have very little appeal except to sadists and masochists. You can see the comparative gentleness of the English civilization by the amateurish way in which prize-fighting is always described in the boys' weeklies. There is no specialized vocabulary. Look at these four extracts, two English, two American;

When the gong sounded, both men were breathing heavily and each had great red marks on his chest. Bill's chin was bleeding, and Ben had a cut over his right eye.

Into their corners they sank, but when the gong clanged again they were up swiftly, and they went like tigers at each other. (ROVER)

* * *

He walked in stolidly and smashed a clublike right to my face. Blood spattered and I went back on my heels, but surged in and ripped my right under the heart. Another right smashed full on Ben's already battered mouth, and, spitting out the fragments of a tooth, he crashed a flailing left to my body. (FIGHT STORIES)

* * *

It was amazing to watch the Black Panther at work. His muscles rippled and slid under his dark skin. There was all the power and grace of a giant cat in his swift and terrible onslaught.

He volleyed blows with a bewildering speed for so huge a fellow. In a moment Ben was simply blocking with his gloves as well as he could. Ben was really a past-master of defence. He had many fine victories behind him. But the Negro's rights and lefts crashed through openings that hardly any other fighter could have found. (WIZARD)

* * *

Haymakers which packed the bludgeoning weight of forest monarchs crashing down under the ax hurled into the bodies of the two heavies as they swapped punches. (FIGHT STORIES)

Notice how much more knowledgeable the American extracts sound. They are written for devotees of the prize-ring, the others are not. Also, it ought to be emphasized that on its level the moral code of the English boys' papers is a decent one. Crime and dishonesty are never held up to admiration, there is none of the cynicism and corruption of the American gangster story. The huge sale of the Yank Mags in England shows that there is a demand for that kind of thing, but very few English writers seem able to produce it. When hatred of Hitler became a major emotion in America, it was interesting to see how promptly 'anti-Fascism' was adapted to pornographic purposes by the editors of the Yank Mags. One magazine which I have in front of me is given up to a long, complete story, 'When Hell Game to America', in which the agents of a 'blood-maddened European dictator' are trying to conquer the U.S.A. with death-rays and invisible aeroplanes. There is the frankest appeal to sadism, scenes in which the Nazis tie bombs to women's backs and fling them off heights to watch them blown to pieces in mid-air, others in which they tie naked girls together by their hair and prod them with knives to make them dance, etc., etc. The editor comments solemnly on all this, and uses it as a plea for tightening up restrictions against immigrants. On another page of the same paper: 'LIVES OF THE HOTCHA CHORUS GIRLS. Reveals all the intimate secrets and fascinating pastimes of the famous Broadway Hotcha girls. NOTHING IS OMITTED. Price 10c.' 'HOW TO LOVE. 10c.' 'FRENCH PHOTO RING. 25c.' 'NAUGHTY NUDIES TRANSFERS. From the outside of the glass you see a beautiful girl, innocently dressed. Turn it around and look through the glass and oh! what a difference! Set of 3 transfers 25c.,' etc., etc., etc. There is nothing at all like this in any English paper likely to be read by boys. But the process of Americanization is going on all the same. The American ideal, the 'he-man', the 'tough guy', the gorilla who puts everything right by socking everybody on the jaw, now figures in probably a majority of boys' papers. In one serial now running in the SKIPPER he is always portrayed ominously enough, swinging a rubber truncheon.

The development of the WIZARD, HOTSPUR, etc., as against the earlier boys' papers, boils down to this: better technique, more

scientific interest, more bloodshed, more leader-worship. But, after all, it is the LACK of development that is the really striking thing.

To begin with, there is no political development whatever. The world of the SKIPPER and the CHAMPION is still the pre-1914 world of the MAGNET and the GEM. The Wild West story, for instance, with its cattle-rustlers, lynch-law and other paraphernalia belonging to the eighties, is a curiously archaic thing. It is worth noticing that in papers of this type it is always taken for granted that adventures only happen at the ends of the earth, in tropical forests, in Arctic wastes, in African deserts, on Western prairies, in Chinese opium dens–everywhere in fact, except the places where things really DO happen. That is a belief dating from thirty or forty years ago, when the new continents were in process of being opened up. Nowadays, of course, if you really want adventure, the place to look for it is in Europe. But apart from the picturesque side of the Great War, contemporary history is carefully excluded. And except that Americans are now admired instead of being laughed at, foreigners are exactly the same figures of fun that they always were. If a Chinese character appears, he is still the sinister pigtailed opium-smuggler of Sax Rohmer; no indication that things have been happening in China since 1912–no indication that a war is going on there, for instance. If a Spaniard appears, he is still a 'dago' or 'greaser' who rolls cigarettes and stabs people in the back; no indication that things have been happening in Spain. Hitler and the Nazis have not yet appeared, or are barely making their appearance. There will be plenty about them in a little while, but it will be from a strictly patriotic angle (Britain versus Germany), with the real meaning of the struggle kept out of sight as much as possible. As for the Russian Revolution, it is extremely difficult to find any reference to it in any of these papers. When Russia is mentioned at all it is usually in an information snippet (example: 'There are 29,000 centenarians in the USSR.'), and any reference to the Revolution is indirect and twenty years out of date. In one story in the ROVER, for instance, somebody has a tame bear, and as it is a Russian bear, it is nicknamed Trotsky–obviously an echo of the 1917-23 period and not of recent controversies. The clock has stopped at 1910. Britannia rules the waves, and no one has heard of slumps, booms,

unemployment, dictatorships, purges or concentration camps.

And in social outlook there is hardly any advance. The snobbishness is somewhat less open than in the GEM and MAGNET–that is the most one can possibly say. To begin with, the school story, always partly dependent on snob-appeal, is by no means eliminated. Every number of a boys' paper includes at least one school story, these stories slightly outnumbering the Wild Westerns. The very elaborate fantasy-life of the GEM and MAGNET is not imitated and there is more emphasis on extraneous adventure, but the social atmosphere (old grey stones) is much the same. When a new school is introduced at the beginning of a story we are often told in just those words that 'it was a very posh school'. From time to time a story appears which is ostensibly directed AGAINST snobbery. The scholarship-boy (cf. Tom Redwing in the MAGNET) makes fairly frequent appearances, and what is essentially the same theme is sometimes presented in this form: there is great rivalry between two schools, one of which considers itself more 'posh' than the other, and there are fights, practical jokes, football matches, etc., always ending in the discomfiture of the snobs. If one glances very superficially at some of these stories it is possible to imagine that a democratic spirit has crept into the boys' weeklies, but when one looks more closely one sees that they merely reflect the bitter jealousies that exist within the white-collar class. Their real function is to allow the boy who goes to a cheap private school (NOT a Council school) to feel that his school is just as 'posh' in the sight of God as Winchester or Eton. The sentiment of school loyalty ('We're better than the fellows down the road'), a thing almost unknown to the real working class, is still kept up. As these stories are written by many different hands, they do, of course, vary a good deal in tone. Some are reasonably free from snobbishness, in others money and pedigree are exploited even more shamelessly than in the GEM and MAGNET. In one that I came across an actual MAJORITY of the boys mentioned were titled.

Where working-class characters appear, it is usually either as comics (jokes about tramps, convicts, etc.), or as prize-fighters, acrobats, cowboys, professional footballers and Foreign Legionaries–in other words, as adventurers. There is no facing of the facts about

working-class life, or, indeed, about WORKING life of any description. Very occasionally one may come across a realistic description of, say, work in a coal-mine, but in all probability it will only be there as the background of some lurid adventure. In any case the central character is not likely to be a coal-miner. Nearly all the time the boy who reads these papers–in nine cases out often a boy who is going to spend his life working in a shop, in a factory or in some subordinate job in an office–is led to identify with people in positions of command, above all with people who are never troubled by shortage of money. The Lord Peter Wimsey figure, the seeming idiot who drawls and wears a monocle but is always to the fore in moments of danger, turns up over and over again. (This character is a great favourite in Secret Service stories.) And, as usual, the heroic characters all have to talk B.B.C.; they may talk Scottish or Irish or American, but no one in a star part is ever permitted to drop an aitch. Here it is worth comparing the social atmosphere of the boys' weeklies with that of the women's weeklies, the ORACLE, the FAMILY STAR, PEG'S PAPER, etc.

The women's papers are aimed at an older public and are read for the most part by girls who are working for a living. Consequently they are on the surface much more realistic. It is taken for granted, for example, that nearly everyone has to live in a big town and work at a more or less dull job. Sex, so far from being taboo, is THE subject. The short, complete stories, the special feature of these papers, are generally of the 'came the dawn' type: the heroine narrowly escapes losing her 'boy' to a designing rival, or the 'boy' loses his job and has to postpone marriage, but presently gets a better job. The changeling-fantasy (a girl brought up in a poor home is 'really' the child of rich parents) is another favourite. Where sensationalism comes in, usually in the serials, it arises out of the more domestic type of crime, such as bigamy, forgery or sometimes murder; no Martians, death-rays or international anarchist gangs. These papers are at any rate aiming at credibility, and they have a link with real life in their correspondence columns, where genuine problems are being discussed. Ruby M. Ayres's column of advice in the ORACLE, for instance, is extremely sensible and well written. And yet the world of the ORACLE and PEG'S PAPER is a pure

fantasy-world. It is the same fantasy all the time; pretending to be richer than you are. The chief impression that one carries away from almost every story in these papers is of a frightful, overwhelming 'refinement'. Ostensibly the characters are working-class people, but their habits, the interiors of their houses, their clothes, their outlook and, above all, their speech arc entirely middle class. They are all living at several pounds a week above their income. And needless to say, that is just the impression that is intended. The idea is to give the bored factory-girl or worn-out mother of five a dream-life in which she pictures herself–not actually as a duchess (that convention has gone out) but as, say, the wife of a bank-manager. Not only is a five-to-six-pound-a-week standard of life set up as the ideal, but it is tacitly assumed that that is how working-class people really DO live. The major facts arc simply not faced. It is admitted, for instance, that people sometimes lose their jobs; but then the dark clouds roll away and they get better jobs instead. No mention of un-employment as something permanent and inevitable, no mention of the dole, no mention of trade unionism. No suggestion anywhere that there can be anything wrong with the system AS A SYSTEM; there arc only individual misfortunes, which are generally due to somebody's wickedness and can in any case be put right in the last chapter. Always the dark clouds roll away, the kind employer raises Alfred's wages, and there are jobs for everybody except the drunks. It is still the world of the WIZARD and the GEM, except that there are orange-blossoms instead of machine-guns.

The outlook inculcated by all these papers is that of a rather exceptionally stupid member of the Navy League in the year 1910. Yes, it may be said, but what does it matter? And in any case, what else do you expect?

Of course no one in his senses would want to turn the so-called penny dreadful into a realistic novel or a Socialist tract. An adventure story must of its nature be more or less remote from real life. But, as I have tried to make clear, the unreality of the WIZARD and the GEM is not so artless as it looks. These papers exist because of a specialized demand, because boys at certain ages find it necessary to read about Martians, death-rays, grizzly bears and gangsters. They get what they are looking for, but they get it wrapped up in the

illusions which their future employers think suitable for them. To what extent people draw their ideas from fiction is disputable. Personally I believe that most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth, and that from this point of view the worst books are often the most important, because they are usually the ones that are read earliest in life. It is probable that many people who would consider themselves extremely sophisticated and 'advanced' are actually carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood from (for instance) Sapper and Ian Hay. If that is so, the boys' twopenny weeklies are of the deepest importance. Here is the stuff that is read somewhere between the ages of twelve and eighteen by a very large proportion, perhaps an actual majority, of English boys, including many who will never read anything else except newspapers; and along with it they are absorbing a set of beliefs which would be regarded as hopelessly out of date in the Central Office of the Conservative Party. All the better because it is done indirectly, there is being pumped into them the conviction that the major problems of our time do not exist, that there is nothing wrong with LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism, that foreigners are un-important comics and that the British Empire is a sort of charity-concern which will last for ever. Considering who owns these papers, it is difficult to believe that this is un-intentional. Of the twelve papers I have been discussing (i.e. twelve including the THRILLER and DETECTIVE WEEKLY) seven are the property of the Amalgamated Press, which is one of the biggest press-combines in the world and controls more than a hundred different papers. The GEM and MAGNET, therefore, are closely linked up with the DAILY TELEGRAPH and the FINANCIAL TIMES. This in itself would be enough to rouse certain suspicions, even if it were not obvious that the stories in the boys' weeklies are politically vetted. So it appears that if you feel the need of a fantasy-life in which you travel to Mars and fight lions bare-handed (and what boy doesn't?), you can only have it by delivering yourself over, mentally, to people like Lord Camrose. For there is no competition. Throughout the whole of this run of papers the differences are negligible, and on this level no others exist. This raises the question, why is there no such thing as a left-wing boys'

paper?

At first glance such an idea merely makes one slightly sick. It is so horribly easy to imagine what a left-wing boys' paper would be like, if it existed. I remember in 1920 or 1921 some optimistic person handing round Communist tracts among a crowd of public-school boys. The tract I received was of the question-and-answer kind:

Q. 'Can a Boy Communist be a Boy Scout, Comrade?'

A. 'No, Comrade.'

Q. 'Why, Comrade?'

A. 'Because, Comrade, a Boy Scout must salute the Union Jack, which is

the symbol of tyranny and oppression,' etc., etc.

Now suppose that at this moment somebody started a left-wing paper deliberately aimed at boys of twelve or fourteen. I do not suggest that the whole of its contents would be exactly like the tract I have quoted above, but does anyone doubt that they would be SOMETHING like it? Inevitably such a paper would either consist of dreary up-lift or it would be under Communist influence and given over to adulation of Soviet Russia; in either case no normal boy would ever look at it. Highbrow literature apart, the whole of the existing left-wing Press, in so far as it is at all vigorously 'left', is one long tract. The one Socialist paper in England which could live a week on its merits AS A PAPER is the DAILY HERALD: and how much Socialism is there in the DAILY HERALD? At this moment, therefore, a paper with a 'left' slant and at the same time likely to have an appeal to ordinary boys in their teens is something almost beyond hoping for.

But it does not follow that it is impossible. There is no clear reason why every adventure story should necessarily be mixed up with snobbishness and gutter patriotism. For, after all, the stories in the HOTSPUR and the MODERN BOY are not Conservative tracts; they are merely adventure stories with a Conservative bias. It is fairly easy to imagine the process being reversed. It is possible, for instance, to imagine a paper as thrilling and lively as the HOTSPUR, but with subject-matter and 'ideology' a little more up to date. It is even possible (though this raises other difficulties) to imagine a women's paper at the same literary level as the ORACLE, dealing in

approximately the same kind of story, but taking rather more account of the realities of working-class life. Such things have been done before, though not in England. In the last years of the Spanish monarchy there was a large output in Spain of left-wing novelettes, some of them evidently of anarchist origin. Unfortunately at the time when they were appearing I did not see their social significance, and I lost the collection of them that I had, but no doubt copies would still be procurable. In get-up and style of story they were very similar to the English fourpenny novelette, except that their inspiration was 'left'. If, for instance, a story described police pursuing anarchists through the mountains, it would be from the point of view of the anarchist and not of the police. An example nearer to hand is the Soviet film CHAPAIEV, which has been shown a number of times in London. Technically, by the standards of the time when it was made, CHAPAIEV is a first-rate film, but mentally, in spite of the unfamiliar Russian background, it is not so very remote from Hollywood. The one thing that lifts it out of the ordinary is the remarkable performance by the actor who takes the part of the White officer (the fat one)–a performance which looks very like an inspired piece of gagging. Otherwise the atmosphere is familiar. All the usual paraphernalia is there–heroic fight against odds, escape at the last moment, shots of galloping horses, love interest, comic relief. The film is in fact a fairly ordinary one, except that its tendency is 'left'. In a Hollywood film of the Russian Civil War the Whites would probably be angels and the Reds demons. In the Russian version the Reds are angels and the Whites demons. That is also a lie, but, taking the long view, it is a less pernicious lie than the other.

Here several difficult problems present themselves. Their general nature is obvious enough, and I do not want to discuss them. I am merely pointing to the fact that, in England, popular imaginative literature is a field that left-wing thought has never begun to enter. ALL fiction from the novels in the mushroom libraries downwards is censored in the interests of the ruling class. And boys' fiction above all, the blood-and-thunder stuff which nearly every boy devours at some time or other, is sodden in the worst illusions of 1910. The fact is only unimportant if one believes that what is read in childhood leaves no impression behind. Lord Camrose and his colleagues

evidently believe nothing of the kind, and, after all, Lord Camrose ought to know.

CHARLES DICKENS (1940)

I

Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing. Even the burial of his body in Westminster Abbey was a species of theft, if you come to think of it.

When Chesterton wrote his introductions to the Everyman Edition of Dickens's works, it seemed quite natural to him to credit Dickens with his own highly individual brand of medievalism, and more recently a Marxist writer, Mr. T. A. Jackson, has made spirited efforts to turn Dickens into a blood-thirsty revolutionary. The Marxist claims him as 'almost' a Marxist, the Catholic claims him as 'almost' a Catholic, and both claim him as a champion of the proletariat (or 'the poor', as Chesterton would have put it). On the other hand, Nadezhda Krupskaya, in her little book on Lenin, relates that towards the end of his life Lenin went to see a dramatized version of THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH, and found Dickens's 'middle-class sentimentality' so intolerable that he walked out in the middle of a scene.

Taking 'middle-class' to mean what Krupskaya might be expected to mean by it, this was probably a truer judgement than those of Chesterton and Jackson. But it is worth noticing that the dislike of Dickens implied in this remark is something unusual. Plenty of people have found him unreadable, but very few seem to have felt any hostility towards the general spirit of his work. Some years later Mr. Bechhofer Roberts published a full-length attack on Dickens in the form of a novel (THIS SIDE IDOLATRY), but it was a merely personal attack, concerned for the most part with Dickens's treatment of his wife. It dealt with incidents which not one in a thousand of Dickens's readers would ever hear about, and which no more invalidates his work than the second-best bed invalidates HAMLET. All that the book really demonstrated was that a writer's literary personality has little or nothing to do with his private character. It is

quite possible that in private life Dickens was just the kind of insensitive egoist that Mr. Bechhofer Roberts makes him appear. But in his published work there is implied a personality quite different from this, a personality which has won him far more friends than enemies. It might well have been otherwise, for even if Dickens was a bourgeois, he was certainly a subversive writer, a radical, one might truthfully say a rebel. Everyone who has read widely in his work has felt this. Gissing, for instance, the best of the writers on Dickens, was anything but a radical himself, and he disapproved of this strain in Dickens and wished it were not there, but it never occurred to him to deny it. In OLIVER TWIST, HARD TIMES, BLEAK HOUSE, LITTLE DORRIT, Dickens attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached. Yet he managed to do it without making himself hated, and, more than this, the very people he attacked have swallowed him so completely that he has become a national institution himself. In its attitude towards Dickens the English public has always been a little like the elephant which feels a blow with a walking-stick as a delightful tickling. Before I was ten years old I was having Dickens ladled down my throat by schoolmasters in whom even at that age I could see a strong resemblance to Mr. Creakle, and one knows without needing to be told that lawyers delight in Sergeant Buzfuz and that LITTLE DORRIT is a favourite in the Home Office. Dickens seems to have succeeded in attacking everybody and antagonizing nobody. Naturally this makes one wonder whether after all there was something unreal in his attack upon society. Where exactly does he stand, socially, morally, and politically? As usual, one can define his position more easily if one starts by deciding what he was NOT.

In the first place he was NOT, as Messrs. Chesterton and Jackson seem to imply, a ‘proletarian’ writer. To begin with, he does not write about the proletariat, in which he merely resembles the overwhelming majority of novelists, past and present. If you look for the working classes in fiction, and especially English fiction, all you find is a hole. This statement needs qualifying, perhaps. For reasons that are easy enough to see, the agricultural labourer (in England a proletarian) gets a fairly good showing in fiction, and a great deal has been written about criminals, derelicts and, more recently, the

working-class intelligentsia. But the ordinary town proletariat, the people who make the wheels go round, have always been ignored by novelists. When they do find their way between the covers of a book, it is nearly always as objects of pity or as comic relief. The central action of Dickens's stories almost invariably takes place in middle-class surroundings. If one examines his novels in detail one finds that his real subject-matter is the London commercial bourgeoisie and their hangers-on–lawyers, clerks, tradesmen, innkeepers, small craftsmen, and servants. He has no portrait of an agricultural worker, and only one (Stephen Blackpool in HARD TIMES) of an industrial worker. The Plornishes in LITTLE DORRIT are probably his best picture of a working-class family–the Peggottys, for instance, hardly belong to the working class–but on the whole he is not successful with this type of character. If you ask any ordinary reader which of Dickens's proletarian characters he can remember, the three he is almost certain to mention are Bill Sykes, Sam Weller, and Mrs. Gamp. A burglar, a valet, and a drunken midwife–not exactly a representative cross-section of the English working class.

Secondly, in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word, Dickens is not a 'revolutionary' writer. But his position here needs some defining.

Whatever else Dickens may have been, he was not a hole-and-corner soul-saver, the kind of well-meaning idiot who thinks that the world will be perfect if you amend a few bylaws and abolish a few anomalies. It is worth comparing him with Charles Reade, for instance. Reade was a much better-informed man than Dickens, and in some ways more public-spirited. He really hated the abuses he could understand, he showed them up in a series of novels which for all their absurdity are extremely readable, and he probably helped to alter public opinion on a few minor but important points. But it was quite beyond him to grasp that, given the existing form of society, certain evils CANNOT be remedied. Fasten upon this or that minor abuse, expose it, drag it into the open, bring it before a British jury, and all will be well that is how he sees it. Dickens at any rate never imagined that you can cure pimples by cutting them off. In every page of his work one can see a consciousness that society is wrong somewhere at the root. It is when one asks 'Which root?' that one

begins to grasp his position.

The truth is that Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral. Hence the utter lack of any constructive suggestion anywhere in his work. He attacks the law, parliamentary government, the educational system and so forth, without ever clearly suggesting what he would put in their places. Of course it is not necessarily the business of a novelist, or a satirist, to make constructive suggestions, but the point is that Dickens's attitude is at bottom not even destructive. There is no clear sign that he wants the existing order to be overthrown, or that he believes it would make very much difference if it WERE overthrown. For in reality his target is not so much society as 'human nature'. It would be difficult to point anywhere in his books to a passage suggesting that the economic system is wrong AS A SYSTEM. Nowhere, for instance, does he make any attack on private enterprise or private property. Even in a book like OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, which turns on the power of corpses to interfere with living people by means of idiotic wills, it does not occur to him to suggest that individuals ought not to have this irresponsible power. Of course one can draw this inference for oneself, and one can draw it again from the remarks about Bounderby's will at the end of HARD TIMES, and indeed from the whole of Dickens's work one can infer the evil of LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism; but Dickens makes no such inference himself. It is said that Macaulay refused to review HARD TIMES because he disapproved of its 'sullen Socialism'. Obviously Macaulay is here using the word 'Socialism' in the same sense in which, twenty years ago, a vegetarian meal or a Cubist picture used to be referred to as 'Bolshevism'. There is not a line in the book that can properly be called Socialistic; indeed, its tendency if anything is pro-capitalist, because its whole moral is that capitalists ought to be kind, not that workers ought to be rebellious. Bounder by is a bullying windbag and Gradgrind has been morally blinded, but if they were better men, the system would work well enough that, all through, is the implication. And so far as social criticism goes, one can never extract much more from Dickens than this, unless one deliberately reads meanings into him. His whole 'message' is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the

world would be decent.

Naturally this calls for a few characters who are in positions of authority and who DO behave decently. Hence that recurrent Dickens figure, the good rich man. This character belongs especially to Dickens's early optimistic period. He is usually a 'merchant' (we are not necessarily told what merchandise he deals in), and he is always a superhumanly kind-hearted old gentleman who 'trots' to and fro, raising his employees' wages, patting children on the head, getting debtors out of jail and in general, acting the fairy godmother. Of course he is a pure dream figure, much further from real life than, say, Squeers or Micawber. Even Dickens must have reflected occasionally that anyone who was so anxious to give his money away would never have acquired it in the first place. Mr. Pickwick, for instance, had 'been in the city', but it is difficult to imagine him making a fortune there. Nevertheless this character runs like a connecting thread through most of the earlier books. Pickwick, the Cheerybles, old Chuzzlewit, Scrooge–it is the same figure over and over again, the good rich man, handing out guineas. Dickens does however show signs of development here. In the books of the middle period the good rich man fades out to some extent. There is no one who plays this part in A TALE OF TWO CITIES, nor in GREAT EXPECTATIONS–GREAT EXPECTATIONS is, in fact, definitely an attack on patronage–and in HARD TIMES it is only very doubtfully played by Gradgrind after his reformation. The character reappears in a rather different form as Meagles in LITTLE DORRIT and John Jarndyce in BLEAK HOUSE–one might perhaps add Betsy Trotwood in DAVID COPPERFIELD. But in these books the good rich man has dwindled from a 'merchant' to a RENTIER. This is significant. A RENTIER is part of the possessing class, he can and, almost without knowing it, does make other people work for him, but he has very little direct power. Unlike Scrooge or the Cheerybles, he cannot put everything right by raising everybody's wages. The seeming inference from the rather despondent books that Dickens wrote in the fifties is that by that time he had grasped the helplessness of well-meaning individuals in a corrupt society. Nevertheless in the last completed novel, OUR MUTUAL FRIEND (published 1864-5), the good rich man comes back in full glory in

the person of Boffin. Boffin is a proletarian by origin and only rich by inheritance, but he is the usual DEUS EX MACHINA, solving everybody's problems by showering money in all directions. He even 'trots', like the Cheerybles. In several ways OUR MUTUAL FRIEND is a return to the earlier manner, and not an unsuccessful return either. Dickens's thoughts seem to have come full circle. Once again, individual kindliness is the remedy for everything.

One crying evil of his time that Dickens says very little about is child labour. There are plenty of pictures of suffering children in his books, but usually they are suffering in schools rather than in factories. The one detailed account of child labour that he gives is the description in DAVID COPPERFIELD of little David washing bottles in Murdstone & Grinby's warehouse. This, of course, is autobiography. Dickens himself, at the age of ten, had worked in Warren's blacking factory in the Strand, very much as he describes it here. It was a terribly bitter memory to him, partly because he felt the whole incident to be discreditable to his parents, and he even concealed it from his wife till long after they were married. Looking back on this period, he says in DAVID COPPERFIELD:

It is a matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone & Grinby.

And again, having described the rough boys among whom he worked:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship...and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my bosom.

Obviously it is not David Copperfield who is speaking, it is Dickens himself. He uses almost the same words in the autobiography that he began and abandoned a few months earlier. Of course Dickens is right in saying that a gifted child ought not to work ten hours a day pasting labels on bottles, but what he does not say is that NO child ought to be condemned to such a fate, and there is no

reason for inferring that he thinks it. David escapes from the warehouse, but Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes and the others are still there, and there is no sign that this troubles Dickens particularly. As usual, he displays no consciousness that the STRUCTURE of society can be changed. He despises politics, does not believe that any good can come out of Parliament–he had been a Parliamentary shorthand writer, which was no doubt a disillusioning experience–and he is slightly hostile to the most hopeful movement of his day, trade unionism. In HARD TIMES trade unionism is represented as something not much better than a racket, something that happens because employers are not sufficiently paternal. Stephen Blackpool's refusal to join the union is rather a virtue in Dickens's eyes. Also, as Mr. Jackson has pointed out, the apprentices' association in BARNABY RUDGE, to which Sim Tappertit belongs, is probably a hit at the illegal or barely legal unions of Dickens's own day, with their secret assemblies, passwords and so forth. Obviously he wants the workers to be decently treated, but there is no sign that he wants them to take their destiny into their own hands, least of all by open violence.

As it happens, Dickens deals with revolution in the narrower sense in two novels, BARNABY RUDGE and A TALE OF TWO CITIES. In BARNABY RUDGE it is a case of rioting rather than revolution. The Gordon Riots of 1780, though they had religious bigotry as a pretext, seem to have been little more than a pointless outburst of looting. Dickens's attitude to this kind of thing is sufficiently indicated by the fact that his first idea was to make the ringleaders of the riots three lunatics escaped from an asylum. He was dissuaded from this, but the principal figure of the book is in fact a village idiot. In the chapters dealing with the riots Dickens shows a most profound horror of mob violence. He delights in describing scenes in which the 'dregs' of the population behave with atrocious bestiality. These chapters are of great psychological interest, because they show how deeply he had brooded on this subject. The things he describes can only have come out of his imagination, for no riots on anything like the same scale had happened in his lifetime. Here is one of his descriptions, for instance:

If Bedlam gates had been flung open wide, there would not have

issued forth such maniacs as the frenzy of that night had made. There were men there who danced and trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies, and wrenched them from their stalks, like savages who twisted human necks. There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water; and others who were restrained by force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of one drunken lad–not twenty, by his looks–who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot, melting his head like wax...But of all the howling throng not one learnt mercy from, or sickened at, these sights; nor was the fierce, besotted, senseless rage of one man glutted.

You might almost think you were reading a description of 'Red' Spain by a partisan of General Franco. One ought, of course, to remember that when Dickens was writing, the London 'mob' still existed. (Nowadays there is no mob, only a flock.) Low wages and the growth and shift of population had brought into existence a huge, dangerous slum-proletariat, and until the early middle of the nineteenth century there was hardly such a thing as a police force. When the brickbats began to fly there was nothing between shuttering your windows and ordering the troops to open fire. In A TALE OF TWO CITIES he is dealing with a revolution which was really about something, and Dickens's attitude is different, but not entirely different. As a matter of fact, A TALE OF TWO CITIES is a book which tends to leave a false impression behind, especially after a lapse of time.

The one thing that everyone who has read A TALE OF TWO CITIES remembers is the Reign of Terror. The whole book is dominated by the guillotine–tumbrils thundering to and fro, bloody knives, heads bouncing into the basket, and sinister old women knitting as they watch. Actually these scenes only occupy a few chapters, but they are written with terrible intensity, and the rest of the book is rather slow going. But A TALE OF TWO CITIES is not a companion volume to THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL. Dickens sees

clearly enough that the French Revolution was bound to happen and that many of the people who were executed deserved what they got. If, he says, you behave as the French aristocracy had behaved, vengeance will follow. He repeats this over and over again. We are constantly being reminded that while 'my lord' is lolling in bed, with four liveried footmen serving his chocolate and the peasants starving outside, somewhere in the forest a tree is growing which will presently be sawn into planks for the platform of the guillotine, etc., etc., etc. The inevitability of the Terror, given its causes, is insisted upon in the clearest terms:

It was too much the way...to talk of this terrible Revolution as if it were the only harvest ever known under the skies that had not been sown–as if nothing had ever been done, or omitted to be done, that had led to it–as if observers of the wretched millions in France, and of the misused and perverted resources that should have made them prosperous, had not seen it inevitably coming, years before, and had not in plain terms recorded what they saw.

And again:

All the devouring and insatiate monsters imagined since imagination could record itself, are fused in the one realization, Guillotine. And yet there is not in France, with its rich variety of soil and climate, a blade, a leaf, a root, a spring, a peppercorn, which will grow to maturity under conditions more certain than those that have produced this horror. Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms.

In other words, the French aristocracy had dug their own graves. But there is no perception here of what is now called historic necessity. Dickens sees that the results are inevitable, given the causes, but he thinks that the causes might have been avoided. The Revolution is something that happens because centuries of oppression have made the French peasantry sub-human. If the wicked nobleman could somehow have turned over a new leaf, like Scrooge, there would have been no Revolution, no JACQUERIE, no guillotine–and so much the better. This is the opposite of the 'revolutionary' attitude. From the 'revolutionary' point of view the class-struggle is the main source of progress, and therefore the nobleman who robs the peasant and goads him to revolt is playing a

necessary part, just as much as the Jacobin who guillotines the nobleman. Dickens never writes anywhere a line that can be interpreted as meaning this. Revolution as he sees it is merely a monster that is begotten by tyranny and always ends by devouring its own instruments. In Sydney Carton's vision at the foot of the guillotine, he foresees Defarge and the other leading spirits of the Terror all perishing under the same knife–which, in fact, was approximately what happened.

And Dickens is very sure that revolution is a monster. That is why everyone remembers the revolutionary scenes in A TALE OF TWO CITIES; they have the quality of nightmare, and it is Dickens's own nightmare. Again and again he insists upon the meaningless horrors of revolution–the mass-butcheries, the injustice, the ever-present terror of spies, the frightful blood-lust of the mob. The descriptions of the Paris mob–the description, for instance, of the crowd of murderers struggling round the grindstone to sharpen their weapons before butchering the prisoners in the September massacres–outdo anything in BARNABY RUDGE. The revolutionaries appear to him simply as degraded savages–in fact, as lunatics. He broods over their frenzies with a curious imaginative intensity. He describes them dancing the 'Carmagnole', for instance:

There could not be fewer than five hundred people, and they were dancing like five thousand demons...They danced to the popular Revolution song, keeping a ferocious time that was like a gnashing of teeth in unison... They advanced, retreated, struck at one another's hands, clutched at one another's heads, spun round alone, caught one another, and spun around in pairs, until many of them dropped...Suddenly they stopped again, paused, struck out the time afresh, forming into lines the width of the public way, and, with their heads low down and their hands high up, swooped screaming off. No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport–a something, once innocent, delivered over to all devilry.

He even credits some of these wretches with a taste for guillotining children. The passage I have abridged above ought to be read in full. It and others like it show how deep was Dickens's horror of revolutionary hysteria. Notice, for instance that touch, 'with their

heads low down and their hands high up', etc., and the evil vision it conveys. Madame Defarge is a truly dreadful figure, certainly Dickens's most successful attempt at a MALIGNANT character. Defarge and others are simply 'the new oppressors who have risen in the destruction of the old', the revolutionary courts are presided over by 'the lowest, cruellest and worst populace', and so on and so forth. All the way through Dickens insists upon the nightmare insecurity of a revolutionary period, and in this he shows a great deal of prescience. 'A law of the suspected, which struck away all security for liberty or life, and delivered over any good and innocent person to any bad and guilty one; prisons gorged with people who had committed no offence, and could obtain no hearing'–it would apply pretty accurately to several countries today.

The apologists of any revolution generally try to minimize its horrors; Dickens's impulse is to exaggerate them–and from a historical point of view he has certainly exaggerated. Even the Reign of Terror was a much smaller thing than he makes it appear. Though he quotes no figures, he gives the impression of a frenzied massacre lasting for years, whereas in reality the whole of the Terror, so far as the number of deaths goes, was a joke compared with one of Napoleon's battles. But the bloody knives and the tumbrils rolling to and fro create in his mind a special sinister vision which he has succeeded in passing on to generations of readers. Thanks to Dickens, the very word 'tumbril' has a murderous sound; one forgets that a tumbril is only a sort of farm-cart. To this day, to the average Englishman, the French Revolution means no more than a pyramid of severed heads. It is a strange thing that Dickens, much more in sympathy with the ideas of the Revolution than most Englishmen of his time, should have played a part in creating this impression.

If you hate violence and don't believe in politics, the only remedy remaining is education. Perhaps society is past praying for, but there is always hope for the individual human being, if you can catch him young enough. This belief partly accounts for Dickens's preoccupation with childhood.

No one, at any rate no English writer, has written better about childhood than Dickens. In spite of all the knowledge that has accumulated since, in spite of the fact that children are now

comparatively sanely treated, no novelist has shown the same power of entering into the child's point of view. I must have been about nine years old when I first read DAVID COPPERFIELD. The mental atmosphere of the opening chapters was so immediately intelligible to me that I vaguely imagined they had been written BY A CHILD. And yet when one re-reads the book as an adult and sees the Murdstones, for instance, dwindle from gigantic figures of doom into semi-comic monsters, these passages lose nothing. Dickens has been able to stand both inside and outside the child's mind, in such a way that the same scene can be wild burlesque or sinister reality, according to the age at which one reads it. Look, for instance, at the scene in which David Copperfield is unjustly suspected of eating the mutton chops; or the scene in which Pip, in GREAT EXPECTATIONS, coming back from Miss Havisham's house and finding himself completely unable to describe what he has seen, takes refuge in a series of outrageous lies–which, of course, are eagerly believed. All the isolation of childhood is there. And how accurately he has recorded the mechanisms of the child's mind, its visualizing tendency, its sensitiveness to certain kinds of impression. Pip relates how in his childhood his ideas about his dead parents were derived from their tombstones:

The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, 'ALSO GEORGIANA, WIFE OF THE ABOVE', I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine...I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trouser-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

There is a similar passage in DAVID COPPERFIELD. After biting Mr. Murdstone's hand, David is sent away to school and obliged to wear on his back a placard saying, 'Take care of him. He bites.' He looks at the door in the playground where the boys have carved their names, and from the appearance of each name he seems to know in just what tone of voice the boy will read out the placard:

There was one boy–a certain J. Steerforth–who cut his name very deep and very often, who, I conceived, would read it in a rather strong voice, and afterwards pull my hair. There was another boy, one Tommy Traddles, who I dreaded would make game of it, and pretend to be dreadfully frightened of me. There was a third, George Demple, who I fancied would sing it.

When I read this passage as a child, it seemed to me that those were exactly the pictures that those particular names would call up. The reason, of course, is the sound-associations of the words (Demple–'temple'; Traddles–probably 'skedaddle'). But how many people, before Dickens, had ever noticed such things? A sympathetic attitude towards children was a much rarer thing in Dickens's day than it is now. The early nineteenth century was not a good time to be a child. In Dickens's youth children were still being 'solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen', and it was not so long since boys of thirteen had been hanged for petty theft. The doctrine of 'breaking the child's spirit' was in full vigour, and THE FAIRCHILD FAMILY was a standard book for children till late into the century. This evil book is now issued in pretty-pretty expurgated editions, but it is well worth reading in the original version. It gives one some idea of the lengths to which child-discipline was sometimes carried. Mr. Fairchild, for instance, when he catches his children quarrelling, first thrashes them, reciting Dr. Watts's 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite' between blows of the cane, and then takes them to spend the afternoon beneath a gibbet where the rotting corpse of a murderer is hanging. In the earlier part of the century scores of thousands of children, aged sometimes as young as six, were literally worked to death in the mines or cotton mills, and even at the fashionable public schools boys were flogged till they ran with blood for a mistake in their Latin verses. One thing which Dickens seems to have recognized, and which most of his contemporaries did not, is the sadistic sexual element in flogging. I think this can be inferred from DAVID COPPERFIELD and NICHOLAS NICKLEBY. But mental cruelty to a child infuriates him as much as physical, and though there is a fair number of exceptions, his schoolmasters are generally scoundrels.

Except for the universities and the big public schools, every kind

of education then existing in England gets a mauling at Dickens's hands. There is Doctor Blimber's Academy, where little boys are blown up with Greek until they burst, and the revolting charity schools of the period, which produced specimens like Noah Claypole and Uriah Heep, and Salem House, and Dotheboys Hall, and the disgraceful little dame-school kept by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt. Some of what Dickens says remains true even today. Salem House is the ancestor of the modern 'prep school', which still has a good deal of resemblance to it; and as for Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, some old fraud of much the same stamp is carrying on at this moment in nearly every small town in England. But, as usual, Dickens's criticism is neither creative nor destructive. He sees the idiocy of an educational system founded on the Greek lexicon and the wax-ended cane; on the other hand, he has no use for the new kind of school that is coming up in the fifties and sixties, the 'modern' school, with its gritty insistence on 'facts'. What, then, DOES he want? As always, what he appears to want is a moralized version of the existing thing–the old type of school, but with no caning, no bullying or underfeeding, and not quite so much Greek. Doctor Strong's school, to which David Copperfield goes after he escapes from Murdstone & Grinby's, is simply Salem House with the vices left out and a good deal of 'old grey stones' atmosphere thrown in:

Doctor Strong's was an excellent school, as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys...which worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity. Hence, we soon became warmly attached to it–I am sure I did for one, and I never knew, in all my time, of any boy being otherwise–and learnt with a good will, desiring to do it credit. We had noble games out of hours, and plenty of liberty; but even then, as I remember, we were well spoken of in the town, and rarely did any disgrace, by our appearance or manner, to the reputation of Doctor Strong and Doctor Strong's boys.

In the woolly vagueness of this passage one can see Dickens's utter lack of any educational theory. He can imagine the MORAL atmosphere of a good school, but nothing further. The boys 'learnt

with a good will', but what did they learn? No doubt it was Doctor Blimber's curriculum, a little watered down. Considering the attitude to society that is everywhere implied in Dickens's novels, it comes as rather a shock to learn that he sent his eldest son to Eton and sent all his children through the ordinary educational mill. Gissing seems to think that he may have done this because he was painfully conscious of being under-educated himself. Here perhaps Gissing is influenced by his own love of classical learning. Dickens had had little or no formal education, but he lost nothing by missing it, and on the whole he seems to have been aware of this. If he was unable to imagine a better school than Doctor Strong's, or, in real life, than Eton, it was probably due to an intellectual deficiency rather different from the one Gissing suggests.

It seems that in every attack Dickens makes upon society he is always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure. It is hopeless to try and pin him down to any definite remedy, still more to any political doctrine. His approach is always along the moral plane, and his attitude is sufficiently summed up in that remark about Strong's school being as different from Creakle's 'as good is from evil'. Two things can be very much alike and yet abysmally different. Heaven and Hell are in the same place. Useless to change institutions without a 'change of heart'–that, essentially, is what he is always saying.

If that were all, he might be no more than a cheer-up writer, a reactionary humbug. A 'change of heart' is in fact THE alibi of people who do not wish to endanger the STATUS QUO. But Dickens is not a humbug, except in minor matters, and the strongest single impression one carries away from his books is that of a hatred of tyranny. I said earlier that Dickens is not IN THE ACCEPTED SENSE a revolutionary writer. But it is not at all certain that a merely moral criticism of society may not be just as 'revolutionary'–and revolution, after all, means turning things upside down–as the politico-economic criticism which is fashionable at this moment. Blake was not a politician, but there is more understanding of the nature of capitalist society in a poem like 'I wander through each charted street' than in three-quarters of Socialist literature. Progress is not an illusion, it happens, but it is slow and invariably

disappointing. There is always a new tyrant waiting to take over from the old–generally not quite so bad, but still a tyrant. Consequently two viewpoints are always tenable. The one, how can you improve human nature until you have changed the system? The other, what is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature? They appeal to different individuals, and they probably show a tendency to alternate in point of time. The moralist and the revolutionary are constantly undermining one another. Marx exploded a hundred tons of dynamite beneath the moralist position, and we are still living in the echo of that tremendous crash. But already, somewhere or other, the sappers are at work and fresh dynamite is being tamped in place to blow Marx at the moon. Then Marx, or somebody like him, will come back with yet more dynamite, and so the process continues, to an end we cannot yet foresee. The central problem–how to prevent power from being abused–remains unsolved. Dickens, who had not the vision to see that private property is an obstructive nuisance, had the vision to see that. 'If men would behave decently the world would be decent' is not such a platitude as it sounds.

II

More completely than most writers, perhaps, Dickens can be explained in terms of his social origin, though actually his family history was not quite what one would infer from his novels. His father was a clerk in government service, and through his mother's family he had connexions with both the Army and the Navy. But from the age of nine onwards he was brought up in London in commercial surroundings, and generally in an atmosphere of struggling poverty. Mentally he belongs to the small urban bourgeoisie, and he happens to be an exceptionally fine specimen of this class, with all the 'points', as it were, very highly developed. That is partly what makes him so interesting. If one wants a modern equivalent, the nearest would be H. G. Wells, who has had a rather similar history and who obviously owes something to Dickens as novelist. Arnold Bennett was essentially of the same type, but, unlike the other two, he was a midlander, with an industrial and

noncomformist rather than commercial and Anglican background.

The great disadvantage, and advantage, of the small urban bourgeois is his limited outlook. He sees the world as a middle-class world, and everything outside these limits is either laughable or slightly wicked. On the one hand, he has no contact with industry or the soil; on the other, no contact with the governing classes. Anyone who has studied Wells's novels in detail will have noticed that though he hates the aristocrat like poison, he has no particular objection to the plutocrat, and no enthusiasm for the proletarian. His most hated types, the people he believes to be responsible for all human ills, are kings, landowners, priests, nationalists, soldiers, scholars and peasants. At first sight a list beginning with kings and ending with peasants looks like a mere omnium gatherum, but in reality all these people have a common factor. All of them are archaic types, people who are governed by tradition and whose eyes are turned towards the past–the opposite, therefore, of the rising bourgeois who has put his money on the future and sees the past simply as a dead hand.

Actually, although Dickens lived in a period when the bourgeoisie was really a rising class, he displays this characteristic less strongly than Wells. He is almost unconscious of the future and has a rather sloppy love of the picturesque (the 'quaint old church', etc.). Nevertheless his list of most hated types is like enough to Wells's for the similarity to be striking. He is vaguely on the side of the working class–has a sort of generalized sympathy with them because they are oppressed–but he does not in reality know much about them; they come into his books chiefly as servants, and comic servants at that. At the other end of the scale he loathes the aristocrat and–going one better than Wells in this loathes the big bourgeois as well. His real sympathies are bounded by Mr. Pickwick on the upper side and Mr. Barkis on the lower. But the term 'aristocrat', for the type Dickens hates, is vague and needs defining.

Actually Dickens's target is not so much the great aristocracy, who hardly enter into his books, as their petty offshoots, the cadging dowagers who live up mews in Mayfair, and the bureaucrats and professional soldiers. All through his books there are countess hostile sketches of these people, and hardly any that are friendly. There are

practically no friendly pictures of the landowning class, for instance. One might make a doubtful exception of Sir Leicester Dedlock; otherwise there is only Mr. Wardle (who is a stock figure the 'good old squire') and Haredale in BARNABY RUDGE, who has Dickens's sympathy because he is a persecuted Catholic. There are no friendly pictures of soldiers (i.e. officers), and none at all of naval men. As for his bureaucrats, judges and magistrates, most of them would feel quite at home in the Circumlocution Office. The only officials whom Dickens handles with any kind of friendliness are, significantly enough, policemen.

Dickens's attitude is easily intelligible to an Englishman, because it is part of the English puritan tradition, which is not dead even at this day. The class Dickens belonged to, at least by adoption, was growing suddenly rich after a couple of centuries of obscurity. It had grown up mainly in the big towns, out of contact with agriculture, and politically impotent; government, in its experience, was something which either interfered or persecuted. Consequently it was a class with no tradition of public service and not much tradition of usefulness. What now strikes us as remarkable about the new moneyed class of the nineteenth century is their complete irresponsibility; they see everything in terms of individual success, with hardly any consciousness that the community exists. On the other hand, a Tite Barnacle, even when he was neglecting his duties, would have some vague notion of what duties he was neglecting. Dickens's attitude is never irresponsible, still less does he take the money-grubbing Smilesian line; but at the back of his mind there is usually a half-belief that the whole apparatus of government is unnecessary. Parliament is simply Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle, the Empire is simply Major Bagstock and his Indian servant, the Army is simply Colonel Chowser and Doctor Slammer, the public services are simply Bumble and the Circumlocution Office– and so on and so forth. What he does not see, or only intermittently sees, is that Coodle and Doodle and all the other corpses left over from the eighteenth century ARE performing a function which neither Pickwick nor Boffin would ever bother about.

And of course this narrowness of vision is in one way a great advantage to him, because it is fatal for a caricaturist to see too

much. From Dickens's point of view 'good' society is simply a collection of village idiots. What a crew! Lady Tippins! Mrs. Gowan! Lord Verisopht! The Honourable Bob Stables! Mrs. Sparsit (whose husband was a Powler)! The Tite Barnacles! Nupkins! It is practically a case-book in lunacy. But at the same time his remoteness from the landowning-military-bureaucratic class incapacitates him for full-length satire. He only succeeds with this class when he depicts them as mental defectives. The accusation which used to be made against Dickens in his lifetime, that he 'could not paint a gentleman', was an absurdity, but it is true in this sense, that what he says against the 'gentleman' class is seldom very damaging. Sir Mulberry Hawk, for instance, is a wretched attempt at the wicked-baronet type. Harthouse in HARD TIMES is better, but he would be only an ordinary achievement for Trollope or Thackeray. Trollope's thoughts hardly move outside the 'gentleman' class, but Thackeray has the great advantage of having a foot in two moral camps. In some ways his outlook is very similar to Dickens's. Like Dickens, he identifies with the puritanical moneyed class against the card-playing, debt-bilking aristocracy. The eighteenth century, as he sees it, is sticking out into the nineteenth in the person of the wicked Lord Steyne. VANITY FAIR is a full-length version of what Dickens did for a few chapters in LITTLE DORRIT. But by origins and upbringing Thackeray happens to be somewhat nearer to the class he is satirizing. Consequently he can produce such comparatively subtle types as, for instance, Major Pendennis and Rawdon Crawley. Major Pendennis is a shallow old snob, and Rawdon Crawley is a thick-headed ruffian who sees nothing wrong in living for years by swindling tradesmen; but what Thackery realizes is that according to their tortuous code they are neither of them bad men. Major Pendennis would not sign a dud cheque, for instance; Rawdon certainly would, but on the other hand he would not desert a friend in a tight corner. Both of them would behave well on the field of battle–a thing that would not particularly appeal to Dickens. The result is that at the end one is left with a kind of amused tolerance for Major Pendennis and with something approaching respect for Rawdon; and yet one sees, better than any diatribe could make one, the utter rottenness of that kind of cadging,

toadying life on the fringes of smart society. Dickens would be quite incapable of this. In his hands both Rawdon and the Major would dwindle to traditional caricatures. And, on the whole, his attacks on 'good' society are rather perfunctory. The aristocracy and the big bourgeoisie exist in his books chiefly as a kind of 'noises off', a haw-hawing chorus somewhere in the wings, like Podsnap's dinner-parties. When he produces a really subtle and damaging portrait, like John Dorrit or Harold Skimpole, it is generally of some rather middling, unimportant person.

One very striking thing about Dickens, especially considering the time he lived in, is his lack of vulgar nationalism. All peoples who have reached the point of becoming nations tend to despise foreigners, but there is not much doubt that the English-speaking races are the worst offenders. One can see this from the fact that as soon as they become fully aware of any foreign race they invent an insulting nickname for it. Wop, Dago, Froggy, Squarehead, Kike, Sheeny, Nigger, Wog, Chink, Greaser, Yellowbelly–these are merely a selection. Any time before 1870 the list would have been shorter, because the map of the world was different from what it is now, and there were only three or four foreign races that had fully entered into the English consciousness. But towards these, and especially towards France, the nearest and best-hated nation, the English attitude of patronage was so intolerable that English 'arrogance' and 'xenophobia' are still a legend. And of course they are not a completely untrue legend even now. Till very recently nearly all English children were brought up to despise the southern European races, and history as taught in schools was mainly a list of battles won by England. But one has got to read, say, the QUARTERLY REVIEW of the thirties to know what boasting really is. Those were the days when the English built up their legend of themselves as 'sturdy islanders' and 'stubborn hearts of oak' and when it was accepted as a kind of scientific fact that one Englishman was the equal of three foreigners. All through nineteenth-century novels and comic papers there runs the traditional figure of the 'Froggy'–a small ridiculous man with a tiny beard and a pointed top-hat, always jabbering and gesticulating, vain, frivolous and fond of boasting of his martial exploits, but generally taking to flight when real danger

appears. Over against him was John Bull, the 'sturdy English yeoman', or (a more public-school version) the 'strong, silent Englishman' of Charles Kingsley, Tom Hughes and others.

Thackeray, for instance, has this outlook very strongly, though there are moments when he sees through it and laughs at it. The one historical fact that is firmly fixed in his mind is that the English won the battle of Waterloo. One never reads far in his books without coming upon some reference to it. The English, as he sees it, are invincible because of their tremendous physical strength, due mainly to living on beef. Like most Englishmen of his time, he has the curious illusion that the English are larger than other people (Thackeray, as it happened, was larger than most people), and therefore he is capable of writing passages like this:

I say to you that you are better than a Frenchman. I would lay even money that you who are reading this are more than five feet seven in height, and weigh eleven stone; while a Frenchman is five feet four and does not weigh nine. The Frenchman has after his soup a dish of vegetables, where you have one of meat. You are a different and superior animal–a French-beating animal (the history of hundreds of years has shown you to be so), etc. etc.

There are similar passages scattered all through Thackeray's works. Dickens would never be guilty of anything of that kind. It would be an exaggeration to say that he nowhere pokes fun at foreigners, and of course like nearly all nineteenth-century Englishmen, he is untouched by European culture. But never anywhere does he indulge in the typical English boasting, the 'island race', 'bulldog breed', 'right little, tight little island' style of talk. In the whole of A TALE OF TWO CITIES there is not a line that could be taken as meaning, 'Look how these wicked Frenchmen behave!' The only place where he seems to display a normal hatred of foreigners is in the American chapters of MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT. This, however, is simply the reaction of a generous mind against cant. If Dickens were alive today he would make a trip to Soviet Russia and come back to the book rather like Gide's RETOUR DE L'URSS. But he is remarkably free from the idiocy of regarding nations as individuals. He seldom even makes jokes turning on nationality. He does not exploit the comic Irishman and the comic

Welshman, for instance, and not because he objects to stock characters and ready-made jokes, which obviously he does not. It is perhaps more significant that he shows no prejudice against Jews. It is true that he takes it for granted (OLIVER TWIST and GREAT EXPECTATIONS) that a receiver of stolen goods will be a Jew, which at the time was probably justified. But the 'Jew joke', endemic in English literature until the rise of Hitler, does not appear in his books, and in OUR MUTUAL FRIEND he makes a pious though not very convincing attempt to stand up for the Jews.

Dickens's lack of vulgar nationalism is in part the mark of a real largeness of mind, and in part results from his negative, rather unhelpful political attitude. He is very much an Englishman but he is hardly aware of it–certainly the thought of being an Englishman does not thrill him. He has no imperialist feelings, no discernible views on foreign politics, and is untouched by the military tradition. Temperamentally he is much nearer to the small noncomformist tradesman who looks down on the 'redcoats', and thinks that war is wicked–a one-eyed view, but after all, war is wicked. It is noticeable that Dickens hardly writes of war, even to denounce it. With all his marvellous powers of description, and of describing things he had never seen, he never describes a battle, unless one counts the attack on the Bastille in A TALE OF TWO CITIES. Probably the subject would not strike him as interesting, and in any case he would not regard a battlefield as a place where anything worth settling could be settled. It is one up to the lower-middle-class, puritan mentality.

III

Dickens had grown up near enough to poverty to be terrified of it, and in spite of his generosity of mind, he is not free from the special prejudices of the shabby-genteel. It is usual to claim him as a 'popular' writer, a champion of the 'oppressed masses'. So he is, so long as he thinks of them as oppressed; but there are two things that condition his attitude. In the first place, he is a south-of-England man, and a Cockney at that, and therefore out of touch with the bulk of the real oppressed masses, the industrial and agricultural labourers. It is interesting to see how Chesterton, another Cockney,

always presents Dickens as the spokesman of 'the poor', without showing much awareness of who 'the poor' really are. To Chesterton 'the poor' means small shopkeepers and servants. Sam Weller, he says, 'is the great symbol in English literature of the populace peculiar to England'; and Sam Weller is a valet! The other point is that Dickens's early experiences have given him a horror of proletarian roughness. He shows this unmistakably whenever he writes of the very poorest of the poor, the slum-dwellers. His descriptions of the London slums are always full of undisguised repulsion:

The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; and people half naked, drunken, slipshod and ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, and filth, and misery, etc. etc.

There are many similar passages in Dickens. From them one gets the impression of whole submerged populations whom he regards as being beyond the pale. In rather the same way the modern doctrinaire Socialist contemptuously writes off a large block of the population as 'lumpenproletariat'.

Dickens also shows less understanding of criminals than one would expect of him. Although he is well aware of the social and economic causes of crime, he often seems to feel that when a man has once broken the law he has put himself outside human society. There is a chapter at the end of DAVID COPPERFIELD in which David visits the prison where Latimer and Uriah Heep are serving their sentences. Dickens actually seems to regard the horrible 'model' prisons, against which Charles Reade delivered his memorable attack in IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND, as too humane. He complains that the food is too good! As soon as he comes up against crime or the worst depths of poverty, he shows traces of the 'I've always kept myself respectable' habit of mind. The attitude of Pip (obviously the attitude of Dickens himself) towards Magwitch in GREAT EXPECTATIONS is extremely interesting. Pip is conscious all along of his ingratitude towards Joe, but far less so of his ingratitude towards Magwitch. When he discovers that the person who has loaded him with benefits for years is actually a transported

convict, he falls into frenzies of disgust. 'The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast', etc. etc. So far as one can discover from the text, this is not because when Pip was a child he had been terrorized by Magwitch in the churchyard; it is because Magwitch is a criminal and a convict. There is an even more 'kept-myself-respectable' touch in the fact that Pip feels as a matter of course that he cannot take Magwitch's money. The money is not the product of a crime, it has been honestly acquired; but it is an ex-convict's money and therefore 'tainted'. There is nothing psychologically false in this, either. Psychologically the latter part of GREAT EXPECTATIONS is about the best thing Dickens ever did; throughout this part of the book one feels 'Yes, that is just how Pip would have behaved.' But the point is that in the matter of Magwitch, Dickens identifies with Pip, and his attitude is at bottom snobbish. The result is that Magwitch belongs to the same queer class of characters as Falstaff and, probably, Don Quixote–characters who are more pathetic than the author intended.

When it is a question of the non-criminal poor, the ordinary, decent, labouring poor, there is of course nothing contemptuous in Dickens's attitude. He has the sincerest admiration for people like the Peggottys and the Plornishes. But it is questionable whether he really regards them as equals. It is of the greatest interest to read Chapter XI of DAVID COPPERFIELD and side by side with it the autobiographical fragments (parts of this are given in Forster's LIFE), in which Dickens expresses his feelings about the blacking-factory episode a great deal more strongly than in the novel. For more than twenty years afterwards the memory was so painful to him that he would go out of his way to avoid that part of the Strand. He says that to pass that way 'made me cry, after my eldest child could speak.' The text makes it quite clear that what hurt him most of all, then and in retrospect, was the enforced contact with 'low' associates:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood. But I held some station at the blacking warehouse too...I soon became at least as expeditious and as skilful

with my hands as either of the other boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manners were different enough from theirs to place a space between us. They, and the men, always spoke of me as 'the young gentleman'. A certain man...used to call me 'Charles' sometimes in speaking to me; but I think it was mostly when we were very confidential...Poll Green uprose once, and rebelled against the 'young-gentleman' usage; but Bob Fagin settled him speedily.

It was as well that there should be 'a space between us', you see. However much Dickens may admire the working classes, he does not wish to resemble them. Given his origins, and the time he lived in, it could hardly be otherwise. In the early nineteenth century class animosities may have been no sharper than they are now, but the surface differences between class and class were enormously greater. The 'gentleman' and the 'common man' must have seemed like different species of animal. Dickens is quite genuinely on the side of the poor against the rich, but it would be next door to impossible for him not to think of a working-class exterior as a stigma. In one of Tolstoy's fables the peasants of a certain village judge every stranger who arrives from the state of his hands. If his palms are hard from work, they let him in; if his palms are soft, out he goes. This would be hardly intelligible to Dickens; all his heroes have soft hands. His younger heroes–Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit, Edward Chester, David Copperfield, John Harmon–are usually of the type known as 'walking gentlemen'. He likes a bourgeois exterior and a bourgeois (not aristocratic) accent. One curious symptom of this is that he will not allow anyone who is to play a heroic part to speak like a working man. A comic hero like Sam Weller, or a merely pathetic figure like Stephen Blackpool, can speak with a broad accent, but the JEUNE PREMIER always speaks the equivalent of B.B.C. This is so, even when it involves absurdities. Little Pip, for instance, is brought up by people speaking broad Essex, but talks upper-class English from his earliest childhood; actually he would have talked the same dialect as Joe, or at least as Mrs. Gargery. So also with Biddy Wopsle, Lizzie Hexam, Sissie Jupe, Oliver Twist–one ought perhaps to add Little Dorrit. Even Rachel in HARD TIMES has barely a trace of Lancashire accent, an impossibility in

her case.

One thing that often gives the clue to a novelist's real feelings on the class question is the attitude he takes up when class collides with sex. This is a thing too painful to be lied about, and consequently it is one of the points at which the 'I'm-not-a-snob' pose tends to break down.

One sees that at its most obvious where a class-distinction is also a colour-distinction. And something resembling the colonial attitude ('native' women are fair game, white women are sacrosanct) exists in a veiled form in all-white communities, causing bitter resentment on both sides. When this issue arises, novelists often revert to crude class-feelings which they might disclaim at other times. A good example of 'class-conscious' reaction is a rather forgotten novel, THE PEOPLE OF CLOPTON, by Andrew Barton. The author's moral code is quite clearly mixed up with class-hatred. He feels the seduction of a poor girl by a rich man to be something atrocious, a kind of defilement, something quite different from her seduction by a man in her own walk of life. Trollope deals with this theme twice (THE THREE CLERKS and THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON) and, as one might expect, entirely from the upper-class angle. As he sees it, an affair with a barmaid or a landlady's daughter is simply an 'entanglement' to be escaped from. Trollope's moral standards are strict, and he does not allow the seduction actually to happen, but the implication is always that a working-class girl's feelings do not greatly matter. In THE THREE CLERKS he even gives the typical class-reaction by noting that the girl 'smells'. Meredith (RHODA FLEMING) takes more the 'class-conscious' viewpoint. Thackeray, as often, seems to hesitate. In PENDENNIS (Fanny Bolton) his attitude is much the same as Trollope's; in A SHABBY GENTEEL STORY it is nearer to Meredith's.

One could divine a great deal about Trollope's social origin, or Meredith's, or Barton's, merely from their handling of the class-sex theme. So one can with Dickens, but what emerges, as usual, is that he is more inclined to identify himself with the middle class than with the proletariat. The one incident that seems to contradict this is the tale of the young peasant-girl in Doctor Manette's manuscript in A TALE OF TWO CITIES. This, however, is merely a costume-

piece put in to explain the implacable hatred of Madame Defarge, which Dickens does not pretend to approve of. In DAVID COPPERFIELD, where he is dealing with a typical nineteenth-century seduction, the class-issue does not seem to strike him as paramount. It is a law of Victorian novels that sexual misdeeds must not go unpunished, and so Steerforth is drowned on Yarmouth sands, but neither Dickens, nor old Peggotty, nor even Ham, seems to feel that Steerforth has added to his offence by being the son of rich parents. The Steerforths are moved by class-motives, but the Peggottys are not–not even in the scene between Mrs. Steerforth and old Peggotty; if they were, of course, they would probably turn against David as well as against Steerforth.

In OUR MUTUAL FRIEND Dickens treats the episode of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam very realistically and with no appearance of class bias. According to the 'Unhand me, monster!' tradition, Lizzie ought either to 'spurn' Eugene or to be ruined by him and throw herself off Waterloo Bridge: Eugene ought to be either a heartless betrayer or a hero resolved upon defying society. Neither behaves in the least like this. Lizzie is frightened by Eugene's advances and actually runs away from him, but hardly pretends to dislike them; Eugene is attracted by her, has too much decency to attempt seducing her and dare not marry her because of his family. Finally they are married and no one is any the worse, except Mrs. Twemlow, who will lose a few dinner engagements. It is all very much as it might have happened in real life. But a 'class-conscious' novelist would have given her to Bradley Headstone.

But when it is the other way about–when it is a case of a poor man aspiring to some woman who is 'above' him Dickens instantly retreats into the middle-class attitude. He is rather fond of the Victorian notion of a woman (woman with a capital W) being 'above' a man. Pip feels that Estella is 'above' him, Esther Summerson is 'above' Guppy, Little Dorrit is 'above' John Chivery, Lucy Manette is 'above' Sydney Carton. In some of these the 'above'-ness is merely moral, but in others it is social. There is a scarcely mistakable class-reaction when David Copperfield discovers that Uriah Heep is plotting to marry Agnes Wickfield. The disgusting Uriah suddenly announces that he is in love with her:

‘Oh, Master Copperfield, with what a pure affection do I love the ground my Agnes walks on.’

I believe I had the delirious idea of seizing the red-hot poker out of the fire, and running him through with it. It went from me with a shock, like a ball fired from a rifle: but the image of Agnes, outraged by so much as a thought of this red-headed animal’s, remained in my mind (when I looked at him, sitting all awry as if his mean soul griped his body) and made me giddy...’I believe Agnes Wickfield to be as far above you (David says later on), and as far removed from all your aspirations, as the moon herself.’

Considering how Heep’s general lowness–his servile manners, dropped aitches and so forth–has been rubbed in throughout the book, there is not much doubt about the nature of Dickens’s feelings. Heep, of course, is playing a villainous part, but even villains have sexual lives; it is the thought of the ‘pure’ Agnes in bed with a man who drops his aitches that really revolts Dickens. But his usual tendency is to treat a man in love with a woman who is ‘above’ him as a joke. It is one of the stock jokes of English literature, from Malvolio onwards. Guppy in BLEAK HOUSE is an example, John Chivery is another, and there is a rather ill-natured treatment of this theme in the ‘swarry’ in PICKWICK PAPERS. Here Dickens describes the Bath footmen as living a kind of fantasy-life, holding dinner-parties in imitation of their ‘betters’ and deluding themselves that their young mistresses are in love with them. This evidently strikes him as very comic. So it is in a way, though one might question whether it is not better for a footman even to have delusions of this kind than simply to accept his status in the spirit of the catechism.

In his attitude towards servants Dickens is not ahead of his age. In the nineteenth century the revolt against domestic service was just beginning, to the great annoyance of everyone with over £500 a year. An enormous number of the jokes in nineteenth-century comic papers deals with the uppishness of servants. For years PUNCH ran a series of jokes called ‘Servant Gal-isms’, all turning on the then astonishing fact that a servant is a human being. Dickens is sometimes guilty of this kind of thing himself. His books abound with the ordinary comic servants; they are dishonest (GREAT

EXPECTATIONS), incompetent (DAVID COPPERFIELD), turn up their noses at good food (PICKWICK PAPERS), etc. etc.–all rather in the spirit of the suburban housewife with one downtrodden cook-general. But what is curious, in a nineteenth-century radical, is that when he wants to draw a sympathetic picture of a servant, he creates what is recognizably a feudal type. Sam Weller, Mark Tapley, Clara Peggotty are all of them feudal figures. They belong to the genre of the 'old family retainer'; they identify themselves with their master's family and are at once doggishly faithful and completely familiar. No doubt Mark Tapley and Sam Weller are derived to some extent from Smollett, and hence from Cervantes; but it is interesting that Dickens should have been attracted by such a type. Sam Weller's attitude is definitely medieval. He gets himself arrested in order to follow Mr. Pickwick into the Fleet, and afterwards refuses to get married because he feels that Mr. Pickwick still needs his services. There is a characteristic scene between them:

'Vages or no vages, board or no board, lodgin' or no lodgin', Sam Veller, as you took from the old inn in the Borough, sticks by you, come what may...'

'My good fellow', said Mr. Pickwick, when Mr. Weller had sat down again, rather abashed at his own enthusiasm, 'you are bound to consider the young woman also.'

'I do consider the young 'ooman, sir', said Sam. 'I have considered the young 'ooman. I've spoke to her. I've told her how I'm sitivated; she's ready to vait till I'm ready, and I believe she vill. If she don't, she's not the young 'ooman I take her for, and I give up with readiness.'

It is easy to imagine what the young woman would have said to this in real life. But notice the feudal atmosphere. Sam Weller is ready as a matter of course to sacrifice years of his life to his master, and he can also sit down in his master's presence. A modern manservant would never think of doing either. Dickens's views on the servant question do not get much beyond wishing that master and servant would love one another. Sloppy in OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, though a wretched failure as a character, represents the same kind of loyalty as Sam Weller. Such loyalty, of course, is natural, human, and likeable; but so was feudalism.

What Dickens seems to be doing, as usual, is to reach out for an idealized version of the existing thing. He was writing at a time when domestic service must have seemed a completely inevitable evil. There were no labour-saving devices, and there was huge inequality of wealth. It was an age of enormous families, pretentious meals and inconvenient houses, when the slavey drudging fourteen hours a day in the basement kitchen was something too normal to be noticed. And given the FACT of servitude, the feudal relationship is the only tolerable one. Sam Weller and Mark Tapley are dream figures, no less than the Cheerybles. If there have got to be masters and servants, how much better that the master should be Mr. Pickwick and the servant should be Sam Weller. Better still, of course, if servants did not exist at all–but this Dickens is probably unable to imagine. Without a high level of mechanical development, human equality is not practically possible; Dickens goes to show that it is not imaginable either.

IV

It is not merely a coincidence that Dickens never writes about agriculture and writes endlessly about food. He was a Cockney, and London is the centre of the earth in rather the same sense that the belly is the centre of the body. It is a city of consumers, of people who are deeply civilized but not primarily useful. A thing that strikes one when one looks below the surface of Dickens's books is that, as nineteenth-century novelists go, he is rather ignorant. He knows very little about the way things really happen. At first sight this statement looks flatly untrue and it needs some qualification.

Dickens had had vivid glimpses of 'low life'–life in a debtor's prison, for example–and he was also a popular novelist and able to write about ordinary people. So were all the characteristic English novelists of the nineteenth century. They felt at home in the world they lived in, whereas a writer nowadays is so hopelessly isolated that the typical modern novel is a novel about a novelist. Even when Joyce, for instance, spends a decade or so in patient efforts to make contact with the 'common man', his 'common man' finally turns out to be a Jew, and a bit of a highbrow at that. Dickens at least does not

suffer from this kind of thing. He has no difficulty in introducing the common motives, love, ambition, avarice, vengeance and so forth. What he does not noticeably write about, however, is work.

In Dickens's novels anything in the nature of work happens off-stage. The only one of his heroes who has a plausible profession is David Copperfield, who is first a shorthand writer and then a novelist, like Dickens himself. With most of the others, the way they earn their living is very much in the background. Pip, for instance, 'goes into business' in Egypt; we are not told what business, and Pip's working life occupies about half a page of the book. Clennam has been in some unspecified business in China, and later goes into another barely specified business with Doyce; Martin Chuzzlewit is an architect, but does not seem to get much time for practising. In no case do their adventures spring directly out of their work. Here the contrast between Dickens and, say, Trollope is startling. And one reason for this is undoubtedly that Dickens knows very little about the professions his characters are supposed to follow. What exactly went on in Gradgrind's factories? How did Podsnap make his money? How did Merdle work his swindles? One knows that Dickens could never follow up the details of Parliamentary elections and Stock Exchange rackets as Trollope could. As soon as he has to deal with trade, finance, industry or politics he takes refuge in vagueness, or in satire. This is the case even with legal processes, about which actually he must have known a good deal. Compare any lawsuit in Dickens with the lawsuit in ORLEY FARM, for instance.

And this partly accounts for the needless ramifications of Dickens's novels, the awful Victorian 'plot'. It is true that not all his novels are alike in this. A TALE OF TWO CITIES is a very good and fairly simple story, and so in its different ways is HARD TIMES; but these are just the two which are always rejected as 'not like Dickens'–and incidentally they were not published in monthly numbers. The two first-person novels are also good stories, apart from their subplots. But the typical Dickens novel, NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, OLIVER TWIST, MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT, OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, always exists round a framework of melodrama. The last thing anyone ever remembers about the books is their central story. On the other hand, I suppose no one has ever read

them without carrying the memory of individual pages to the day of his death. Dickens sees human beings with the most intense vividness, but sees them always in private life, as 'characters', not as functional members of society; that is to say, he sees them statically. Consequently his greatest success is The PICKWICK PAPERS, which is not a story at all, merely a series of sketches; there is little attempt at development–the characters simply go on and on, behaving like idiots, in a kind of eternity. As soon as he tries to bring his characters into action, the melodrama begins. He cannot make the action revolve round their ordinary occupations; hence the crossword puzzle of coincidences, intrigues, murders, disguises, buried wills, long-lost brothers, etc. etc. In the end even people like Squeers and Micawber get sucked into the machinery.

Of course it would be absurd to say that Dickens is a vague or merely melodramatic writer. Much that he wrote is extremely factual, and in the power of evoking visual images he has probably never been equalled. When Dickens has once described something you see it for the rest of your life. But in a way the concreteness of his vision is a sign of what he is missing. For, after all, that is what the merely casual onlooker always sees–the outward appearance, the non-functional, the surfaces of things. No one who is really involved in the landscape ever sees the landscape. Wonderfully as he can describe an APPEARANCE, Dickens does not often describe a process. The vivid pictures that he succeeds in leaving in one's memory are nearly always the pictures of things seen in leisure moments, in the coffee-rooms of country inns or through the windows of a stage-coach; the kind of things he notices are inn-signs, brass door-knockers, painted jugs, the interiors of shops and private houses, clothes, faces and, above all, food. Everything is seen from the consumer-angle. When he writes about Cokestown he manages to evoke, in just a few paragraphs, the atmosphere of a Lancashire town as a slightly disgusted southern visitor would see it. 'It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with evil-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness.'

That is as near as Dickens ever gets to the machinery of the mills. An engineer or a cotton-broker would see it differently; but then neither of them would be capable of that impressionistic touch about the heads of the elephants.

In a rather different sense his attitude to life is extremely unphysical. He is a man who lives through his eyes and ears rather than through his hands and muscles. Actually his habits were not so sedentary as this seems to imply. In spite of rather poor health and physique, he was active to the point of restlessness; throughout his life he was a remarkable walker, and he could at any rate carpenter well enough to put up stage scenery. But he was not one of those people who feel a need to use their hands. It is difficult to imagine him digging at a cabbage-patch, for instance. He gives no evidence of knowing anything about agriculture, and obviously knows nothing about any kind of game or sport. He has no interest in pugilism, for instance. Considering the age in which he was writing, it is astonishing how little physical brutality there is in Dickens's novels. Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley, for instance, behave with the most remarkable mildness towards the Americans who are constantly menacing them with revolvers and bowie-knives. The average English or American novelist would have had them handing out socks on the jaw and exchanging pistol-shots in all directions. Dickens is too decent for that; he sees the stupidity of violence, and he also belongs to a cautious urban class which does not deal in socks on the jaw, even in theory. And his attitude towards sport is mixed up with social feelings. In England, for mainly geographical reasons, sport, especially field-sports, and snobbery are inextricably mingled. English Socialists are often flatly incredulous when told that Lenin, for instance, was devoted to shooting. In their eyes, shooting, hunting, etc., are simply snobbish observances of the landed gentry; they forget that these things might appear differently in a huge virgin country like Russia. From Dickens's point of view almost any kind of sport is at best a subject for satire. Consequently one side of nineteenth-century life–the boxing, racing, cock-fighting, badger-digging, poaching, rat-catching side of life, so wonderfully embalmed in Leech's illustrations to Surtees–is outside his scope.

What is more striking, in a seemingly 'progressive' radical, is that

he is not mechanically minded. He shows no interest either in the details of machinery or in the things machinery can do. As Gissing remarks, Dickens nowhere describes a railway journey with anything like the enthusiasm he shows in describing journeys by stage-coach. In nearly all of his books one has a curious feeling that one is living in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and in fact, he does tend to return to this period. LITTLE DORRIT, written in the middle fifties, deals with the late twenties; GREAT EXPECTATIONS (1861) is not dated, but evidently deals with the twenties and thirties. Several of the inventions and discoveries which have made the modern world possible (the electric telegraph, the breech-loading gun, India-rubber, coal gas, wood-pulp paper) first appeared in Dickens's lifetime, but he scarcely notes them in his books. Nothing is queerer than the vagueness with which he speaks of Doyce's 'invention' in LITTLE DORRIT. It is represented as something extremely ingenious and revolutionary, 'of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures', and it is also an important minor link in the book; yet we are never told what the 'invention' is! On the other hand, Doyce's physical appearance is hit off with the typical Dickens touch; he has a peculiar way of moving his thumb, a way characteristic of engineers. After that, Doyce is firmly anchored in one's memory; but, as usual, Dickens has done it by fastening on something external.

There are people (Tennyson is an example) who lack the mechanical faculty but can see the social possibilities of machinery. Dickens has not this stamp of mind. He shows very little consciousness of the future. When he speaks of human progress it is usually in terms of MORAL progress–men growing better; probably he would never admit that men are only as good as their technical development allows them to be. At this point the gap between Dickens and his modern analogue, H.G. Wells, is at its widest. Wells wears the future round his neck like a mill-stone, but Dickens's unscientific cast of mind is just as damaging in a different way. What it does is to make any POSITIVE attitude more difficult for him. He is hostile to the feudal, agricultural past and not in real touch with the industrial present. Well, then, all that remains is the future (meaning Science, 'progress', and so forth), which hardly enters into his

thoughts. Therefore, while attacking everything in sight, he has no definable standard of comparison. As I have pointed out already, he attacks the current educational system with perfect justice, and yet, after all, he has no remedy to offer except kindlier schoolmasters. Why did he not indicate what a school MIGHT have been? Why did he not have his own sons educated according to some plan of his own, instead of sending them to public schools to be stuffed with Greek? Because he lacked that kind of imagination. He has an infallible moral sense, but very little intellectual curiosity. And here one comes upon something which really is an enormous deficiency in Dickens, something, that really does make the nineteenth century seem remote from us–that he has no idea of work.

With the doubtful exception of David Copperfield (merely Dickens himself), one cannot point to a single one of his central characters who is primarily interested in his job. His heroes work in order to make a living and to marry the heroine, not because they feel a passionate interest in one particular subject. Martin Chuzzlewit, for instance, is not burning with zeal to be an architect; he might just as well be a doctor or a barrister. In any case, in the typical Dickens novel, the DEUS EX MACHINA enters with a bag of gold in the last chapter and the hero is absolved from further struggle. The feeling 'This is what I came into the world to do. Everything else is uninteresting. I will do this even if it means starvation', which turns men of differing temperaments into scientists, inventors, artists, priests, explorers and revolutionaries–this motif is almost entirely absent from Dickens's books. He himself, as is well known, worked like a slave and believed in his work as few novelists have ever done. But there seems to be no calling except novel-writing (and perhaps acting) towards which he can imagine this kind of devotion. And, after all, it is natural enough, considering his rather negative attitude towards society. In the last resort there is nothing he admires except common decency. Science is uninteresting and machinery is cruel and ugly (the heads of the elephants). Business is only for ruffians like Bounderby. As for politics–leave that to the Tite Barnacles. Really there is no objective except to marry the heroine, settle down, live solvently and be kind. And you can do that much better in private life.

Here, perhaps, one gets a glimpse of Dickens's secret imaginative background. What did he think of as the most desirable way to live? When Martin Chuzzlewit had made it up with his uncle, when Nicholas Nickleby had married money, when John Harman had been enriched by Boffin what did they DO?

The answer evidently is that they did nothing. Nicholas Nickleby invested his wife's money with the Cheerybles and 'became a rich and prosperous merchant', but as he immediately retired into Devonshire, we can assume that he did not work very hard. Mr. and Mrs. Snodgrass 'purchased and cultivated a small farm, more for occupation than profit.' That is the spirit in which most of Dickens's books end–a sort of radiant idleness. Where he appears to disapprove of young men who do not work (Harthouse, Harry Gowan, Richard Carstone, Wrayburn before his reformation) it is because they are cynical and immoral or because they are a burden on somebody else; if you are 'good', and also self-supporting, there is no reason why you should not spend fifty years in simply drawing your dividends. Home life is always enough. And, after all, it was the general assumption of his age. The 'genteel sufficiency', the 'competence', the 'gentleman of independent means' (or 'in easy circumstances')–the very phrases tell one all about the strange, empty dream of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century middle bourgeoisie. It was a dream of COMPLETE IDLENESS. Charles Reade conveys its spirit perfectly in the ending of HARD CASH. Alfred Hardie, hero of HARD CASH, is the typical nineteenth-century novel-hero (public-school style), with gifts which Reade describes as amounting to 'genius'. He is an old Etonian and a scholar of Oxford, he knows most of the Greek and Latin classics by heart, he can box with prizefighters and win the Diamond Sculls at Henley. He goes through incredible adventures in which, of course, he behaves with faultless heroism, and then, at the age of twenty-five, he inherits a fortune, marries his Julia Dodd and settles down in the suburbs of Liverpool, in the same house as his parents-in-law:

They all lived together at Albion Villa, thanks to Alfred...Oh, you happy little villa! You were as like Paradise as any mortal dwelling can be. A day came, however, when your walls could no longer hold all the happy inmates. Julia presented Alfred with a lovely boy; enter

two nurses and the villa showed symptoms of bursting. Two months more, and Alfred and his wife overflowed into the next villa. It was but twenty yards off; and there was a double reason for the migration. As often happens after a long separation, Heaven bestowed on Captain and Mrs. Dodd another infant to play about their knees, etc. etc. etc.

This is the type of the Victorian happy ending–a vision of a huge, loving family of three or four generations, all crammed together in the same house and constantly multiplying, like a bed of oysters. What is striking about it is the utterly soft, sheltered, effortless life that it implies. It is not even a violent idleness, like Squire Western's.

That is the significance of Dickens's urban background and his non interest in the blackguardly-sporting military side of life. His heroes, once they had come into money and 'settled down', would not only do no work; they would not even ride, hunt, shoot, fight duels, elope with actresses or lose money at the races. They would simply live at home in feather-bed respectability, and preferably next door to a blood-relation living exactly the same life:

The first act of Nicholas, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's old house. As time crept on, and there came gradually about him a group of lovely children, it was altered and enlarged; but none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed.

Within a stone's-throw was another retreat enlivened by children's pleasant voices too; and here was Kate...the same true, gentle creature, the same fond sister, the same in the love of all about her, as in her girlish days.

It is the same incestuous atmosphere as in the passage quoted from Reade. And evidently this is Dickens's ideal ending. It is perfectly attained in NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT and PICKWICK, and it is approximated to in varying degrees in almost all the others. The exceptions are HARD TIMES and GREAT EXPECTATIONS–the latter actually has a 'happy ending', but it contradicts the general tendency of the book, and it was put in at the request of Bulwer Lytton.

The ideal to be striven after, then, appears to be something like

this: a hundred thousand pounds, a quaint old house with plenty of ivy on it, a sweetly womanly wife, a horde of children, and no work. Everything is safe, soft, peaceful and, above all, domestic. In the moss-grown churchyard down the road are the graves of the loved ones who passed away before the happy ending happened. The servants are comic and feudal, the children prattle round your feet, the old friends sit at your fireside, talking of past days, there is the endless succession of enormous meals, the cold punch and sherry negus, the feather beds and warming-pans, the Christmas parties with charades and blind man's buff; but nothing ever happens, except the yearly childbirth. The curious thing is that it is a genuinely happy picture, or so Dickens is able to make it appear. The thought of that kind of existence is satisfying to him. This alone would be enough to tell one that more than a hundred years have passed since Dickens's first book was written. No modern man could combine such purposelessness with so much vitality.

V

By this time anyone who is a lover of Dickens, and who has read as far as this, will probably be angry with me.

I have been discussing Dickens simply in terms of his 'message', and almost ignoring his literary qualities. But every writer, especially every novelist, HAS a 'message', whether he admits it or not, and the minutest details of his work are influenced by it. All art is propaganda. Neither Dickens himself nor the majority of Victorian novelists would have thought of denying this. On the other hand, not all propaganda is art. As I said earlier, Dickens is one of those writers who are felt to be worth stealing. He has been stolen by Marxists, by Catholics and, above all, by Conservatives. The question is, What is there to steal? Why does anyone care about Dickens? Why do I care about Dickens?

That kind of question is never easy to answer. As a rule, an aesthetic preference is either something inexplicable or it is so corrupted by non-aesthetic motives as to make one wonder whether the whole of literary criticism is not a huge network of humbug. In Dickens's case the complicating factor is his familiarity. He happens

to be one of those ‘great authors’ who are ladled down everyone’s throat in childhood. At the time this causes rebellion and vomiting, but it may have different after-effects in later life. For instance, nearly everyone feels a sneaking affection for the patriotic poems that he learned by heart as a child, ‘Ye Mariners of England’, the ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ and so forth. What one enjoys is not so much the poems themselves as the memories they call up. And with Dickens the same forces of association are at work. Probably there are copies of one or two of his books lying about in an actual majority of English homes. Many children begin to know his characters by sight before they can even read, for on the whole Dickens was lucky in his illustrators. A thing that is absorbed as early as that does not come up against any critical judgement. And when one thinks of this, one thinks of all that is bad and silly in Dickens–the cast-iron ‘plots’, the characters who don’t come off, the longueurs, the paragraphs in blank verse, the awful pages of ‘pathos’. And then the thought arises, when I say I like Dickens, do I simply mean that I like thinking about my childhood? Is Dickens merely an institution?

If so, he is an institution that there is no getting away from. How often one really thinks about any writer, even a writer one cares for, is a difficult thing to decide; but I should doubt whether anyone who has actually read Dickens can go a week without remembering him in one context or another. Whether you approve of him or not, he is THERE, like the Nelson Column. At any moment some scene or character, which may come from some book you cannot even remember the name of, is liable to drop into your mind. Micawber’s letters! Winkle in the witness-box! Mrs. Gamp! Mrs. Wititterly and Sir Tumley Snuffim! Todgers’s! (George Gissing said that when he passed the Monument it was never of the Fire of London that he thought, always of Todgers’s.) Mrs. Leo Hunter! Squeers! Silas Wegg and the Decline and Fall-off of the Russian Empire! Miss Mills and the Desert of Sahara! Wopsle acting Hamlet! Mrs. Jellyby! Mantalini, Jerry Cruncher, Barkis, Pumblechook, Tracy Tupman, Skimpole, Joe Gargery, Pecksniff–and so it goes on and on. It is not so much a series of books, it is more like a world. And not a purely comic world either, for part of what one remembers in Dickens is his

Victorian morbidness and necrophilia and the blood-and-thunder scenes–the death of Sykes, Krook's spontaneous combustion, Fagin in the condemned cell, the women knitting round the guillotine. To a surprising extent all this has entered even into the minds of people who do not care about it. A music-hall comedian can (or at any rate could quite recently) go on the stage and impersonate Micawber or Mrs. Gamp with a fair certainty of being understood, although not one in twenty of the audience had ever read a book of Dickens's right through. Even people who affect to despise him quote him unconsciously.

Dickens is a writer who can be imitated, up to a certain point. In genuinely popular literature–for instance, the Elephant and Castle version of SWEENY TODD–he has been plagiarized quite shamelessly. What has been imitated, however, is simply a tradition that Dickens himself took from earlier novelists and developed, the cult of 'character', i.e. eccentricity. The thing that cannot be imitated is his fertility of invention, which is invention not so much of characters, still less of 'situations', as of turns of phrase and concrete details. The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing is the UNNECESSARY DETAIL. Here is an example of what I mean. The story given below is not particularly funny, but there is one phrase in it that is as individual as a fingerprint. Mr. Jack Hopkins, at Bob Sawyer's party, is telling the story of the child who swallowed its sister's necklace:

Next day, child swallowed two beads; the day after that, he treated himself to three, and so on, till in a week's time he had got through the necklace–five-and-twenty beads in all. The sister, who was an industrious girl and seldom treated herself to a bit of finery, cried her eyes out at the loss of the necklace; looked high and low for it; but I needn't say, didn't find it. A few days afterwards, the family were at dinner–baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes under it–the child, who wasn't hungry, was playing about the room, when suddenly there was the devil of a noise, like a small hailstorm. 'Don't do that, my boy', says the father. 'I ain't a-doin' nothing', said the child. 'Well, don't do it again', said the father. There was a short silence, and then the noise began again, worse than ever. 'If you don't mind what I say, my boy', said the father, 'you'll find yourself in bed, in

something less than a pig's whisper.' He gave the child a shake to make him obedient, and such a rattling ensued as nobody ever heard before. 'Why dam' me, it's IN the child', said the father; 'he's got the croup in the wrong place!' 'No, I haven't, father', said the child, beginning to cry, 'it's the necklace; I swallowed it, father.' The father caught the child up, and ran with him to the hospital, the beads in the boy's stomach rattling all the way with the jolting; and the people looking up in the air, and down in the cellars, to see where the unusual sound came from. 'He's in the hospital now', said Jack Hopkins, 'and he makes such a devil of a noise when he walks about, that they're obliged to muffle him in a watchman's coat, for fear he should wake the patients.'

As a whole, this story might come out of any nineteenth-century comic paper. But the unmistakable Dickens touch, the thing that nobody else would have thought of, is the baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes under it. How does this advance the story? The answer is that it doesn't. It is something totally unnecessary, a florid little squiggle on the edge of the page; only, it is by just these squiggles that the special Dickens atmosphere is created. The other thing one would notice here is that Dickens's way of telling a story takes a long time. An interesting example, too long to quote, is Sam Weller's story of the obstinate patient in Chapter XLIV of THE PICKWICK PAPERS. As it happens, we have a standard of comparison here, because Dickens is plagiarizing, consciously or unconsciously. The story is also told by some ancient Greek writer. I cannot now find the passage, but I read it years ago as a boy at school, and it runs more or less like this:

A certain Thracian, renowned for his obstinacy, was warned by his physician that if he drank a flagon of wine it would kill him. The Thracian thereupon drank the flagon of wine and immediately jumped off the house-top and perished. 'For', said he, 'in this way I shall prove that the wine did not kill me.'

As the Greek tells it, that is the whole story–about six lines. As Sam Weller tells it, it takes round about a thousand words. Long before getting to the point we have been told all about the patient's clothes, his meals, his manners, even the newspapers he reads, and about the peculiar construction of the doctor's carriage, which

conceals the fact that the coachman's trousers do not match his coat. Then there is the dialogue between the doctor and the patient. ''Crumpets is wholesome, sir,' said the patient. 'Crumpets is NOT wholesome, sir,' says the doctor, wery fierce,' etc., etc. In the end the original story had been buried under the details. And in all of Dickens's most characteristic passages it is the same. His imagination overwhelms everything, like a kind of weed. Squeers stands up to address his boys, and immediately we are hearing about Bolder's father who was two pounds ten short, and Mobbs's stepmother who took to her bed on hearing that Mobbs wouldn't eat fat and hoped Mr. Squeers would flog him into a happier state of mind. Mrs. Leo Hunter writes a poem, 'Expiring Frog'; two full stanzas are given. Boffin takes a fancy to pose as a miser, and instantly we are down among the squalid biographies of eighteenth-century misers, with names like Vulture Hopkins and the Rev. Blewberry Jones, and chapter headings like 'The Story of the Mutton Pies' and 'The Treasures of a Dunghill'. Mrs. Harris, who does not even exist, has more detail piled on to her than any three characters in an ordinary novel. Merely in the middle of a sentence we learn, for instance, that her infant nephew has been seen in a bottle at Greenwich Fair, along with the pink-eyed lady, the Prussian dwarf and the living skeleton. Joe Gargery describes how the robbers broke into the house of Pumblechook, the corn and seed merchant–'and they took his till, and they took his cashbox, and they drinked his wine, and they partook of his wittles, and they slapped his face, and they pulled his nose, and they tied him up to his bedpost, and they give him a dozen, and they stuffed his mouth full of flowering annuals to prevent his crying out.' Once again the unmistakable Dickens touch, the flowering annuals; but any other novelist would only have mentioned about half of these outrages. Everything is piled up and up, detail on detail, embroidery on embroidery. It is futile to object that this kind of thing is rococo–one might as well make the same objection to a wedding-cake. Either you like it or you do not like it. Other nineteenth-century writers, Surtees, Barham, Thackeray, even Marryat, have something of Dickens's profuse, overflowing quality, but none of them on anything like the same scale. The appeal of all these writers now depends partly on period-

flavour and though Marryat is still officially a 'boy's writer' and Surtees has a sort of legendary fame among hunting men, it is probable that they are read mostly by bookish people.

Significantly, Dickens's most successful books (not his BEST books) are THE PICKWICK PAPERS, which is not a novel, and HARD TIMES and A TALE OF TWO CITIES, which are not funny. As a novelist his natural fertility greatly hampers him, because the burlesque which he is never able to resist, is constantly breaking into what ought to be serious situations. There is a good example of this in the opening chapter of GREAT EXPECTATIONS. The escaped convict, Magwitch, has just captured the six-year-old Pip in the churchyard. The scene starts terrifyingly enough, from Pip's point of view. The convict, smothered in mud and with his chain trailing from his leg, suddenly starts up among the tombs, grabs the child, turns him upside down and robs his pockets. Then he begins terrorizing him into bringing foal and a file:

He held me by the arms in an upright position on the top of the stone, and went on in these fearful terms:

'You bring me, tomorrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You bring the lot to me, at that old Battery over yonder. You do it and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate. Now, I ain't alone, as you may think I am. There's a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his doors, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep his way to him and tear him open. I am keeping that young man from harming you at the present moment, but with great difficulty. I find it wery hard to hold that young man off of your inside. Now, what do you say?'

Here Dickens has simply yielded to temptation. To begin with, no

starving and hunted man would speak in the least like that. Moreover, although the speech shows a remarkable knowledge of the way in which a child's mind works, its actual words are quite out of tune with what is to follow. It turns Magwitch into a sort of pantomime wicked uncle, or, if one sees him through the child's eyes, into an appalling monster. Later in the book he is to be represented as neither, and his exaggerated gratitude, on which the plot turns, is to be incredible because of just this speech. As usual, Dickens's imagination has overwhelmed him. The picturesque details were too good to be left out. Even with characters who are more of a piece than Magwitch he is liable to be tripped up by some seductive phrase. Mr. Murdstone, for instance, is in the habit of ending David Copperfield's lessons every morning with a dreadful sum in arithmetic. 'If I go into a cheesemonger's shop, and buy four thousand double-Gloucester cheeses at fourpence halfpenny each, present payment', it always begins. Once again the typical Dickens detail, the double-Gloucester cheeses. But it is far too human a touch for Murdstone; he would have made it five thousand cashboxes. Every time this note is struck, the unity of the novel suffers. Not that it matters very much, because Dickens is obviously a writer whose parts are greater than his wholes. He is all fragments, all details–rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles–and never better than when he is building up some character who will later on be forced to act inconsistently.

Of course it is not usual to urge against Dickens that he makes his characters behave inconsistently. Generally he is accused of doing just the opposite. His characters are supposed to be mere 'types', each crudely representing some single trait and fitted with a kind of label by which you recognize him. Dickens is 'only a caricaturist'–that is the usual accusation, and it does him both more and less than justice. To begin with, he did not think of himself as a caricaturist, and was constantly setting into action characters who ought to have been purely static. Squeers, Micawber, Miss Mowcher,[Note, below] Wegg, Skimpole, Pecksniff and many others are finally involved in 'plots' where they are out of place and where they behave quite incredibly. They start off as magic-lantern slides and they end by getting mixed up in a third-rate movie. Sometimes one can put one's

finger on a single sentence in which the original illusion is destroyed. There is such a sentence in DAVID COPPERFIELD. After the famous dinner-party (the one where the leg of mutton was underdone), David is showing his guests out. He stops Traddles at the top of the stairs:

[Note: Dickens turned Miss Mowcher into a sort of heroine because the real woman whom he had caricatured had read the earlier chapters and was bitterly hurt. He had previously meant her to play a villainous part. But ANY action by such a character would seem incongruous. (Author's footnote)]

'Traddles', said I, 'Mr. Micawber don't mean any harm, poor fellow: but if I were you I wouldn't lend him anything.'

'My dear Copperfield', returned Traddles, smiling, 'I haven't got anything to lend.'

'You have got a name, you know,' I said.

At the place where one reads it this remark jars a little though something of the kind was inevitable sooner or later. The story is a fairly realistic one, and David is growing up; ultimately he is bound to see Mr. Micawber for what he is, a cadging scoundrel. Afterwards, of course, Dickens's sentimentality overcomes him and Micawber is made to turn over a new leaf. But from then on, the original Micawber is never quite recaptured, in spite of desperate efforts. As a rule, the 'plot' in which Dickens's characters get entangled is not particularly credible, but at least it makes some pretence at reality, whereas the world to which they belong is a never-never land, a kind of eternity. But just here one sees that 'only a caricaturist' is not really a condemnation. The fact that Dickens is always thought of as a caricaturist, although he was constantly trying to be something else, is perhaps the surest mark of his genius. The monstrosities that he created are still remembered as monstrosities, in spite of getting mixed up in would-be probable melodramas. Their first impact is so vivid that nothing that comes afterwards effaces it. As with the people one knew in childhood, one seems always to remember them in one particular attitude, doing one particular thing. Mrs. Squeers is always ladling out brimstone and treacle, Mrs. Gummidge is always weeping, Mrs. Gargery is always banging her husband's head against the wall, Mrs. Jellyby is always scribbling tracts while her children

fall into the area–and there they all are, fixed up for ever like little twinkling miniatures painted on snuffbox lids, completely fantastic and incredible, and yet somehow more solid and infinitely more memorable than the efforts of serious novelists. Even by the standards of his time Dickens was an exceptionally artificial writer. As Ruskin said, he 'chose to work in a circle of stage fire.' His characters are even more distorted and simplified than Smollett's. But there are no rules in novel-writing, and for any work of art there is only one test worth bothering about–survival. By this test Dickens's characters have succeeded, even if the people who remember them hardly think of them as human beings. They are monsters, but at any rate they exist.

But all the same there is a disadvantage in writing about monsters. It amounts to this, that it is only certain moods that Dickens can speak to. There are large areas of the human mind that he never touches. There is no poetic feeling anywhere in his books, and no genuine tragedy, and even sexual love is almost outside his scope. Actually his books are not so sexless as they are sometimes declared to be, and considering the time in which he was writing, he is reasonably frank. But there is not a trace in him of the feeling that one finds in MANON LESCAUT, SALAMMBÔ, CARMEN, WUTHERING HEIGHTS. According to Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence once said that Balzac was 'a gigantic dwarf', and in a sense the same is true of Dickens. There are whole worlds which he either knows nothing about or does not wish to mention. Except in a rather roundabout way, one cannot learn very much from Dickens. And to say this is to think almost immediately of the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century. Why is it that Tolstoy's grasp seems to be so much larger than Dickens's–why is it that he seems able to tell you so much more ABOUT YOURSELF? It is not that he is more gifted, or even, in the last analysis, more intelligent. It is because he is writing about people who are growing. His characters are struggling to make their souls, whereas Dickens's are already finished and perfect. In my own mind Dickens's people are present far more often and far more vividly than Tolstoy's, but always in a single unchangeable attitude, like pictures or pieces of furniture. You cannot hold an imaginary conversation with a Dickens character as

you can with, say, Peter Bezoukhov. And this is not merely because of Tolstoy's greater seriousness, for there are also comic characters that you can imagine yourself talking to–Bloom, for instance, or Pecuchet, or even Wells's Mr. Polly. It is because Dickens's characters have no mental life. They say perfectly the thing that they have to say, but they cannot be conceived as talking about anything else. They never learn, never speculate. Perhaps the most meditative of his characters is Paul Dombey, and his thoughts are mush. Does this mean that Tolstoy's novels are 'better' than Dickens's? The truth is that it is absurd to make such comparisons in terms of 'better' and 'worse'. If I were forced to compare Tolstoy with Dickens, I should say that Tolstoy's appeal will probably be wider in the long run, because Dickens is scarcely intelligible outside the English-speaking culture; on the other hand, Dickens is able to reach simple people, which Tolstoy is not. Tolstoy's characters can cross a frontier, Dickens can be portrayed on a cigarette-card. But one is no more obliged to choose between them than between a sausage and a rose. Their purposes barely intersect.

VI

If Dickens had been merely a comic writer, the chances are that no one would now remember his name. Or at best a few of his books would survive in rather the same way as books like FRANK FAIRLEIGH, MR. VERDANT GREEN and MRS. CAUDLE'S CURTAIN LECTURES, as a sort of hangover of the Victorian atmosphere, a pleasant little whiff of oysters and brown stout. Who has not felt sometimes that it was 'a pity' that Dickens ever deserted the vein of PICKWICK for things like LITTLE DORRIT and HARD TIMES? What people always demand of a popular novelist is that he shall write the same book over and over again, forgetting that a man who would write the same book twice could not even write it once. Any writer who is not utterly lifeless moves upon a kind of parabola, and the downward curve is implied in the upper one. Joyce has to start with the frigid competence of DUBLINERS and end with the dream-language of FINNEGAN'S WAKE, but ULYSSES and PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST are part of the trajectory. The thing

that drove Dickens forward into a form of art for which he was not really suited, and at the same time caused us to remember him, was simply the fact that he was a moralist, the consciousness of 'having something to say'. He is always preaching a sermon, and that is the final secret of his inventiveness. For you can only create if you can CARE. Types like Squeers and Micawber could not have been produced by a hack writer looking for something to be funny about. A joke worth laughing at always has an idea behind it, and usually a subversive idea. Dickens is able to go on being funny because he is in revolt against authority, and authority is always there to be laughed at. There is always room for one more custard pie.

His radicalism is of the vaguest kind, and yet one always knows that it is there. That is the difference between being a moralist and a politician. He has no constructive suggestions, not even a clear grasp of the nature of the society he is attacking, only an emotional perception that something is wrong, all he can finally say is, 'Behave decently', which, as I suggested earlier, is not necessarily so shallow as it sounds. Most revolutionaries are potential Tories, because they imagine that everything can be put right by altering the SHAPE of society; once that change is effected, as it sometimes is, they see no need for any other. Dickens has not this kind of mental coarseness. The vagueness of his discontent is the mark of its permanence. What he is out against is not this or that institution, but, as Chesterton put it, 'an expression on the human face.' Roughly speaking, his morality is the Christian morality, but in spite of his Anglican upbringing he was essentially a Bible-Christian, as he took care to make plain when writing his will. In any case he cannot properly be described as a religious man. He 'believed', undoubtedly, but religion in the devotional sense does not seem to have entered much into his thoughts [Note, below]. Where he is Christian is in his quasi-instinctive siding with the oppressed against the oppressors. As a matter of course he is on the side of the underdog, always and everywhere. To carry this to its logical conclusion one has got to change sides when the underdog becomes an upper-dog, and in fact Dickens does tend to do so. He loathes the Catholic Church, for instance, but as soon as the Catholics are persecuted (BARNABY RUDGE) he is on their side. He loathes the aristocratic class even

more, but as soon as they are really overthrown (the revolutionary chapters in A TALE OF TWO CITIES) his sympathies swing round. Whenever he departs from this emotional attitude he goes astray. A well-known example is at the ending of DAVID COPPERFIELD, in which everyone who reads it feels that something has gone wrong. What is wrong is that the closing chapters are pervaded, faintly but not noticeably, by the cult of success. It is the gospel according to Smiles, instead of the gospel according to Dickens. The attractive, out-at-elbow characters are got rid of, Micawber makes a fortune, Heep gets into prison–both of these events are flagrantly impossible–and even Dora is killed off to make way for Agnes. If you like, you can read Dora as Dickens's wife and Agnes as his sister-in-law, but the essential point is that Dickens has 'turned respectable' and done violence to his own nature. Perhaps that is why Agnes is the most disagreeable of his heroines, the real legless angel of Victorian romance, almost as bad as Thackeray's Laura.

[Note: From a letter to his youngest son (in 1868): 'You will remember that you have never at home been harassed about religious observances, or mere formalities. I have always been anxious not to weary my children with such things, before they are old enough to form opinions respecting them. You will therefore understand the better that I now most solemnly impress upon you the truth and beauty of the Christian Religion, as it came from Christ Himself, and the impossibility of your going far wrong if you humbly but heartily respect it...Never abandon the wholesome practice of saying your own private prayers, night and morning. I have never abandoned it myself, and I know the comfort of it.' (Author's footnote)]

No grown-up person can read Dickens without feeling his limitations, and yet there does remain his native generosity of mind, which acts as a kind of anchor and nearly always keeps him where he belongs. It is probably the central secret of his popularity. A good-tempered antinomianism rather of Dickens's type is one of the marks of Western popular culture. One sees it in folk-stories and comic songs, in dream-figures like Mickey Mouse and Pop-eye the Sailor (both of them variants of Jack the Giant-killer), in the history of working-class Socialism, in the popular protests (always ineffective but not always a sham) against imperialism, in the impulse that

makes a jury award excessive damages when a rich man's car runs over a poor man; it is the feeling that one is always on the wrong side of the underdog, on the side of the weak against the strong. In one sense it is a feeling that is fifty years out of date. The common man is still living in the mental world of Dickens, but nearly every modern intellectual has gone over to some or other form of totalitarianism. From the Marxist or Fascist point of view, nearly all that Dickens stands for can be written off as 'bourgeois morality'. But in moral outlook no one could be more 'bourgeois' than the English working classes. The ordinary people in the Western countries have never entered, mentally, into the world of 'realism' and power-politics. They may do so before long, in which case Dickens will be as out of date as the cab-horse. But in his own age and ours he has been popular chiefly because he was able to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man. And it is important that from this point of view people of very different types can be described as 'common'. In a country like England, in spite of its class-structure, there does exist a certain cultural unity. All through the Christian ages, and especially since the French Revolution, the Western world has been haunted by the idea of freedom and equality; it is only an IDEA, but it has penetrated to all ranks of society. The most atrocious injustices, cruelties, lies, snobberies exist everywhere, but there are not many people who can regard these things with the same indifference as, say, a Roman slave-owner. Even the millionaire suffers from a vague sense of guilt, like a dog eating a stolen leg of mutton. Nearly everyone, whatever his actual conduct may be, responds emotionally to the idea of human brotherhood. Dickens voiced a code which was and on the whole still is believed in, even by people who violate it. It is difficult otherwise to explain why he could be both read by working people (a thing that has happened to no other novelist of his stature) and buried in Westminster Abbey.

When one reads any strongly individual piece of writing, one has the impression of seeing a face somewhere behind the page. It is not necessarily the actual face of the writer. I feel this very strongly with Swift, with Defoe, with Fielding, Stendhal, Thackeray, Flaubert, though in several cases I do not know what these people looked like

and do not want to know. What one sees is the face that the writer OUGHT to have. Well, in the case of Dickens I see a face that is not quite the face of Dickens's photographs, though it resembles it. It is the face of a man of about forty, with a small beard and a high colour. He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is GENEROUSLY ANGRY–in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls.

CHARLES READE (1940)

Since Charles Reade's books are published in cheap editions one can assume that he still has his following, but it is unusual to meet anyone who has voluntarily read him. In most people his name seems to evoke, at most, a vague memory of 'doing' THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH as a school holiday task. It is his bad luck to be remembered by this particular book, rather as Mark Twain, thanks to the films, is chiefly remembered by A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT. Reade wrote several dull books, and THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH is one of them. But he also wrote three novels which I personally would back to outlive the entire works of Meredith and George Eliot, besides some brilliant long-short stories such as A JACK OF ALL TRADES and THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A THIEF.

What is the attraction of Reade? At bottom it is the same charm as one finds in R. Austin Freeman's detective stories or Lieutenant-Commander Gould's collections of curiosities–the charm of useless knowledge. Reade was a man of what one might call penny-encyclopaedic learning. He possessed vast stocks of disconnected information which a lively narrative gift allowed him to cram into books which would at any rate pass as novels. If you have the sort of mind that takes a pleasure in dates, lists, catalogues, concrete details, descriptions of processes, junk-shop windows and back numbers of the EXCHANGE AND MART, the sort of mind that likes knowing exactly how a medieval catapult worked or just what objects a prison cell of the eighteen-forties contained, then you can hardly help enjoying Reade. He himself, of course, did not see his work in quite this light. He prided himself on his accuracy and compiled his books largely from newspaper cuttings, but the strange facts which he collected were subsidiary to what he would have regarded as his 'purpose'. For he was a social reformer in a fragmentary way, and made vigorous attacks on such diverse evils as blood-letting, the treadmill, private asylums, clerical celibacy and tight-lacing.

My own favourite has always been FOUL PLAY, which as it happens is not an attack on anything in particular. Like most

nineteenth-century novels FOUL PLAY is too complicated to be summarized, but its central story is that of a young clergyman, Robert Penfold, who is unjustly convicted of forgery, is transported to Australia, absconds in disguise, and is wrecked on a desert island together with the heroine. Here, of course, Reade is in his element. Of all men who ever lived, he was the best fitted to write a desert-island story. Some desert-island stories, of course, are worse than others, but none is altogether bad when it sticks to the actual concrete details of the struggle to keep alive. A list of the objects in a shipwrecked man's possession is probably the surest winner in fiction, surer even than a trial scene. Nearly thirty years after reading the book I can still remember more or less exactly what things the three heroes of Ballantyne's CORAL ISLAND possessed between them. (A telescope, six yards of whipcord, a penknife, a brass ring and a piece of hoop iron.) Even a dismal book like ROBINSON CRUSOE, so unreadable as a whole that few people even know that the second part exists, becomes interesting when it describes Crusoe's efforts to make a table, glaze earthenware and grow a patch of wheat. Reade, however, was an expert on desert islands, or at any rate he was very well up in the geography textbooks of the time. Moreover he was the kind of man who would have been at home on a desert island himself. He would never, like Crusoe, have been stumped by such an easy problem as that of leavening bread and, unlike Ballantyne, he knew that civilized men cannot make fire by rubbing sticks together.

The hero of FOUL PLAY, like most of Reade's heroes, is a kind of superman. He is hero, saint, scholar, gentleman, athlete, pugilist, navigator, physiologist, botanist, blacksmith and carpenter all rolled into one, the sort of compendium of all the talents that Reade honestly imagined to be the normal product of an English university. Needless to say, it is only a month or two before this wonderful clergyman has got the desert island running like a West End hotel. Even before reaching the island, when the last survivors of the wrecked ship are dying of thirst in an open boat, he has shown his ingenuity by constructing a distilling apparatus with a jar, a hot-water bottle and a piece of tubing. But his best stroke of all is the way in which he contrives to leave the island. He himself, with a

price on his head, would be glad enough to remain, but the heroine, Helen Rollestone, who has no idea that he is a convict, is naturally anxious to escape. She asks Robert to turn his 'great mind' to this problem. The first difficulty, of course, is to discover exactly where the island is. Luckily, however, Helen is still wearing her watch, which is still keeping Sydney time. By fixing a stick in the ground and watching its shadow Robert notes the exact moment of noon, after which it is a simple matter to work out the longitude–for naturally a man of his calibre would know the longitude of Sydney. It is equally natural that he can determine the latitude within a degree or two by the nature of the vegetation. But the next difficulty is to send a message to the outside world. After some thought Robert writes a series of messages on pieces of parchment made from seals' bladders, with ink obtained from cochineal insects. He has noticed that migrant birds often use the island as a stopping-place, and he fixes on ducks as the likeliest messengers, because every duck is liable to be shot sooner or later. By a stratagem often used in India he captures a number of ducks, ties a message to each of their legs and lets them go. Finally, of course, one of the ducks takes refuge on a ship, and the couple are rescued, but even then the story is barely half finished. There follow enormous ramifications, plots and counterplots, intrigues, triumphs and disasters, ending with the vindication of Robert, and wedding bells.

In any of Reade's three best books, FOUL PLAY, HARD CASH and IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND, it is not fair to say that the sole interest is in the technical detail. His power of descriptive writing, especially of describing violent action, is also very striking, and on a serial-story level he is a wonderful contriver of plots. Simply as a novelist it is impossible to take him seriously, because he has no sense whatever of character or of probability, but he himself had the advantage of believing in even the absurdest details of his own stories. He wrote of life as he saw it, and many Victorians saw it in the same way: that is, as a series of tremendous melodramas, with virtue triumphant every time. Of all the nineteenth-century novelists who have remained readable, he is perhaps the only one who is completely in tune with his own age. For all his unconventionality, his 'purpose', his eagerness to expose

abuses, he never makes a fundamental criticism. Save for a few surface evils he sees nothing wrong in an acquisitive society, with its equation of money and virtue, its pious millionaires and erastian clergymen. Perhaps nothing gives one his measure better than the fact that in introducing Robert Penfold, at the beginning of FOUL PLAY, he mentions that he is a scholar and a cricketer and only thirdly and almost casually adds that he is a priest.

That is not to say that Reade's social conscience was not sound so far as it went, and in several minor ways he probably helped to educate public opinion. His attack on the prison system in IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND is relevant to this day, or was so till very recently, and in his medical theories he is said to have been a long way ahead of his time. What he lacked was any notion that the early railway age, with the special scheme of values appropriate to it, was not going to last for ever. This is a little surprising when one remembers that he was the brother of Winwood Reade. However hastily and unbalanced Winwood Reade's MARTYRDOM OF MAN may seem now, it is a book that shows an astonishing width of vision, and it is probably the unacknowledged grandparent of the 'outlines' so popular today. Charles Reade might have written an 'outline' of phrenology, cabinet-making or the habits of whales, but not of human history. He was simply a middle-class gentleman with a little more conscience than most, a scholar who happened to prefer popular science to the classics. Just for that reason he is one of the best 'escape' novelists we have. FOUL PLAY and HARD CASH would be good books to send to a soldier enduring the miseries of trench warfare, for instance. There are no problems in them, no genuine 'messages', merely the fascination of a gifted mind functioning within very narrow limits, and offering as complete a detachment from real life as a game of chess or a jigsaw puzzle.

INSIDE THE WHALE (1940)

I

When Henry Miller's novel, TROPIC OF CANCER, appeared in 1935, it was greeted with rather cautious praise, obviously

conditioned in some cases by a fear of seeming to enjoy pornography. Among the people who praised it were T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read, Aldous Huxley, John dos Passes, Ezra Pound–on the whole, not the writers who are in fashion at this moment. And in fact the subject matter of the book, and to a certain extent its mental atmosphere, belong to the twenties rather than to the thirties.

TROPIC OF CANCER is a novel in the first person, or autobiography in the form of a novel, whichever way you like to look at it. Miller himself insists that it is straight autobiography, but the tempo and method of telling the story are those of a novel. It is a story of the American Paris, but not along quite the usual lines, because the Americans who figure in it happen to be people without money. During the boom years, when dollars were plentiful and the exchange-value of the franc was low, Paris was invaded by such a swarm of artists, writers, students, dilettanti, sight-seers, debauchees, and plain idlers as the world has probably never seen. In some quarters of the town the so-called artists must actually have outnumbered the working population–indeed, it has been reckoned that in the late twenties there were as many as 30,000 painters in Paris, most of them impostors. The populace had grown so hardened to artists that gruff-voiced lesbians in corduroy breeches and young men in Grecian or medieval costume could walk the streets without attracting a glance, and along the Seine banks Notre Dame it was almost impossible to pick one's way between the sketching-stools. It was the age of dark horses and neglected genii; the phrase on everybody's lips was 'QUAND JE SERAI LANCÉ'. As it turned out, nobody was 'LANCÉ', the slump descended like another Ice Age, the cosmopolitan mob of artists vanished, and the huge Montparnasse cafés which only ten years ago were filled till the small hours by hordes of shrieking poseurs have turned into darkened tombs in which there arc not even any ghosts. It is this world–described in, among other novels, Wyndham Lewis's TARR–that Miller is writing about, but he is dealing only with the under side of it, the lumpen-proletarian fringe which has been able to survive the slump because it is composed partly of genuine artists and partly of genuine scoundrels. The neglected genii, the paranoiacs who art always 'going to' write the novel that will knock Proust into a

cocked hat, are there, but they are only genii in the rather rare moments when they are not scouting about for the next meal. For the most part it is a story of bug-ridden rooms in working-men's hotels, of fights, drinking bouts, cheap brothels, Russian refugees, cadging, swindling, and temporary jobs. And the whole atmosphere of the poor quarters of Paris as a foreigner sees them–the cobbled alleys, the sour reek of refuse, the bistros with their greasy zinc counters and worn brick floors, the green waters of the Seine, the blue cloaks of the Republican Guard, the crumbling iron urinals, the peculiar sweetish smell of the Metro stations, the cigarettes that come to pieces, the pigeons in the Luxembourg Gardens–it is all there, or at any rate the feeling of it is there.

On the face of it no material could be less promising. When TROPIC OF CANCER was published the Italians were marching into Abyssinia and Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging. The intellectual foci of the world were Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. It did not seem to be a moment at which a novel of outstanding value was likely to be written about American dead-beats cadging drinks in the Latin Quarter. Of course a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a footler or a plain idiot. From a mere account of the subject matter of TROPIC OF CANCER most people would probably assume it to be no more than a bit of naughty-naughty left over from the twenties. Actually, nearly everyone who read it saw at once that it was nothing of the kind, but a very remarkable book. How or why remarkable? That question is never easy to answer. It is better to begin by describing the impression that TROPIC OF CANCER has left on my own mind.

When I first opened TROPIC OF CANCER and saw that it was full of unprintable words, my immediate reaction was a refusal to be impressed. Most people's would be the same, I believe. Nevertheless, after a lapse of time the atmosphere of the book, besides innumerable details, seemed to linger in my memory in a peculiar way. A year later Miller's second book, BLACK SPRING, was published. By this time? TROPIC OF CANCER was much more vividly present in my mind than it had been when I first read it. My first feeling about

BLACK SPRING was that it showed a falling-off, and it is a fact that it has not the same unity as the other book. Yet after another year there were many passages in BLACK SPRING that had also rooted themselves in my memory. Evidently these books are of the sort to leave a flavour behind them–books that 'create a world of their own', as the saying goes. The books that do this are not necessarily good books, they may be good bad books like RAFFLES or the SHERLOCK HOLMES stories, or perverse and morbid books like WUTHERING HEIGHTS or THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS. But now and again there appears a novel which opens up a new world not by revealing what is strange, but by revealing what is familiar. The truly remarkable thing about ULYSSES, for instance, is the commonplaceness of its material. Of course there is much more in ULYSSES than this, because Joyce is a kind of poet and also an elephantine pedant, but his real achievement has been to get the familiar on to paper. He dared–for it is a matter of DARING just as much as of technique–to expose the imbecilities of the inner mind, and in doing so he discovered an America which was under everybody's nose. Here is a whole world of stuff which you supposed to be of its nature incommunicable, and somebody has managed to communicate it. The effect is to break down, at any rate momentarily, the solitude in which the human being lives. When you read certain passages in ULYSSES you feel that Joyce's mind and your mind are one, that he knows all about you though he has never heard your name, that there some world outside time and space in which you and he are together. And though he does not resemble Joyce in other ways, there is a touch of this quality in Henry Miller. Not everywhere, because his work is very uneven, and sometimes, especially in BLACK SPRING, tends to slide away into more verbiage or into the squashy universe of the surrealists. But read him for five pages, ten pages, and you feel the peculiar relief that comes not so much from understanding as from being UNDERSTOOD. 'He knows all about me,' you feel; 'he wrote this specially for me'. It is as though you could hear a voice speaking to you, a friendly American voice, with no humbug in it, no moral purpose, merely an implicit assumption that we are all alike. For the moment you have got away from the lies and simplifications, the stylized, marionette-

like quality of ordinary fiction, even quite good fiction, and are dealing with the recognizable experiences of human beings.

But what kind of experience? What kind of human beings? Miller is writing about the man in the street, and it is incidentally rather a pity that it should be a street full of brothers. That is the penalty of leaving your native land. It means transferring your roots into shallower soil. Exile is probably more damaging to a novelist than to a painter or even a poet, because its effect is to take him out of contact with working life and narrow down his range to the street, the cafe, the church, the brothel and the studio. On the whole, in Miller's books you are reading about people living the expatriate life, people drinking, talking, meditating, and fornicating, not about people working, marrying, and bringing up children; a pity, because he would have described the one set of activities as well as the other. In BLACK SPRING there is a wonderful flashback of New York, the swarming Irish-infested New York of the O. Henry period, but the Paris scenes are the best, and, granted their utter worthlessness as social types, the drunks and dead-beats of the cafes are handled with a feeling for character and a mastery of technique that are unapproached in any at all recent novel. All of them are not only credible but completely familiar; you have the feeling that all their adventures have happened to yourself. Not that they are anything very startling in the way of adventures. Henry gets a job with a melancholy Indian student, gets another job at a dreadful French school during a cold snap when the lavatories are frozen solid, goes on drinking bouts in Le Havre with his friend Collins, the sea captain, goes to the brothels where there are wonderful Negresses, talks with his friend Van Norden, the novelist, who has got the great novel of the world in his head but can never bring himself to begin writing it. His friend Karl, on the verge of starvation, is picked up by a wealthy widow who wishes to marry him. There are interminable Hamlet-like conversations in which Karl tries to decide which is worse, being hungry or sleeping with an old woman. In great detail he describes his visits to the widow, how he went to the hotel dressed in his best, how before going in he neglected to urinate, so that the whole evening was one long crescendo of torment etc., etc. And after all, none of it is true, the widow doesn't even exist–Karl has simply

invented her in order to make himself seem important. The whole book is in this vein, more or less. Why is it that these monstrous trivialities are so engrossing? Simply because the whole atmosphere is deeply familiar, because you have all the while the feeling that these things are happening to YOU. And you have this feeling because somebody has chosen to drop the Geneva language of the ordinary novel and drag the REAL-POLITIK of the inner mind into the open. In Miller's case it is not so much a question of exploring the mechanisms of the mind as of owning up to everyday facts and everyday emotions. For the truth is that many ordinary people, perhaps an actual majority, do speak and behave in just the way that is recorded here. The callous coarseness with which the characters in TROPIC OF CANCER talk is very rare in fiction, but it is extremely common in real life; again and again I have heard just such conversations from people who were not even aware that they were talking coarsely. It is worth noticing that TROPIC OF CANCER is not a young man's book. Miller was in his forties when it was published, and though since then he has produced three or four others, it is obvious that this first book had been lived with for years. It is one of those books that are slowly matured in poverty and obscurity, by people who know what they have got to do and therefore are able to wait. The prose is astonishing, and in parts of BLACK SPRING is even better. Unfortunately I cannot quote; unprintable words occur almost everywhere. But get hold of TROPIC OF CANCER, get hold of BLACK SPRING and read especially the first hundred pages. They give you an idea of what can still be done, even at this late date, with English prose. In them, English is treated as a spoken language, but spoken WITHOUT FEAR, i.e. without fear of rhetoric or of the unusual or poetical word. The adjective has come back, after its ten years' exile. It is a flowing, swelling prose, a prose with rhythms in it, something quite different from the flat cautious statements and snack-bar dialects that are now in fashion.

When a book like TROPIC OF CANCER appears, it is only natural that the first thing people notice should be its obscenity. Given our current notions of literary decency, it is not at all easy to approach an unprintable book with detachment. Either one is

shocked and disgusted, or one is morbidly thrilled, or one is determined above all else not to be impressed. The last is probably the commonest reaction, with the result that unprintable books often get less attention than they deserve. It is rather the fashion to say that nothing is easier than to write an obscene book, that people only do it in order to get themselves talked about and make money, etc., etc. What makes it obvious that this is not the case is that books which are obscene in the police-court sense are distinctly uncommon. If there were easy money to be made out of dirty words, a lot more people would be making it. But, because 'obscene' books do not appear very frequently, there is a tendency to lump them together, as a rule quite unjustifiably. TROPIC OF CANCER has been vaguely associated with two other books, ULYSSES and VOYAGE AU BOUT DE LA NUIT, but in neither case is there much resemblance. What Miller has in common with Joyce is a willingness to mention the inane, squalid facts of everyday life. Putting aside differences of technique, the funeral scene in ULYSSES, for instance, would fit into TROPIC OF CANCER; the whole chapter is a sort of confession, an exposé of the frightful inner callousness of the human being. But there the resemblance ends. As a novel, TROPIC OF CANCER is far inferior to ULYSSES. Joyce is an artist, in a sense in which Miller is not and probably would not wish to be, and in any case he is attempting much more. He is exploring different states of consciousness, dream, reverie (the 'bronze-by-gold' chapter), drunkenness, etc., and dovetailing them all into a huge complex pattern, almost like a Victorian 'plot'. Miller is simply a hard-boiled person talking about life, an ordinary American businessman with intellectual courage and a gift for words. It is perhaps significant that he looks exactly like everyone's idea of an American businessman. As for the comparison with VOYAGE AU BOUT DE LA NUIT, it is even further from the point. Both books, use unprintable words, both are in some sense autobiographical, but that is all. VOYAGE AU BEUT DE LA NUIT is a book-with-a-purpose, and its purpose is to protest against the horror and meaninglessness of modern life–actually, indeed, of LIFE. It is a cry of unbearable disgust, a voice from the cesspool. TROPIC OF CANCER is almost exactly the opposite. The thing has become so unusual as to seem almost

anomalous, but it is the book of a man who is happy. So is BLACK SPRING, though slightly less so, because tinged in places with nostalgia. With years of lumpen-proletarian life behind him, hunger, vagabondage, dirt, failure, nights in the open, battles with immigration officers, endless struggles for a bit of cash, Miller finds that he is enjoying himself. Exactly the aspects of life that feel Céline with horror are the ones that appeal to him. So far from protesting, he is ACCEPTING. And the very word 'acceptance' calls up his real affinity, another American, Walt Whitman.

But there is something rather curious in being Whitman in the nineteen-thirties. It is not certain that if Whitman himself were alive at the moment he would write anything in the least degree resembling LEAVES OF GRASS. For what he is saying, after all, is 'I accept', and there is a radical difference between acceptance now and acceptance then. Whitman was writing in a time of unexampled prosperity, but more than that, he was writing in a country where freedom was something more than a word. The democracy, equality, and comradeship that he is always talking about arc not remote ideals, but something that existed in front of his eyes. In mid-nineteenth-century America men felt themselves free and equal, WERE free and equal, so far as that is possible outside-a society of pure communism. There was poverty and there were even class distinctions, but except for the Negroes there was no permanently submerged class. Everyone had inside him, like a kind of core, the knowledge that he could earn a decent living, and earn it without bootlicking. When you read about Mark Twain's Mississippi raftsmen and pilots, or Bret Harte's Western gold-miners, they seem more remote than the cannibals of the Stone Age. The reason is simply that they are free human beings. But it is the same even with the peaceful domesticated America of the Eastern states, the America of the LITTLE WOMEN, HELEN'S BABIES, and RIDING DOWN FROM BANGOR. Life has a buoyant, carefree quality that you can feel as you read, like a physical sensation in your belly. If is this that Whitman is celebrating, though actually he does it very badly, because he is one of those writers who tell you what you ought to feel instead of making you feel it. Luckily for his beliefs, perhaps, he died too early to see the deterioration in American life that came with

the rise of large-scale industry and the exploiting of cheap immigrant labour.

Millers outlook is deeply akin to that of Whitman, and nearly everyone who has read him has remarked on this. TROPIC OF CANCER ends with an especially Whitmanesque passage, in which, after the lecheries, the swindles, the fights, the drinking bouts, and the imbecilities, he simply sits down and watches the Seine flowing past, in a sort of mystical acceptance of thing-as-it-is. Only, what is he accepting? In the first place, not America, but the ancient bone-heap of Europe, where every grain of soil has passed through innumerable human bodies. Secondly, not an epoch of expansion and liberty, but an epoch of fear, tyranny, and regimentation. To say 'I accept' in an age like our own is to say that you accept concentration camps, rubber truncheons. Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machine guns, putsches, purges, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas masks, submarines, spies, PROVOCATEURS, press censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood films, and political murders. Not only those things, of course, but, those things among-others. And on the whole this is Henry Miller's attitude. Not quite always, because at moments he shows signs of a fairly ordinary kind of literary nostalgia. There is a long passage in the earlier part of BLACK SPRING, in praise of the Middle Ages, which as prose must be one of the most remarkable pieces of writing in recent years, but which displays an attitude not very different from that of Chesterton. In MAX AND THE WHITE PHAGOCYTES there is an attack on modern American civilization (breakfast cereals, cellophane, etc.) from the usual angle of the literary man who hates industrialism. But in general the attitude is 'Let's swallow it whole'. And hence the seeming preoccupation with indecency and with the dirty-handkerchief side of life. It is only seeming, for the truth is that ordinary everyday life consists far more largely of horrors than writers of fiction usually care to admit. Whitman himself 'accepted' a great deal that his contemporaries found unmentionable. For he is not only writing of the prairie, he also wanders through the city and notes the shattered skull of the suicide, the 'grey sick faces of onanists', etc, etc. But unquestionably our own age, at any rate in Western Europe, is less healthy and less hopeful than the age in

which Whitman was writing. Unlike Whitman, we live in a SHRINKING world. The 'democratic vistas' have ended in barbed wire. There is less feeling of creation and growth, less and less emphasis on the cradle, endlessly rocking, more and more emphasis on the teapot, endlessly stewing. To accept civilization as it is practically means accepting decay. It has ceased to be a strenuous attitude and become a passive attitude–even 'decadent', if that word means anything.

But precisely because, in one sense, he is passive to experience. Miller is able to get nearer to the ordinary man than is possible to more purposive writers. For the ordinary man is also passive. Within a narrow circle (home life, and perhaps the trade union or local politics) he feels himself master of his fate, but against major events he is as helpless as against the elements. So far from endeavouring to influence the future, he simply lies down and lets things happen to him. During the past ten years literature has involved itself more and more deeply in politics, with the result that there is now less room in it for the ordinary man than at any time during the past two centuries. One can see the change in the prevailing literary attitude by comparing the books written about the Spanish civil war with those written about the war of 1914-18. The immediately striking thing about the Spanish war books, at any rate those written in English, is their shocking dullness and badness. But what is more significant is that almost all of them, right-wing or left-wing, are written from a political angle, by cocksure partisans telling you what to think, whereas the books about the Great War were written by common soldiers or junior officers who did not even pretend to understand what the whole thing was about. Books like ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, LE FEU, A FAREWELL TO ARMS, DEATH OF A HERO, GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT, MEMOIRS OF AN INFANTRY OFFICER, and A SUBALTERN ON THE SOMME were written not by propagandists but by VICTIMS. They are saying in effect, 'What the hell is all this about? God knows. All we can do is to endure.' And though he is not writing about war, nor, on the whole, about unhappiness, this is nearer to Miller's attitude than the omniscience which is now fashionable. The BOOSTER, a short-lived periodical of which he was part-editor, used to describe itself in its

advertisements as ‘non-political, non-educational, non-progressive, non-co-operative, non-ethical, non-literary, non-consistent, non-contemporary’, and Miller’s own work could be described in nearly the same terms. It is a voice from the crowd, from the underling, from the third-class carriage, from the ordinary, non-political, non-moral, passive man.

I have been using the phrase ‘ordinary man’ rather loosely, and I have taken it for granted that the ‘ordinary man’ exists, a thing now denied by some people. I do not mean that the people Miller is writing about constitute a majority, still less that he is writing about proletarians. No English or American novelist has as yet seriously attempted that. And again, the people in TROPIC OF CANCER fall short of being ordinary to the extent that they are idle, disreputable, and more or less ‘artistic’. As I have said already, this a pity, but it is the necessary result of expatriation. Miller’s ‘ordinary man’ is neither the manual worker nor the suburban householder, but the derelict, the DÉCLASSÉ, the adventurer, the American intellectual without roots and without money. Still, the experiences even of this type overlap fairly widely with those of more normal people. Milter has been able to get the most out of his rather limited material because he has had the courage to identify with it. The ordinary man, the ‘average sensual man’, has been given the power of speech, like Balaam’s ass.

It will be seen that this is something out of date, or at any rate out of fashion. The average sensual man is out of fashion. Preoccupation with sex and truthfulness about the inner life are out of fashion. American Paris is out of fashion. A book like TROPIC OF CANCER, published at such a time, must be either a tedious preciosity or something unusual, and I think a majority of the people who have read it would agree that it is not the first. It is worth trying to discover just what, this escape from the current literary fashion means. But to do that one has got to see it against its background–that is, against the general development of English literature in the twenty years since the Great War.

II

When one says that a writer is fashionable one practically always means that he is admired by people under thirty. At the beginning of the period I am speaking of, the years during and immediately after the war, the writer who had the deepest hold upon the thinking young was almost certainly Housman. Among people who were adolescent in the years 1910-25, Housman had an influence which was enormous and is now not at all easy to understand. In 1920, when I was about seventeen, I probably knew the whole of the SHROPSHIRE LAD by heart. I wonder how much impression the SHROPSHIRE LAD makes at this moment on a boy of the same age and more or less the same cast of mind? No doubt he has heard of it and even glanced into it; it might strike him as cheaply clever– probably that would be about all. Yet these are the poems that I and my contemporaries used to recite to ourselves, over and over, in a kind of ecstasy, just as earlier generations had recited Meredith's 'Love in a Valley', Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine' etc., etc.

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a roselipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The roselipt girls arc sleeping
In fields Where roses fade.

It just tinkles. But it did not seem to tinkle in 1920. Why does the bubble always burst? To answer that question one has to take account of the EXTERNAL conditions that make certain writers popular at certain times. Housman's poems had not attracted much notice when they were first published. What was there in them that appealed so deeply to a single generation, the generation born round about 1900?

In the first place, Housman is a 'country' poet. His poems are full of the charm of buried villages, the nostalgia of place-names, Clunton and Clunbury, Knighton, Ludlow, 'on Wenlock Edge', 'in summer time on Bredon', thatched roofs and the jingle of smithies, the wild jonquils in the pastures, the 'blue, remembered hills'. War poems apart, English verse of the 1910-25 period is mostly 'country'.

The reason no doubt was that the RENTIER-professional class was ceasing once and for all to have any real relationship with the soil; but at any rate there prevailed then, far more than now, a kind of snobbism of belonging to the country and despising the town. England at that time was hardly more an agricultural country than it is now, but before the light industries began to spread themselves it was easier to think of it as one. Most middle-class boys grew up within sight of a farm, and naturally it was the picturesque side of farm life that appealed to them–the ploughing, harvesting, stack-thrashing and so forth. Unless he has to do it himself a boy is not likely to notice the horrible drudgery of hoeing turnip, milking cows with chapped teats at four o'clock in the morning, etc., etc. Just before, just after, and for that matter, during the war was the great age of the 'Nature poet', the heyday of Richard Jefferies and W. H. Hudson. Rupert Brooke's 'Grantchester', the star poem of 1913, is nothing but an enormous gush of 'country' sentiment, a sort of accumulated vomit from a stomach stuffed with place-names. Considered as a poem 'Grantchester' is something worse than worthless, but as an illustration of what the thinking middle-class young of that period FELT it is a valuable document.

Housman, however, did not enthuse over the rambler roses in the week-ending spirit of Brooke and the others. The 'country' motif is there all the time, but mainly as a background. Most of the poems have a quasi-human subject, a kind of idealized rustic, in reality Strephon or Corydon brought up to date. This in itself had a deep appeal. Experience shows that overcivilized people enjoy reading about rustics (key-phrase, 'close to the soil') because they imagine them to be more primitive and passionate than themselves. Hence the 'dark earth' novel of Sheila Kaye-Smith, etc. And at that time a middle-class boy, with his 'country' bias, would identify with an agricultural worker as he would never have done with a town worker. Most boys had in their minds a vision of an idealized ploughman, gipsy, poacher, or gamekeeper, always pictured as a wild, free, roving blade, living a life of rabbit-snaring, cockfighting, horses, beer, and women. Masefield's 'Everlasting Mercy', another valuable period-piece, immensely popular with boys round about the war years, gives you this vision in a very crude form. But Housman's

Maurices and Terences could be taken seriously where Masefield's Saul Kane could not; on this side of him, Housman was Masefield with a dash of Theocritus. Moreover all his themes are adolescent–murder, suicide, unhappy love, early death. They deal with the simple, intelligible disasters that give you the feeling of being up against the 'bedrock facts' of life:

The sun burns on the half-mown hill,
By now the blood has dried;
And Maurice among the hay lies still
And my knife is in his side.

And again:

They hand us now in Shrewsbury jail
And whistles blow forlorn,
And trains all night groan on the rail
To men who die at morn.

It is all more or less in the same tune. Everything comes unstuck. 'Ned lies long in the churchyard and Tom lies long in jail'. And notice also the exquisite self-pity–the 'nobody loves me' feeling:

The diamond drops adorning
The low mound on the lea,
These arc the tears of morning,
That weeps, but not for thee.

Hard cheese, old chap! Such poems might have been written expressly for adolescents. And the unvarying sexual pessimism (the girl always dies or marries somebody else) seemed like wisdom to boys who were herded together in public schools and were half-inclined to think of women as something unattainable. Whether Housman ever had the same appeal for girls I doubt. In his poems the woman's point of view is not considered, she is merely the nymph, the siren, the treacherous half-human creature who leads you a little distance and then gives you the slip.

But Housman would not have appealed so deeply to the people who were young in 1920 if it had not been for another strain in him, and that was his blasphemous, antinomian, 'cynical' strain. The fight that always occurs between the generations was exceptionally bitter at the end of the Great War; this was partly due to the war itself, and partly it was an indirect result of the Russian Revolution, but an

intellectual struggle was in any case due at about that date. Owing probably to the ease and security of life in England, which even the war hardly disturbed, many people whose ideas were formed in the eighties or earlier had carried them quite unmodified into the nineteen-twenties. Meanwhile, so far as the younger generation was concerned, the official beliefs were dissolving like sand-castles. The slump in religious belief, for instance, was spectacular. For several years the old-young antagonism took on a quality of real hatred. What was left of the war generation had crept out of the massacre to find their elders still bellowing the slogans of 1914, and a slightly younger generation of boys were writhing under dirty-minded celibate schoolmasters. It was to these that Housman appealed, with his implied sexual revolt and his personal grievance against God. He was patriotic, it was true, but in a harmless old-fashioned way, to the tune of red coats and 'God save the Queen' rather than steel helmets and 'Hang the Kaiser'. And he was satisfyingly anti-Christian–he stood for a kind of bitter, defiant paganism, the conviction that life is short and the gods are against you, which exactly fitted the prevailing mood of the young; and all in charming fragile verse that was composed almost entirely of words of one syllable.

It will be seen that I have discussed Housman as though he were merely a propagandist, an utterer of maxims and quotable 'bits'. Obviously he was more than that. There is no need to under-rate him now because he was over-rated a few years ago. Although one gets into trouble nowadays for saying so, there are a number of his poems ('Into my heart an air that kills', for instance, and 'Is my team ploughing?') that are not likely to remain long out of favour. But at bottom it is always a writer's tendency, his 'purpose', his 'message', that makes him liked or disliked. The proof of this is the extreme difficulty of seeing any literary merit in a book that seriously damages your deepest beliefs. And no book is ever truly neutral. Some or other tendency is always discernible, in verse as much as in prose, even if it does no more than determine the form and the choice of imagery. But poets who attain wide popularity, Uke Housman, are as a rule definitely gnomic writers.

After the war, after Housman and the Nature poets, there appears a group of writers of completely different tendency–Joyce, Eliot,

Pound, Lawrence, Wyndham, Lewis, Aldous Huxley, Lytton Strachey. So far as the middle and late twenties go, these are 'the movement', as surely as the Auden-Spender group have been 'the movement' during the past few years. It is true that not all of the gifted writers of the period can be fitted into the pattern. E. M. Forster, for instance, though he wrote his best book in 1923 or thereabouts, was essentially, pre-war, and Yeats does not seem in either of his phases to belong to the twenties. Others who were still living, Moore, Conrad, Bennett, Wells, Norman Douglas, had shot their bolt before the war ever happened. On the other hand, a writer who should be added to the group, though in the narrowly literary sense he hardly 'belongs', is Somerset Maugham. Of course the dates do not fit exactly; most of these writers had already published books before the war, but they can be classified as post-war in the same sense that the younger men now writing are post-slump. Equally, of course, you could read through most of the literary papers of the time without grasping that these people are 'the movement'. Even more then than at most times the big shots of literary journalism were busy pretending that the age-before-last had not come to an end. Squire ruled the LONDON MERCURY Gibbs and Walpole were the gods of the lending libraries, there was a cult of cheeriness and manliness, beer and cricket, briar pipes and monogamy, and it was at all times possible to earn a few guineas by writing an article denouncing 'high-brows'. But all the same it was the despised highbrows who had captured the young. The wind was blowing from Europe, and long before 1930 it had blown the beer-and-cricket school naked, except for their knighthoods.

But the first thing one would notice about the group of writers I have named above is that they do not look like a group. Moreover several of them would strongly object to being coupled with several of the others. Lawrence and Eliot were in reality antipathetic, Huxley worshipped Lawrence but was repelled by Joyce, most of the others would have looked down on Huxley, Strachey, and Maugham, and Lewis attacked everyone in turn; indeed, his reputation as a writer rests largely on these attacks. And yet there is a certain temperamental similarity, evident enough now, though it would not have been so a dozen years ago. What it amounts to is PESSIMISM

OF OUTLOOK. But it is necessary to make clear what is meant by pessimism.

If the keynote of the Georgian poets was 'beauty of Nature', the keynote of the post-war writers would be 'tragic sense of life'. The spirit behind Housman's poems for instance, is not tragic, merely querulous; it is hedonism disappointed. The same is true of Hardy, though one ought to make an exception of THE DYNASTS. But the Joyce-Eliot group come later in time, puritanism is not their main adversary, they are able from the start to 'see through' most of the things that their predecessors had fought for. All of them are temperamentally hostile to the notion of 'progress'; it is felt that progress not only doesn't happen, but OUGHT not to happen. Given this general similarity, there are, of course, differences of approach between the writers I have named as well as different degrees of talent. Eliot's pessimism is partly the Christian pessimism, which implies a certain indifference to human misery, partly a lament over the decadence of Western civilization ('We are the hollow men, we are the stuffed men', etc., etc.), a sort of twilight-of-the-gods feeling, which finally leads him, in Sweeney Agonistes for instance, to achieve the difficult feat of making modern life out to be worse than it is. With Strachey it is merely a polite eighteenth-century scepticism mixed up with a taste for debunking. With Maugham it is a kind of stoical resignation, the stiff upper lip of the pukka sahib somewhere east of Suez, carrying on with his job without believing in it, like an Antonine Emperor. Lawrence at first sight does not seem to be a pessimistic writer, because, like Dickens, he is a 'change-of-heart' man and constantly insisting that life here and now would be all right if only you looked at it a little differently. But what he is demanding is a movement away from our mechanized civilization, which is not going to happen. Therefore his exasperation with the present turns once more into idealization of the past, this time a safely mythical past, the Bronze Age. When Lawrence prefers the Etruscans (his Etruscans) to ourselves it is difficult not to agree with him, and yet, after all, it is a species of defeatism, because that is not the direction in which the world is moving. The kind of life that he is always pointing to, a life centring round the simple mysteries–sex, earth, fire, water, blood–is merely a lost cause. All he has been able

to produce, therefore, is a wish that things would happen in a way in which they are manifestly not going to happen. 'A wave of generosity or a wave of death', he says, but it is obvious that there are no waves of generosity this side of the horizon. So he flees to Mexico, and then dies at forty-five, a few years before the wave of death gets going. It will be seen that once again I am speaking of these people as though they were not artists, as though they were merely propagandists putting a 'message' across. And once again it is obvious that all of them are more than that. It would be absurd, for instance, to look on ULYSSES as MERELY a show-up of the horror of modern life, the 'dirty DAILY MAIL era', as Pound put it. Joyce actually is more of a 'pure artist' than most writers. But ULYSSES could not have been written by someone who was merely dabbling with word-patterns; it is the product of a special vision of life, the vision of a Catholic who has lost his faith. What Joyce is saying is 'Here is life without God. Just look at it!' and his technical innovations, important though they are, are primarily to serve this purpose.

But what is noticeable about all these writers is that what 'purpose' they have is very much up in the air. There is no attention to the urgent problems of the moment, above all no politics in the narrower sense. Our eyes are directed to Rome, to Byzantium, to Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the Subconscious, to the solar plexus–to everywhere except the places where things are actually happening. When one looks back at the twenties, nothing is queerer than the way in which every important event in Europe escaped the notice of the English intelligentsia. The Russian Revolution, for instance, all but vanishes from the English consciousness between the death of Lenin and the Ukraine famine–about ten years. Throughout those years Russia means Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, and exiled counts driving taxi-cabs. Italy means picture-galleries, ruins, churches, and museums–but not Black-shirts. Germany means films, nudism, and psychoanalysis–but not Hitler, of whom hardly anyone had heard till 1931. In 'cultured' circles art-for-art's-saking extended practically to a worship of the meaningless. Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words. To judge a book by its subject matter was the unforgivable

sin, and even to be aware of its subject matter was looked on as a lapse of a taste. About 1928, in one of the three genuinely funny jokes that PUNCH has produced since the Great War, an intolerable youth is pictured informing his aunt that he intends to 'write'. 'And what are you going to write about, dear?' asks the aunt. 'My dear aunt,' says the youth crushingly, 'one doesn't write ABOUT anything, one just WRITES.' The best writers of the twenties did not subscribe to this doctrine, their 'purpose' is in most cases fairly overt, but it is usually 'purpose' along moral-religious-cultural lines. Also, when translatable into political terms, it is in no case 'left'. In one way or another the tendency of all the writers in this group is conservative. Lewis, for instance, spent years in frenzied witch-smellings after 'Bolshevism', which he was able to detect in very unlikely places. Recently he has changed some of his views, perhaps influenced by Hitler's treatment of artists, but it is safe to bet that he will not go very far leftward. Pound seems to have plumped definitely for Fascism, at any rate the Italian variety. Eliot has remained aloof, but if forced at the pistol's point to choose between Fascism and some more democratic form of socialism, would probably choose Fascism. Huxley starts off with the usual despair-of-life, then, under the influence of Lawrence's 'dark abdomen', tries something called Life-Worship, and finally arrives at pacifism–a tenable position, and at this moment an honourable one, but probably in the long run involving rejection of socialism. It is also noticeable that most of the writers in this group have a certain tenderness for the Catholic Church, though not usually of a kind that an orthodox Catholic would accept.

The mental connexion between pessimism and a reactionary outlook is no doubt obvious enough. What is perhaps less obvious is just WHY the leading writers of the twenties were predominantly pessimistic. Why always the sense of decadence, the skulls and cactuses, the yearning after lost faith and impossible civilizations? Was it not, after all, BECAUSE these people were writing in an exceptionally comfortable epoch? It is just in such times that 'cosmic despair' can flourish. People with empty bellies never despair of the universe, nor even think about the universe, for that matter. The whole period 1910-30 was a prosperous one, and even the war years

were physically tolerable if one happened to be a non-combatant in one of the Allied countries. As for the twenties, they were the golden age of the RENTIER-intellectual, a period of irresponsibility such as the world had never before seen. The war was over, the new totalitarian states had not arisen, moral and religious tabus of all descriptions had vanished, and the cash was rolling in. 'Disillusionment' was all the fashion. Everyone with a safe £500 a year turned highbrow and began training himself in TAEDIUM VITAE. It was an age of eagles and of crumpets, facile despairs, backyard Hamlets, cheap return tickets to the end of the night. In some of the minor characteristic novels of the period, books like TOLD BY AN IDIOT, the despair-of-life reaches a Turkish-bath atmosphere of self-pity. And even the best writers of the time can be convicted of a too Olympian attitude, a too great readiness to wash their hands of the immediate practical problem. They see life very comprehensively, much more so than those who come immediately before or after them, but they see it through the wrong end of the telescope. Not that that invalidates their books, as books. The first test of any work of art is survival, and it is a fact that a great deal that was written in the period 1910-30 has survived and looks like continuing to survive. One has only to think of ULYSSES, OF HUMAN BONDAGE, most of Lawrence's early work, especially his short stories, and virtually the whole of Eliot's poems up to about 1930, to wonder what is now being written that will wear so well.

But quite Suddenly, in the years 1930-5, something happens. The literary climate changes. A new group of writers, Auden and Spender and the rest of them, has made its appearance, and although technically these writers owe something to their predecessors, their 'tendency' is entirely different. Suddenly we have got out of the twilight of the gods into a sort of Boy Scout atmosphere of bare knees and community singing. The typical literary man ceases to be a cultured expatriate with a leaning towards the Church, and becomes an eager-minded schoolboy with a leaning towards Communism. If the keynote of the writers of the twenties is 'tragic sense of life', the keynote of the new writers is 'serious purpose'.

The differences between the two schools are discussed at some length in Mr Louis MacNeice's book MODERN POETRY. This

book is, of course, written entirely from the angle of the younger group and takes the superiority of their standards for granted. According to Mr MacNeice:

The poets of NEW SIGNATURES, [Note: Published in 1932. (Author's footnote)] unlike Yeats and Eliot, are emotionally partisan. Yeats proposed to turn his back on desire and hatred; Eliot sat back and watched other people's emotions with ennui and an ironical self-pity...The whole poetry, on the other hand, of Auden, Spender, and Day Lewis implies that they have desires and hatreds of their own and, further, that they think some things ought to be desired and others hated.

And again:

The poets of NEW SIGNATURES have swung back...to the Greek preference for information or statement. Then first requirement is to have something to say, and after that you must say it as well as you can.

In other words, 'purpose' has come back, the younger writers have 'gone into politics'. As I have pointed out already, Eliot & Co. are not really so non-partisan as Mr MacNeice seems to suggest. Still, it is broadly true that in the twenties the literary emphasis was more on technique and less on subject matter than it is now.

The leading figures in this group are Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, MacNeice, and there is a long string of writers of more or less the same tendency, Isherwood, John Lehmann, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Edward Upward, Alee Brown, Philip Henderson, and many others. As before, I am lumping them together simply according to tendency. Obviously there are very great variations in talent. But when one compares these writers with the Joyce-Eliot generation, the immediately striking thing is how much easier it is to form them into a group. Technically they are closer together, politically they are almost indistinguishable, and their criticisms of one another's work have always been (to put it mildly) good-natured. The outstanding writers of the twenties were of very varied origins, few of them had passed through the ordinary English educational mill (incidentally, the best of them, barring Lawrence, were not Englishmen), and most of them had had at some time to struggle against poverty, neglect, and even downright persecution. On the other hand, nearly all the

younger writers fit easily into the public-school-university-Bloomsbury pattern. The few who are of proletarian origin are of the kind that is declassed early in life, first by means of scholarships and then by the bleaching-tub of London 'culture'. It is significant that several of the writers in this group have been not only boys but, subsequently, masters at public schools. Some years ago I described Auden as 'a sort of gutless Kipling'. As criticism this was quite unworthy, indeed it was merely a spiteful remark, but it is a fact that in Auden's work, especially his earlier work, an atmosphere of uplift–something rather like Kipling's If or Newbolt's Play up, Play up, and Play the Game!–never seems to be very far away. Take, for instance, a poem like 'You're leaving now, and it's up to you boys'. It is pure scoutmaster, the exact note of the ten-minutes' straight talk on the dangers of self-abuse. No doubt there is an element of parody that he intends, but there is also a deeper resemblance that he does not intend. And of course the rather priggish note that is common to most of these writers is a symptom, of release. By throwing 'pure art' overboard they have freed themselves from the fear of being laughed at and vastly enlarged their scope. The prophetic side of Marxism, for example, is new material for poetry and has great possibilities.

We are nothing
We have fallen
Into the dark and shall be destroyed.
Think though, that in this darkness
We hold the secret hub of an idea
Whose living sunlit wheel revolves in future years outside.

(Spender, TRIAL OF A JUDGE)

But at the same time, by being Marxized literature has moved no nearer to the masses. Even allowing for the time-lag, Auden and Spender are somewhat farther from being popular writers than Joyce and Eliot, let alone Lawrence. As before, there are many contemporary writers who are outside the current, but there is not much doubt about what is the current. For the middle and late thirties, Auden Spender & Co. ARE 'the movement', just as Joyce, Eliot & Co. were for the twenties. And the movement is in the direction of some rather ill-defined thing called Communism. As

early as 1934 or 1935 it was considered eccentric in literary circles not to be more or less 'left', and in another year or two there had grown up a left-wing orthodoxy that made a certain set of opinions absolutely DE RIGUEUR on certain subjects, The idea had begun to gain ground (VIDE Edward Upward and others) that a writer must either be actively 'left' or write badly. Between 1935 and 1939 the Communist Party had an almost irresistible fascination for any writer under forty. It became as normal to hear that so-and-so had 'joined' as it had been a few years earlier, when Roman Catholicism was fashionable, to hear that So-and-so had 'been received'. For about three years, in fact, the central stream of English literature was more or less directly under Communist control. How was it possible for such a thing to happen? And at the same time, what is meant by 'Communism'? It is better to answer the second question first.

The Communist movement in Western Europe began, as a movement for the violent overthrow of capitalism, and degenerated within a few years into an instrument of Russian foreign policy. This was probably inevitable when this revolutionary ferment that followed the Great War had died down. So far as I know, the only comprehensive history of this subject in English is Franz Borkenau's book, THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL. What Borkenau's facts even more than his deductions make clear is that Communism could never have developed along its present lines if any revolutionary feeling had existed in the industrialized countries. In England, for instance, it is obvious that no such feeling has existed for years past. The pathetic membership figures of all extremist parties show this clearly. It is, only natural, therefore, that the English Communist movement should be controlled by people who are mentally subservient to Russia and have no real aim except to manipulate British foreign policy in the Russian interest. Of course such an aim cannot be openly admitted, and it is this fact that gives the Communist Party its very peculiar character. The more vocal kind of Communist is in effect a Russian publicity agent posing as an international socialist. It is a pose that is easily kept up at normal times, but becomes difficult in moments of crisis, because of the fact that the U.S.S.R. is no more scrupulous in its foreign policy than the rest of the Great Powers. Alliances, changes of front etc., which only

make sense as part of the game of power politics have to be explained and justified in terms of international socialism. Every time Stalin swaps partners, 'Marxism' has to be hammered into a new shape. This entails sudden and violent changes of 'line', purges, denunciations, systematic destruction of party literature, etc., etc. Every Communist is in fact liable at any moment to have to alter his most fundamental convictions, or leave the party. The unquestionable dogma of Monday may become the damnable heresy of Tuesday, and so on. This has happened at least three times during the past ten years. It follows that in any Western country a Communist Party is always unstable and usually very small. Its long-term membership really consists of an inner ring of intellectuals who have identified with the Russian bureaucracy, and a slightly larger body of working-class people who feel a loyalty towards Soviet Russia without necessarily understanding its policies. Otherwise there is only a shifting membership, one lot coming and another going with each change of 'line'.

In 1930 the English Communist Party was a tiny, barely legal organization whose main activity was libelling the Labour Party. But by 1935 the face of Europe had changed, and left-wing politics changed with it. Hitler had risen to power and begun to rearm, the Russian five-year plans had succeeded, Russia had reappeared as a great military power. As Hitler's three targets of attack were, to all appearances, Great Britain, France, and the U.S.S.R., the three countries were forced into a sort of uneasy RAPPROCHEMENT. This meant that the English or French Communist was obliged to become a good patriot and imperialist–that is, to defend the very things he had been attacking for the past fifteen years. The Comintern slogans suddenly faded from red to pink. 'World revolution' and 'Social-Fascism' gave way to 'Defence of democracy' and 'Stop Hitler'. The years 1935-9 were the period of anti-Fascism and the Popular Front, the heyday of the Left Book Club, when red Duchesses and 'broadminded' deans toured the battlefields of the Spanish war and Winston Churchill was the blue-eyed boy of the DAILY WORKER. Since then, of course, there has been yet another change of 'line'. But what is important for my purpose is that it was during the 'anti-Fascist' phase that the younger

English writers gravitated towards Communism.

The Fascism-democracy dogfight was no doubt an attraction in itself, but in any case their conversion was due at about that date. It was obvious that LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism was finished and that there had got to be some kind of reconstruction; in the world of 1935 it was hardly possible to remain politically indifferent. But why did these young men turn towards anything so alien as Russian Communism? Why should WRITERS be attracted by a form of socialism that makes mental honesty impossible? The explanation really lies in something that had already made itself felt before the slump and before Hitler: middle-class unemployment.

Unemployment is not merely a matter of not having a job. Most people can get a job of sorts, even at the worst of times. The trouble was that by about 1930 there was no activity, except perhaps scientific research, the arts, and left-wing politics, that a thinking person could believe in. The debunking of Western civilization had reached its Climax and 'disillusionment' was immensely widespread. Who now could take it for granted to go through life in the ordinary middle-class way, as a soldier, a clergyman, a stockbroker, an Indian Civil Servant, or what-not? And how many of the values by which our grandfathers lived could not be taken seriously? Patriotism, religion, the Empire, the family, the sanctity of marriage, the Old School Tie, birth, breeding, honour, discipline–anyone of ordinary education could turn the whole lot of them inside out in three minutes. But what do you achieve, after all, by getting rid of such primal things as patriotism and religion? You have not necessarily got rid of the need for SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN. There had been a sort of false dawn a few years earlier when numbers of young intellectuals, including several quite gifted writers (Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Hollis, and others), had fled into the Catholic Church. It is significant that these people went almost invariably to the Roman Church and not, for instance, to the C. of E., the Greek Church, or the Protestants sects. They went, that is, to the Church with a world-wide organization, the one with a rigid discipline, the one with power and prestige behind it. Perhaps it is even worth noticing that the only latter-day convert of really first-rate gifts, Eliot, has embraced not Romanism but Anglo-Catholicism, the ecclesiastical equivalent of

Trotskyism. But I do not think one need look farther than this for the reason why the young writers of the thirties flocked into or towards the Communist Party. If was simply something to believe in. Here was a Church, an army, an orthodoxy, a discipline. Here was a Fatherland and–at any rate since 1935 or thereabouts–a Fuehrer. All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises. Patriotism, religion, empire, military glory–all in one word, Russia. Father, king, leader, hero, saviour–all in one word, Stalin. God–Stalin. The devil–Hitler. Heaven–Moscow. Hell–Berlin. All the gaps were filled up. So, after all, the 'Communism' of the English intellectual is something explicable enough. It is the patriotism of the deracinated.

But there is one other thing that undoubtedly contributed to the cult of Russia among the English intelligentsia during these years, and that is the softness and security of life in England itself. With all its injustices, England is still the land of habeas corpus, and the overwhelming majority of English people have no experience of violence or illegality. If you have grown up in that sort of atmosphere it is not at all easy to imagine what a despotic régime is like. Nearly all the dominant writers of the thirties belonged to the soft-boiled emancipated middle class and were too young to have effective memories of the Great War. To people of that kind such things as purges, secret police, summary executions, imprisonment without trial etc., etc., are too remote to be terrifying. They can swallow totalitarianism BECAUSE they have no experience of anything except liberalism. Look, for instance, at this extract from Mr Auden's poem 'Spain' (incidentally this poem is one of the few decent things that have been written about the Spanish war):

To-morrow for the young, the poets exploding like bombs,
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;
To-morrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the struggle.

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;

To-day the expending of powers
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

The second stanza is intended as a sort of thumb-nail sketch of a day in the life of a 'good party man'. In the-morning a couple of political murders, a ten-minutes' interlude to stifle 'bourgeois' remorse, and then a hurried luncheon and a busy afternoon and evening chalking walls and distributing leaflets. All very edifying. But notice the phrase 'necessary murder'. It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a WORD. Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder. It so happens that I have seen the bodies of numbers of murdered men–I don't mean killed in battle, I mean murdered. Therefore I have some conception of what murder means–the terror, the hatred, the howling relatives, the post-mortems, the blood, the smells. To me, murder is something to be avoided. So it is to any ordinary person. The Hitlers and Stalins find murder necessary, but they don't advertise their callousness, and they don't speak of it as murder; it is 'liquidation', 'elimination', or some other soothing phrase. Mr Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible, if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled. So much of left-wing thought is a kind of playing with fire by people who don't even know that fire is hot. The warmongering to which the English intelligentsia gave themselves up in the period 1935-9 was largely based on a sense of personal immunity. The attitude was very different in France, where the military service is hard to dodge and even literary men know the weight of a pack.

Towards the end of Mr Cyril Connolly's recent book, ENEMIES OF PROMISE, there occurs an interesting and revealing passage. The first part of the book, is, more or less, an evaluation of present-day literature. Mr Connolly belongs exactly to the generation of the writers of 'the movement', and with not many reservations their values are his values. It is interesting to notice that among prose-writers her admires chiefly those specialising in violence–the would-be tough American school, Hemingway, etc. The latter part of the book, however, is autobiographical and consists of an account, fascinatingly accurate, of life at a preparatory school and Eton in the years 1910-20. Mr Connolly ends by remarking:

Were I to deduce anything from my feelings on leaving Eton, it might be called THE THEORY OF PERMANENT ADOLESCENCE. It is the theory that the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development.

When you read the second sentence in this passage, your natural impulse is to look for the misprint. Presumably there is a 'not' left out, or something. But no, not a bit of it! He means it! And what is more, he is merely speaking the truth, in an inverted fashion. 'Cultured' middle-class life has reached a depth of softness at which a public-school education–five years in a lukewarm bath of snobbery–can actually be looked back upon as an eventful period. To nearly all the writers who have counted during the thirties, what more has ever happened than Mr Connolly records in ENEMIES OF PROMISE? It is the same pattern all the time; public school, university, a few trips abroad, then London. Hunger, hardship, solitude, exile, war, prison, persecution, manual labour–hardly even words. No wonder that the huge tribe known as 'the right left people' found it so easy to condone the purge-and-trap side of the Russian régime and the horrors of the first Five-Year Plan. They were so gloriously incapable of understanding what it all meant.

By 1937 the whole of the intelligentsia was mentally at war. Left-wing thought had narrowed down to 'anti-Fascism', i.e. to a negative, and a torrent of hate-literature directed against Germany and the politicians supposedly friendly to Germany was pouring from the Press. The thing that, to me, was truly frightening about the war in Spain was not such violence as I witnessed, nor even the party feuds behind the lines, but the immediate reappearance in left-wing circles of the mental atmosphere of the Great War. The very people who for twenty years had sniggered over their own superiority to war hysteria were the ones who rushed straight back into the mental slum of 1915. All the familiar wartime idiocies, spy-hunting, orthodoxy-sniffing (Sniff, sniff. Are you a good anti-Fascist?), the retailing of atrocity stories, came back into vogue as though the intervening years had never happened. Before the end of the Spanish war, and even before Munich, some of the better of the left-wing writers were beginning to squirm. Neither Auden nor, on the whole, Spender

wrote about the Spanish war in quite the vein that was expected of them. Since then there has been a change of feeling and much dismay and confusion, because the actual course of events has made nonsense of the left-wing orthodoxy of the last few years. But then it did not need very great acuteness to see that much of it was nonsense from the start. There is no certainty, therefore, that the next orthodoxy to emerge will be any better than the last.

On the whole the literary history of the thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics. For any writer who accepts or partially accepts the discipline of a political party is sooner or later faced with the alternative: toe the line, or shut up. It is, of course, possible to toe the line and go on writing–after a fashion. Any Marxist can demonstrate with the greatest of ease that 'bourgeois' liberty of thought is an illusion. But when he has finished his demonstration there remains the psychological FACT that without this 'bourgeois' liberty the creative powers wither away. In the future a totalitarian literature may arise, but it will be quite different from anything we can now imagine. Literature as we know it is an individual thing, demanding mental honesty and a minimum of censorship. And this is even truer of prose than of verse. It is probably not a coincidence that the best writers of the thirties have been poets. The atmosphere of orthodoxy is always damaging to prose, and above all it is completely ruinous to the novel, the most anarchical of all forms of literature. How many Roman Catholics have been good novelists? Even the handful one could name have usually been bad Catholics. The novel is practically a Protestant form of art; it is a product of the free mind, of the autonomous individual. No decade in the past hundred and fifty years has been so barren of imaginative prose as the nineteen-thirties. There have been good poems, good sociological works, brilliant pamphlets, but practically no fiction of any value at all. From 1933 onwards the mental climate was increasingly against it. Anyone sensitive enough to be touched by the ZEITGEIST was also involved in politics. Not everyone, of course, was definitely in the political racket, but practically everyone was on its periphery and more or less mixed up in propaganda campaigns and squalid controversies. Communists and near-Communists had a disproportionately large influence in the literary

reviews. It was a time of labels, slogans, and evasions. At the worst moments you were expected to lock yourself up in a constipating little cage of lies; at the best a sort of voluntary censorship ('Ought I to say this? Is it pro-Fascist?') was at work in nearly everyone's mind. It is almost inconceivable that good novels should be written in such an atmosphere. 'Good novels are not written by by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own unorthodoxy. Good novels are written by people who are NOT FRIGHTENED. This brings me back to Henry Miller.

III

If this were a likely, moment for the launching of 'schools' literature, Henry Miller might be the starting-point of a new 'school'. He does at any rate mark an unexpected swing of the pendulum. In his books one gets right away from the 'political animal' and back to a viewpoint not only individualistic but completely passive–the viewpoint of a man who believes the world-process to be outside his control and who in any case hardly wishes to control it.

I first met Miller at the end of 1936, when I was passing through Paris on my way to Spain. What most intrigued me about him was to find that he felt no interest in the Spanish war whatever. He merely told me in forcible terms that to go to Spain at that moment was the act of an idiot. He could understand anyone going there from purely selfish motives, out of curiosity, for instance, but to mix oneself up in such things FROM A SENSE OBLIGATION was sheer stupidity. In any case my Ideas about combating Fascism, defending democracy, etc., etc., were all baloney. Our civilization was destined to be swept away and replaced by something so different that we should scarcely regard it as human–a prospect that did not bother him, he said. And some such outlook is implicit throughout his work. Everywhere there is the sense of the approaching cataclysm, and almost everywhere the implied belief that it doesn't matter. The only political declaration which, so far as I know, he has ever made in print is a purely negative one. A year or so ago an American magazine, the MARXIST QUARTERLY, sent out a questionnaire to various American writers asking them to define their attitude on the subject

of war. Miller replied in terms of extreme pacifism, an individual refusal to fight, with no apparent wish to convert others to the same opinion–practically, in fact, a declaration of irresponsibility.

However, there is more than one kind of irresponsibility. As a rule, writers who do not wish to identify themselves with the historical process at the moment either ignore it or fight against if. If they can ignore it, they are probably fools. If they can understand it well enough to want to fight against it, they probably have enough vision to realize that they cannot win. Look, for instance, at a poem like 'The Scholar Gipsy', with its railing against the 'strange disease of modern life' and its magnificent defeatist simile is the final stanza. It expresses one of the normal literary attitudes, perhaps actually the prevailing attitude during the last hundred years. And on the other hand there are the 'progressives', the yea-sayers, the Shaw-Wells type, always leaping forward to embrace the ego-projections which they mistake for the future. On the whole the writers of the twenties took the first line and the writers of the thirties the second. And at any given moment, of course, there is a huge tribe of Barries and Deepings and Dells who simply don't notice what is happening. Where Miller's work is symptomatically important is in its avoidance of any of these attitudes. He is neither pushing the world-process forward nor trying to drag it back, but on the other hand he is by no means ignoring it. I should say that he believes in the impending ruin of Western Civilization much more firmly than the majority of 'revolutionary' writers; only he does not feel called upon to do anything about it. He is fiddling While Rome is burning, and, unlike the enormous majority of people who do this, fiddling with his face towards the flames.

In MAX AND THE WHITE PHAGOCYTES there is one of those revealing passages in which a writer tells you a great deal about himself while talking about somebody else. The book includes a long essay on the diaries of Anais Nin, which I have never read, except for a few fragments, and which I believe have not been published. Miller claims that they are the only true feminine writing that has ever appeared, whatever that may mean. But the interesting passage is one in which he compares Anais Nin–evidently a completely subjective, introverted writer–to Jonah in the whale's

belly. In passing he refers to an essay that Aldous Huxley wrote some years ago about El Greco's picture, The Dream of Philip the Second. Huxley remarks that the people in El Greco's pictures always look as though they were in the bellies of whales, and professes to find something peculiarly horrible in the idea of being in a 'visceral prison'. Miller retorts that, on the contrary, there are many worse things than being swallowed by whales, and the passage makes it dear that he himself finds the idea rather attractive. Here he is touching upon what is probably a very widespread fantasy. It is perhaps worth noticing that everyone, at least every English-speaking person, invariably speaks of Jonah and the WHALE. Of course the creature that swallowed Jonah was a fish, and was so described in the Bible (Jonah i. 17), but children naturally confuse it with a whale, and this fragment of baby-talk is habitually carried into later life–a sign, perhaps, of the hold that the Jonah myth has upon our imaginations. For the fact is that being inside a whale is a very comfortable, cosy, homelike thought. The historical Jonah, if he can be so called, was glad enough to escape, but in imagination, in day-dream, countless people have envied him. It is, of course, quite obvious why. The whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult. There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter what HAPPENS. A storm that would sink all the battleships in the world would hardly reach you as an echo. Even the whale's own movements would probably be imperceptible to you. He might be wallowing among the surface waves or shooting down into the blackness of the middle seas (a mile deep, according to Herman Melville), but you would never notice the difference. Short of being dead, it is the final, unsurpassable stage of irresponsibility. And however it may be with Anais Nin, there is no question that Miller himself is inside the whale. All his best and most characteristic passages are written from the angle of Jonah, a willing Jonah. Not that he is especially introverted–quite the contrary. In his case the whale happens to be transparent. Only he feels no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining

passive, ACCEPTING.

It will be seen what this amounts to. It is a species of quietism, implying either complete unbelief or else a degree of belief amounting to mysticism. The attitude is 'JE M'EN FOUS' or 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him', whichever way you like to look at it; for practical purposes both are identical, the moral in either case being 'Sit on your bum'. But in a time like ours, is this a defensible attitude? Notice that it is almost impossible to refrain from asking this question. At the moment of writing, we are still in a period in which it is taken for granted that books ought always to be positive, serious, and 'constructive'. A dozen years ago this idea would have been greeted with titters. ('My dear aunt, one doesn't write about anything, one just WRITES.') Then the pendulum swung away from the frivolous notion that art is merely technique, but it swung a very long distance, to the point of asserting that a book can only be 'good' if it is founded on a 'true' vision of life. Naturally the people who believe this also believe that they are in possession of the truth themselves. Catholic critics, for instance, tend to claim that books arc only 'good' when they are of Catholic tendency. Marxist critics make the same claim more boldly for Marxist books. For instance, Mr Edward Upward ('A Marxist Interpretation of Literature,' in the MIND IN CHAINS):

Literary criticism which aims at being Marxist must...proclaim that no book written at the present time can be 'good' unless it is written from a Marxist or near-Marxist viewpoint.

Various other writers have made similar or comparable statements. Mr Upward italicizes 'at the present time' because, he realizes that you cannot, for instance, dismiss HAMLET on the ground that Shakespeare was not a Marxist. Nevertheless his interesting essay only glances very shortly at this difficulty. Much of the literature that comes to us out of the past is permeated by and in fact founded on beliefs (the belief in the immortality of the soul, for example) which now seem to us false and in some cases contemptibly silly. Yet if is 'good' literature, if survival is any test. Mr Upward would no doubt answer that a belief which was appropriate several centuries ago might be inappropriate and therefore stultifying now. But this does not get one much farther,

because it assumes that in any age there will be ONE body of belief which is the current approximation to truth, and that the best literature of the time will be more or less in harmony with it. Actually no such uniformity has ever existed. In seventeenth-century England, for instance, there was a religious and political cleavage which distinctly resembled the left-right antagonism of to-day. Looking back, most modern people would feel that the bourgeois-Puritan viewpoint was a better approximation to truth than the Catholic-feudal one. But it is certainly not the case that all or even a majority of the best writers of the time were puritans. And more than this, there exist 'good' writers whose world-view would in any age be recognized false and silly. Edgar Allan Poe is an example. Poe's outlook is at best a wild romanticism and at worst is not far from being insane in the literal clinical sense. Why is it, then that stories like The Black Cat, The Tell-tale Heart, The Fall of the House of Usher and so forth, which might very nearly have been written by a lunatic, do not convey a feeling of falsity? Because they are true within a certain framework, they keep the rules of their own peculiar world, like a Japanese picture. But it appears that to write successfully about such a world you have got to believe in it. One sees the difference immediately if one compares Poe's TALES with what is, in my opinion, an insincere attempt to work up a similar atmosphere, Julian Green's MINUIT. The thing that immediately strikes one about MINUIT is that there is no reason why any of the events in it should happen. Everything is completely arbitrary; there is no emotional sequence. But this is exactly what one does NOT feel with Poe's stories. Their maniacal logic, in its own setting, is quite convincing. When, for instance, the drunkard seizes the black cat and cuts its eye out with his penknife, one knows exactly WHY he did it, even to the point of feeling that one would have done the same oneself. It seems therefore that for a creative writer possession of the 'truth' is less important than emotional sincerity. Even Mr Upward would not claim that a writer needs nothing beyond a Marxist training. He also needs a talent. But talent, apparently, is a matter of being able to care, of really BELIEVING in your beliefs, whether they are true or false. The difference between, for instance, Céline and Evelyn Waugh is a difference of emotional intensity. It is the

difference between genuine despair and a despair that is at least partly a pretence. And with this there goes another consideration which is perhaps less obvious: that there are occasions when an 'untrue' belief is more likely to be sincerely held than a 'true' one.

If one looks at the books of personal reminiscence written about the war of 1914-18, one notices that nearly all that have remained readable after a lapse of time are written from a passive, negative angle. They are the records of something completely meaningless, a nightmare happening in a void. That was not actually the truth about the war, but it was the truth about the individual reaction. The soldier advancing into a machine-gun barrage or standing waist-deep in a flooded trench knew only that here was an appalling experience in which he was all but helpless. He was likelier to make a good book out of his helplessness and his ignorance than out of a pretended power to see the whole thing in perspective. As for the books that were written during the war itself, the best of them were nearly all the work of people who simply turned their backs and tried not to notice that the war was happening. Mr E. M. Forster has described how in 1917 he read Prufrock and other of Eliot's early poems, and how it heartened him at such a time to get hold of poems that were 'innocent of public-spiritedness':

They sang of private disgust and diffidence, and of people who seemed genuine because they were unattractive or weak...Here was a protest, and a feeble one, and the more congenial for being o feeble...He who could turn aside to complain of ladies and drawing rooms preserved a tiny drop of our self-respect, he carried on the human heritage.

That is very well said. Mr MacNeice, in the book I have referred to already, quotes this passage and somewhat smugly adds:

Ten years later less feeble protests were to be made by poets and the human heritage carried on rather differently...The contemplation of a world of fragments becomes boring and Eliot's successors are more interested in tidying it up.

Similar remarks are scattered throughout Mr MacNeice's book. What he wishes us to believe is that Eliot's 'successors' (meaning Mr MacNeice and his friends) have in some way 'protested' more effectively than Eliot did by publishing Prufrock at the moment when

the Allied armies were assaulting the Hindenburg Line. Just where these 'protests' are to be found I do not know. But in the contrast between Mr Forster's comment and Mr MacNeice's lies all the difference between a man who knows what the 1914-18 war was like and a man who barely remembers it. The truth is that in 1917 there was nothing that a thinking and a sensitive person could do, except to remain human, if possible. And a gesture of helplessness, even of frivolity, might be the best way of doing that. If I had been a soldier fighting in the Great War, I would sooner have got hold of Prufrock than THE FIRST HUNDRED THOUSAND or Horatio Bottomley's LETTERS TO THE BOYS IN THE TRENCHES. I should have felt, like Mr Forster, that by simply standing aloof and keeping touch with pre-war emotions, Eliot was carrying on the human heritage. What a relief it would have been at such a time, to read about the hesitations of a middle-aged highbrow with a bald spot! So different from bayonet-drill! After the bombs and the food-queues and the recruiting-posters, a human voice! What a relief!

But, after all, the war of 1914-18 was only a heightened moment in an almost continuous crisis. At this date it hardly even needs a war to bring home to us the disintegration of our society and the increasing helplessness of all, decent people. It is for this reason that I think that the passive, non-co-operative attitude implied in Henry Miller's work is justified. Whether or not it is an expression of what people OUGHT to feel, it probably comes somewhere near to expressing what they DO feel. Once again it is the human voice among the bomb-explosions, a friendly American voice, 'innocent of public-spiritedness'. No sermons, merely the subjective truth. And along those lines, apparently, it is still possible for a good novel to be written. Not necessarily an edifying novel, but a novel worth reading and likely to be remembered after it is read.

While I have been writing this essay another European war has broken out. It will either last several years and tear Western civilization to pieces, or it will end inconclusively and prepare the way for yet another war which will do the job once and for all. But war is only 'peace intensified'. What is quite obviously happening, war or no war, is the break-up of LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism and of the liberal-Christian culture. Until recently the full implications of

this were not foreseen, because it was generally imagined that socialism could preserve and even enlarge the atmosphere of liberalism. It is now beginning to be realized how false this idea was. Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships–an age in which freedom of thought will be at first a deadly sin and later on a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence. But this means that literature, in the form in which we know it, must suffer at least a temporary death. The literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism has not yet appeared and is barely imaginable. As for the writer, he is sitting on a melting iceberg; he is merely an anachronism, a hangover from the bourgeois age, as surely doomed as the hippopotamus. Miller seems to me a man out of the common because he saw and proclaimed this fact a long while before most of his contemporaries–at a time, indeed, when many of them were actually burbling about a renaissance of literature. Wyndham Lewis had said years earlier that the major history of the English language was finished, but he was basing this on different and rather trivial reasons. But from now onwards the all-important fact for the creative writers going to be that this is not a writer's world. That does not mean that he cannot help to bring the new society into being, but he can take no part in the process AS A WRITER. For AS A WRITER he is a liberal, and what is happening is the destruction of liberalism. It seems likely, therefore, that in the remaining years of free speech any novel worth reading will follow more or less along the lines that Miller has followed–I do not mean in technique or subject matter, but in implied outlook. The passive attitude will come back, and it will be more consciously passive than before. Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism–robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale–or rather, admit you are inside the whale (for you ARE, of course). Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it. That seems to be the formula, that any sensitive novelist is now likely to adopt. A novel on more positive, 'constructive' lines, and not emotionally spurious, is at present very difficult to imagine.

But do I mean by this that Miller is a 'great author', a new hope for English prose? Nothing of the kind. Miller himself would be the last to claim or want any such thing. No doubt he will go on writing–anybody who has ones started always goes on writing–and associated with him there are a number of writers of approximately the same tendency, Lawrence Durrell, Michael Fraenkel and others, almost amounting to a 'school'. But he himself seems to me essentially a man of one book. Sooner or later I should expect him to descend into unintelligibility, or into charlatanism: there are signs of both in his later work. His last book, TROPIC OF CAPRICORN, I have not even read. This was not because I did not want to read it, but because the police and Customs authorities have so far managed to prevent me from getting hold of it. But it would surprise me if it came anywhere near TROPIC OF CANCER or the opening chapters of BLACK SPRING. Like certain other autobiographical novelists, he had it in him to do just one thing perfectly, and he did it. Considering what the fiction of the nineteen-thirties has been like, that is something.

Miller's books are published by the Obelisk Press in Paris. What will happen to the Obelisk Press, now that war has broken out and Jack Kathane, the publisher, is dead, I do not know, but at any rate the books are still procurable. I earnestly counsel anyone who has not done so to read at least TROPIC OF CANCER. With a little ingenuity, or by paying a little over the published price, you can get hold of it, and even if parts of it disgust you, it will stick in your memory. It is also an 'important' book, in a sense different from the sense in which that word is generally used. As a rule novels are spoken of as 'important' when they are either a 'terrible indictment' of something or other or when they introduce some technical innovation. Neither of these applies to TROPIC OF CANCER. Its importance is merely symptomatic. Here in my opinion is the only imaginative prose-writer of the slightest value who has appeared among the English-speaking races for some years past. Even if that is objected to as an overstatement, it will probably be admitted that Miller is a writer out of the ordinary, worth more than a single glance; and after all, he is a completely negative, unconstructive, amoral writer, a mere Jonah, a passive acceptor of evil, a sort of

Whitman among the corpses. Symptomatically, that is more significant than the mere fact that five thousand novels are published in England every year and four thousand nine hundred of them are tripe. It is a demonstration of the impossibility of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into its new shape.

THE ART OF DONALD MCGILL (1941)

Who does not know the 'comics' of the cheap stationers' windows, the penny or twopenny coloured post cards with their endless succession of fat women in tight bathing-dresses and their crude drawing and unbearable colours, chiefly hedge-sparrow's-egg tint and Post Office red?

This question ought to be rhetorical, but it is curious fact that many people seem to be unaware of the existence of these things, or else to have a vague notion that they are something to be found only at the seaside, like nigger minstrels or peppermint rock. Actually they are on sale everywhere–they can be bought at nearly any Woolworth's, for example–and they are evidently produced in enormous numbers, new series constantly appearing. They are not to be confused with the various other types of comic illustrated post card, such as the sentimental ones dealing with puppies and kittens or the Wendyish, sub-pornographic ones which exploit the love affairs of children. They are a genre of their own, specializing in very 'low' humour, the mother-in-law, baby's-nappy, policemen's-boot type of joke, and distinguishable from all the other kinds by having no artistic pretensions. Some half-dozen publishing houses issue them, though the people who draw them seem not to be numerous at any one time.

I have associated them especially with the name of Donald McGill because he is not only the most prolific and by far the best of contemporary post card artists, but also the most representative, the most perfect in the tradition. Who Donald McGill is, I do not know. He is apparently a trade name, for at least one series of post cards is issued simply as 'The Donald McGill Comics', but he is also unquestionable a real person with a style of drawing which is recognizable at a glance. Anyone who examines his post cards in bulk will notice that many of them are not despicable even as drawings, but it would be mere dilettantism to pretend that they have any direct aesthetic value. A comic post card is simply an illustration to a joke, invariably a 'low' joke, and it stands or falls by its ability to raise a laugh. Beyond that it has only 'ideological' interest. McGill

is a clever draughtsman with a real caricaturist's touch in the drawing of faces, but the special value of his post cards is that they are so completely typical. They represent, as it were, the norm of the comic post card. Without being in the least imitative, they are exactly what comic post cards have been any time these last forty years, and from them the meaning and purpose of the whole genre can be inferred.

Get hold of a dozen of these things, preferably McGill's–if you pick out from a pile the ones that seem to you funniest, you will probably find that most of them are McGill's–and spread them out on a table. What do you see?

Your first impression is of overpowering vulgarity. This is quite apart from the ever-present obscenity, and apart also from the hideousness of the colours. They have an utter low-ness of mental atmosphere which comes out not only in the nature of the jokes but, even more, in the grotesque, staring, blatant quality of the drawings. The designs, like those of a child, are full of heavy lines and empty spaces, and all the figures in them, every gesture and attitude, are deliberately ugly, the faces grinning and vacuous, the women monstrously parodied, with bottoms like Hottentots. Your second impression, however, is of indefinable familiarity. What do these things remind you of? What are they so like? In the first place, of course, they remind you of the barely different post cards which you probably gazed at in your childhood. But more than this, what you are really looking at is something as traditional as Greek tragedy, a sort of sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mothers-in-law which is a part of Western European consciousness. Not that the jokes, taken one by one, are necessarily stale. Not being debarred from smuttiness, comic post cards repeat themselves less often than the joke columns in reputable magazines, but their basic subject-matter, the KIND of joke they are aiming at, never varies. A few are genuinely witty, in a Max Millerish style. Examples:

'I like seeing experienced girls home.'

'But I'm not experienced!'

'You're not home yet!'

'I've been struggling for years to get a fur coat. How did you get yours?'

'I left off struggling.'

JUDGE: ‘You are prevaricating, sir. Did you or did you not sleep with this woman?’

Co-respondent: ‘Not a wink, my lord!’

In general, however, they are not witty, but humorous, and it must be said for McGill’s post cards, in particular, that the drawing is often a good deal funnier than the joke beneath it. Obviously the outstanding characteristic of comic cards is their obscenity, and I must discuss that more fully later. But I give here a rough analysis of their habitual subject-matter, with such explanatory remarks as seem to be needed:

SEX.–More than half, perhaps three-quarters, of the jokes are sex jokes, ranging from the harmless to the all but unprintable. First favourite is probably the illegitimate baby. Typical captions: ‘Could you exchange this lucky charm for a baby’s feeding-bottle?’ ‘She didn’t ask me to the christening, so I’m not going to the wedding.’ Also newlyweds, old maids, nude statues and women in bathing-dresses. All of these are IPSO FACTO funny, mere mention of them being enough to raise a laugh. The cuckoldry joke is seldom exploited, and there are no references to homosexuality.

Conventions of the sex joke:

(i) Marriage only benefits women. Every man is plotting seduction and every woman is plotting marriage. No woman ever remained unmarried voluntarily.

(ii) Sex-appeal vanishes at about the age of twenty-five. Well-preserved and good-looking people beyond their first youth are never represented. The amorous honeymooning couple reappear as the grim-visaged wife and shapeless, moustachioed, red-nosed husband, no intermediate stage being allowed for.

HOME LIFE–Next to sex, the henpecked husband is the favourite joke. Typical caption: ‘Did they get an X-ray of your wife’s jaw at the hospital?’–’No, they got a moving picture instead.’

Conventions:

(i) There is no such thing as a happy marriage.

(ii) No man ever gets the better of a woman in argument. Drunkenness–Both drunkenness and teetotalism are ipso facto funny.

Conventions:

(i) All drunken men have optical illusions.

(ii) Drunkenness is something peculiar to middle-aged men. Drunken youths or women are never represented.

W.C. JOKES–There is not a large number of these. Chamber pots are ipso facto funny, and so are public lavatories. A typical post card captioned 'A Friend in Need', shows a man's hat blown off his head and disappearing down the steps of a ladies' lavatory.

INTER-WORKING-CLASS SNOBBERY–Much in these post cards suggests that they are aimed at the better-off working class and poorer middle class. There are many jokes turning on malapropisms, illiteracy, dropped aitches and the rough manners of slum dwellers. Countless post cards show draggled hags of the stage-charwoman type exchanging 'unladylike' abuse. Typical repartee: 'I wish you were a statue and I was a pigeon!' A certain number produced since the war treat evacuation from the anti-evacuee angle. There are the usual jokes about tramps, beggars and criminals, and the comic maidservant appears fairly frequently. Also the comic navvy, bargee, etc.; but there are no anti-Trade-Union jokes. Broadly speaking, everyone with much over or much under £5 a week is regarded as laughable. The 'swell' is almost as automatically a figure of fun as the slum-dweller.

STOCK FIGURES–Foreigners seldom or never appear. The chief locality joke is the Scotsman, who is almost inexhaustible. The lawyer is always a swindler, the clergyman always a nervous idiot who says the wrong thing. The 'knut' or 'masher' still appears, almost as in Edwardian days, in out-of-date looking evening-clothes and an opera hat, or even spats and a knobby cane. Another survival is the Suffragette, one of the big jokes of the pre-1914 period and too valuable to be relinquished. She has reappeared, unchanged in physical appearance, as the Feminist lecturer or Temperance fanatic. A feature of the last few years is the complete absence of anti-Jew post cards. The 'Jew joke', always somewhat more ill-natured than the 'Scotch joke', disappeared abruptly soon after the rise of Hitler.

POLITICS–Any contemporary event, cult or activity which has comic possibilities (for example, 'free love', feminism, A.R.P., nudism) rapidly finds its way into the picture post cards, but their general atmosphere is extremely old-fashioned. The implied political

outlook is a Radicalism appropriate to about the year 1900. At normal times they are not only not patriotic, but go in for a mild guying of patriotism, with jokes about 'God save the King', the Union Jack, etc. The European situation only began to reflect itself in them at some time in 1939, and first did so through the comic aspects of A.R.P. Even at this date few post cards mention the war except in A.R.P. jokes (fat woman stuck in the mouth of Anderson shelter: wardens neglecting their duty while young woman undresses at window she has forgotten to black out, etc., etc.) A few express anti-Hitler sentiments of a not very vindictive kind. One, not McGill's, shows Hitler with the usual hypertrophied backside, bending down to pick a flower. Caption; 'What would you do, chums?' This is about as high a flight of patriotism as any post card is likely to attain. Unlike the twopenny weekly papers, comic post cards are not the product of any great monopoly company, and evidently they are not regarded as having any importance in forming public opinion. There is no sign in them of any attempt to induce an outlook acceptable to the ruling class.

Here one comes back to the outstanding, all-important feature of comic post cards–their obscenity. It is by this that everyone remembers them, and it is also central to their purpose, though not in a way that is immediately obvious.

A recurrent, almost dominant motif in comic post cards is the woman with the stuck-out behind. In perhaps half of them, or more than half, even when the point of the joke has nothing to do with sex, the same female figure appears, a plump 'voluptuous' figure with the dress clinging to it as tightly as another skin and with breasts or buttocks grossly over-emphasized according to which way it is turned. There can be no doubt that these pictures lift the lid off a very widespread repression, natural enough in a country whose women when young tend to be slim to the point of skimpiness. But at the same time the McGill post card–and this applies to all other post cards in this genre–is not intended as pornography but, a subtler thing, as a skit on pornography. The Hottentot figures of the women are caricatures of the Englishman's secret ideal, not portraits of it. When one examines McGill's post cards more closely, one notices that his brand of humour only has a meaning in relation to a fairly

strict moral code. Whereas in papers like ESQUIRE, for instance, or LA VIE PARISIENNE, the imaginary background of the jokes is always promiscuity, the utter breakdown of all standards, the background of the McGill post card is marriage. The four leading jokes are nakedness, illegitimate babies, old maids and newly married couples, none of which would seem funny in a really dissolute or even 'sophisticated' society. The post cards dealing with honeymoon couples always have the enthusiastic indecency of those village weddings where it is still considered screamingly funny to sew bells to the bridal bed. In one, for example, a young bridegroom is shown getting out of bed the morning after his wedding night. 'The first morning in our own little home, darling!' he is saying; 'I'll go and get the milk and paper and bring you up a cup of tea.' Inset is a picture of the front doorstep; on it are four newspapers and four bottles of milk. This is obscene, if you like, but it is not immoral. Its implication–and this is just the implication the ESQUIRE or the NEW YORKER would avoid at all costs–is that marriage is something profoundly exciting and important, the biggest event in the average human being's life.

So also with jokes about nagging wives and tyrannous mothers-in-law. They do at least imply a stable society in which marriage is indissoluble and family loyalty taken for granted. And bound up with this is something I noted earlier, the fact there are no pictures, or hardly any, of good-looking people beyond their first youth. There is the 'spooning' couple and the middle-aged, cat-and-dog couple, but nothing in between. The liaison, the illicit but more or less decorous love-affair which used to be the stock joke of French comic papers, is not a post card subject. And this reflects, on a comic level, the working-class outlook which takes it as a matter of course that youth and adventure–almost, indeed, individual life–end with marriage. One of the few authentic class-differences, as opposed to class-distinctions, still existing in England is that the working classes age very much earlier. They do not live less long, provided that they survive their childhood, nor do they lose their physical activity earlier, but they do lose very early their youthful appearance. This fact is observable everywhere, but can be most easily verified by watching one of the higher age groups registering for military

service; the middle–and upper-class members look, on average, ten years younger than the others. It is usual to attribute this to the harder lives that the working classes have to live, but it is doubtful whether any such difference now exists as would account for it. More probably the truth is that the working classes reach middle age earlier because they accept it earlier. For to look young after, say, thirty is largely a matter of wanting to do so. This generalization is less true of the better-paid workers, especially those who live in council houses and labour-saving flats, but it is true enough even of them to point to a difference of outlook. And in this, as usual, they are more traditional, more in accord with the Christian past than the well-to-do women who try to stay young at forty by means of physical-jerks, cosmetics and avoidance of child-bearing. The impulse to cling to youth at all costs, to attempt to preserve your sexual attraction, to see even in middle age a future for yourself and not merely for your children, is a thing of recent growth and has only precariously established itself. It will probably disappear again when our standard of living drops and our birth-rate rises. 'Youth's a stuff will not endure' expresses the normal, traditional attitude. It is this ancient wisdom that McGill and his colleagues are reflecting, no doubt unconsciously, when they allow for no transition stage between the honeymoon couple and those glamourless figures, Mum and Dad.

I have said that at least half of McGill's post cards are sex jokes, and a proportion, perhaps ten per cent, are far more obscene than anything else that is now printed in England. Newsagents are occasionally prosecuted for selling them, and there would be many more prosecutions if the broadest jokes were not invariably protected by double meanings. A single example will be enough to show how this is done. In one post card, captioned 'They didn't believe her', a young woman is demonstrating, with her hands held apart, something about two feet long to a couple of open-mouthed acquaintances. Behind her on the wall is a stuffed fish in a glass case, and beside that is a photograph of a nearly naked athlete. Obviously it is not the fish that she is referring to, but this could never be proved. Now, it is doubtful whether there is any paper in England that would print a joke of this kind, and certainly there is no paper that does so habitually. There is an immense amount of pornography

of a mild sort, countless illustrated papers cashing in on women's legs, but there is no popular literature specializing in the 'vulgar', farcical aspect of sex. On the other hand, jokes exactly like McGill's are the ordinary small change of the revue and music-hall stage, and are also to be heard on the radio, at moments when the censor happens to be nodding. In England the gap between what can be said and what can be printed is rather exceptionally wide. Remarks and gestures which hardly anyone objects to on the stage would raise a public outcry if any attempt were made to reproduce them on paper. (Compare Max Miller's stage patter with his weekly column in the SUNDAY DISPATCH) The comic post cards are the only existing exception to this rule, the only medium in which really 'low' humour is considered to be printable. Only in post cards and on the variety stage can the stuck-out behind, dog and lamp-post, baby's nappy type of joke be freely exploited. Remembering that, one sees what function these post cards, in their humble way, are performing.

What they are doing is to give expression to the Sancho Panza view of life, the attitude to life that Miss Rebecca West once summed up as 'extracting as much fun as possible from smacking behinds in basement kitchens'. The Don Quixote-Sancho Panza combination, which of course is simply the ancient dualism of body and soul in fiction form, recurs more frequently in the literature of the last four hundred years than can be explained by mere imitation. It comes up again and again, in endless variations, Bouvard and Pécuchet, Jeeves and Wooster, Bloom and Dedalus, Holmes and Watson (the Holmes-Watson variant is an exceptionally subtle one, because the usual physical characteristics of two partners have been transposed). Evidently it corresponds to something enduring in our civilization, not in the sense that either character is to be found in a 'pure' state in real life, but in the sense that the two principles, noble folly and base wisdom, exist side by side in nearly every human being. If you look into your own mind, which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza? Almost certainly you are both. There is one part of you that wishes to be a hero or a saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantages of staying alive with a whole skin. He is your unofficial self, the voice of the belly protesting against the soul. His tastes lie towards safety, soft beds, no

work, pots of beer and women with 'voluptuous' figures. He it is who punctures your fine attitudes and urges you to look after Number One, to be unfaithful to your wife, to bilk your debts, and so on and so forth. Whether you allow yourself to be influenced by him is a different question. But it is simply a lie to say that he is not part of you, just as it is a lie to say that Don Quixote is not part of you either, though most of what is said and written consists of one lie or the other, usually the first.

But though in varying forms he is one of the stock figures of literature, in real life, especially in the way society is ordered, his point of view never gets a fair hearing. There is a constant world-wide conspiracy to pretend that he is not there, or at least that he doesn't matter. Codes of law and morals, or religious systems, never have much room in them for a humorous view of life. Whatever is funny is subversive, every joke is ultimately a custard pie, and the reason why so large a proportion of jokes centre round obscenity is simply that all societies, as the price of survival, have to insist on a fairly high standard of sexual morality. A dirty joke is not, of course, a serious attack upon morality, but it is a sort of mental rebellion, a momentary wish that things were otherwise. So also with all other jokes, which always centre round cowardice, laziness, dishonesty or some other quality which society cannot afford to encourage. Society has always to demand a little more from human beings than it will get in practice. It has to demand faultless discipline and self-sacrifice, it must expect its subjects to work hard, pay their taxes, and be faithful to their wives, it must assume that men think it glorious to die on the battlefield and women want wear themselves out with child-bearing. The whole of what one may call official literature is founded on such assumptions. I never read the proclamations of generals before battle, the speeches of Führers and prime ministers, the solidarity songs of public schools and left-wing political parties, national anthems, Temperance tracts, papal encyclicals and sermons against gambling and contraception, without seeming to hear in the background a chorus of raspberries from all the millions of common men to whom these high sentiments make no appeal. Nevertheless the high sentiments always win in the end, leaders who offer blood, toil, tears and sweat always get more out of their followers than those

who offer safety and a good time. When it comes to the pinch, human beings are heroic. Women face childbed and the scrubbing brush, revolutionaries keep their mouths shut in the torture chamber, battleships go down with their guns still firing when their decks are awash. It is only that the other element in man, the lazy, cowardly, debt-bilking adulterer who is inside all of us, can never be suppressed altogether and needs a hearing occasionally.

The comic post cards are one expression of his point of view, a humble one, less important than the music halls, but still worthy of attention. In a society which is still basically Christian they naturally concentrate on sex jokes; in a totalitarian society, if they had any freedom of expression at all, they would probably concentrate on laziness or cowardice, but at any rate on the unheroic in one form or another. It will not do to condemn them on the ground that they are vulgar and ugly. That is exactly what they are meant to be. Their whole meaning and virtue is in their unredeemed low-ness, not only in the sense of obscenity, but lowness of outlook in every direction whatever. The slightest hint of 'higher' influences would ruin them utterly. They stand for the worm's-eye view of life, for the music-hall world where marriage is a dirty joke or a comic disaster, where the rent is always behind and the clothes are always up the spout, where the lawyer is always a crook and the Scotsman always a miser, where the newly-weds make fools of themselves on the hideous beds of seaside lodging-houses and the drunken, red-nosed husbands roll home at four in the morning to meet the linen-nightgowned wives who wait for them behind the front door, poker in hand. Their existence, the fact that people want them, is symptomatically important. Like the music halls, they are a sort of saturnalia, a harmless rebellion against virtue. They express only one tendency in the human mind, but a tendency which is always there and will find its own outlet, like water. On the whole, human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all the time. For:

there is a just man that perished in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself over wise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?

In the past the mood of the comic post card could enter into the central stream of literature, and jokes barely different from McGill's could casually be uttered between the murders in Shakespeare's tragedies. That is no longer possible, and a whole category of humour, integral to our literature till 1800 or thereabouts, has dwindled down to these ill-drawn post cards, leading a barely legal existence in cheap stationers' windows. The corner of the human heart that they speak for might easily manifest itself in worse forms, and I for one should be sorry to see them vanish.

THE LION AND THE UNICORN: SOCIALISM AND THE ENGLISH GENIUS (1941)

Part I

England Your England

i.

As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.

They do not feel any enmity against me as an individual, nor I against them. They are 'only doing their duty', as the saying goes. Most of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted law-abiding men who would never dream of committing murder in private life. On the other hand, if one of them succeeds in blowing me to pieces with a well-placed bomb, he will never sleep any the worse for it. He is serving his country, which has the power to absolve him from evil.

One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognizes the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty. In certain circumstances it can break down, at certain levels of civilization it does not exist, but as a POSITIVE force there is nothing to set beside it. Christianity and international Socialism are as weak as straw in comparison with it. Hitler and Mussolini rose to power in their own countries very largely because they could grasp this fact and their opponents could not.

Also, one must admit that the divisions between nation and nation are founded on real differences of outlook. Till recently it was thought proper to pretend that all human beings are very much alike, but in fact anyone able to use his eyes knows that the average of human behaviour differs enormously from country to country. Things that could happen in one country could not happen in another. Hitler's June purge, for instance, could not have happened in England. And, as western peoples go, the English are very highly differentiated. There is a sort of back-handed admission of this in the dislike which nearly all foreigners feel for our national way of life. Few Europeans can endure living in England, and even Americans

often feel more at home in Europe.

When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air. Even in the first few minutes dozens of small things conspire to give you this feeling. The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener, the advertisements are more blatant. The crowds in the big towns, with their mild knobby faces, their bad teeth and gentle manners, are different from a European crowd. Then the vastness of England swallows you up, and you lose for a while your feeling that the whole nation has a single identifiable character. Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos! The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pin-tables in the Soho pubs, the old maids hiking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning–all these are not only fragments, but CHARACTERISTIC fragments, of the English scene. How can one make a pattern out of this muddle?

But talk to foreigners, read foreign books or newspapers, and you are brought back to the same thought. Yes, there is something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization. It is a culture as individual as that of Spain. It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes. It has a flavour of its own. Moreover it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature. What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person.

And above all, it is YOUR civilization, it is you. However much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from it for any length of time. The suet puddings and the red pillar-boxes have entered into your soul. Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it, and this side the grave you will never get away from the marks that it has given you.

Meanwhile England, together with the rest of the world, is

changing. And like everything else it can change only in certain directions, which up to a point can be foreseen. That is not to say that the future is fixed, merely that certain alternatives are possible and others not. A seed may grow or not grow, but at any rate a turnip seed never grows into a parsnip. It is therefore of the deepest importance to try and determine what England IS, before guessing what part England CAN PLAY in the huge events that are happening.

ii.

National characteristics are not easy to pin down, and when pinned down they often turn out to be trivialities or seem to have no connexion with one another. Spaniards are cruel to animals, Italians can do nothing without making a deafening noise, the Chinese are addicted to gambling. Obviously such things don't matter in themselves. Nevertheless, nothing is causeless, and even the fact that Englishmen have bad teeth can tell something about the realities of English life.

Here are a couple of generalizations about England that would be accepted by almost all observers. One is that the English are not gifted artistically. They are not as musical as the Germans or Italians, painting and sculpture have never flourished in England as they have in France. Another is that, as Europeans go, the English are not intellectual. They have a horror of abstract thought, they feel no need for any philosophy or systematic 'world-view'. Nor is this because they are 'practical', as they are so fond of claiming for themselves. One has only to look at their methods of town planning and water supply, their obstinate clinging to everything that is out of date and a nuisance, a spelling system that defies analysis, and a system of weights and measures that is intelligible only to the compilers of arithmetic books, to see how little they care about mere efficiency. But they have a certain power of acting without taking thought. Their world-famed hypocrisy–their double-faced attitude towards the Empire, for instance–is bound up with this. Also, in moments of supreme crisis the whole nation can suddenly draw together and act upon a species of instinct, really a code of conduct which is

understood by almost everyone, though never formulated. The phrase that Hitler coined for the Germans, 'a sleep-walking people', would have been better applied to the English. Not that there is anything to be proud of in being called a sleep-walker.

But here it is worth noting a minor English trait which is extremely well marked though not often commented on, and that is a love of flowers. This is one of the first things that one notices when one reaches England from abroad, especially if one is coming from southern Europe. Does it not contradict the English indifference to the arts? Not really, because it is found in people who have no aesthetic feelings whatever. What it does link up with, however, is another English characteristic which is so much a part of us that we barely notice it, and that is the addiction to hobbies and spare-time occupations, the PRIVATENESS of English life. We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossword-puzzle fans. All the culture that is most truly native centres round things which even when they are communal are not official–the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'. The liberty of the individual is still believed in, almost as in the nineteenth century. But this has nothing to do with economic liberty, the right to exploit others for profit. It is the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from above. The most hateful of all names in an English ear is Nosey Parker. It is obvious, of course, that even this purely private liberty is a lost cause. Like all other modern people, the English are in process of being numbered, labelled, conscripted, 'co-ordinated'. But the pull of their impulses is in the other direction, and the kind of regimentation that can be imposed on them will be modified in consequence. No party rallies, no Youth Movements, no coloured shirts, no Jew-baiting or 'spontaneous' demonstrations. No Gestapo either, in all probability.

But in all societies the common people must live to some extent AGAINST the existing order. The genuinely popular culture of England is something that goes on beneath the surface, unofficially and more or less frowned on by the authorities. One thing one

notices if one looks directly at the common people, especially in the big towns, is that they are not puritanical. They are inveterate gamblers, drink as much beer as their wages will permit, are devoted to bawdy jokes, and use probably the foulest language in the world. They have to satisfy these tastes in the face of astonishing, hypocritical laws (licensing laws, lottery acts, etc. etc.) which are designed to interfere with everybody but in practice allow everything to happen. Also, the common people are without definite religious belief, and have been so for centuries. The Anglican Church never had a real hold on them, it was simply a preserve of the landed gentry, and the Nonconformist sects only influenced minorities. And yet they have retained a deep tinge of Christian feeling, while almost forgetting the name of Christ. The power-worship which is the new religion of Europe, and which has infected the English intelligentsia, has never touched the common people. They have never caught up with power politics. The 'realism' which is preached in Japanese and Italian newspapers would horrify them. One can learn a good deal about the spirit of England from the comic coloured postcards that you see in the windows of cheap stationers' shops. These things are a sort of diary upon which the English people have unconsciously recorded themselves. Their old-fashioned outlook, their graded snobberies, their mixture of bawdiness and hypocrisy, their extreme gentleness, their deeply moral attitude to life, are all mirrored there.

The gentleness of the English civilization is perhaps its most marked characteristic. You notice it the instant you set foot on English soil. It is a land where the bus conductors are good-tempered and the policemen carry no revolvers. In no country inhabited by white men is it easier to shove people off the pavement. And with this goes something that is always written off by European observers as 'decadence' or hypocrisy, the English hatred of war and militarism. It is rooted deep in history, and it is strong in the lower-middle class as well as the working class. Successive wars have shaken it but not destroyed it. Well within living memory it was common for 'the redcoats' to be booed at in the streets and for the landlords of respectable public houses to refuse to allow soldiers on the premises. In peace time, even when there are two million unemployed, it is difficult to fill the ranks of the tiny standing army,

which is officered by the country gentry and a specialized stratum of the middle class, and manned by farm labourers and slum proletarians. The mass of the people are without military knowledge or tradition, and their attitude towards war is invariably defensive. No politician could rise to power by promising them conquests or military 'glory', no Hymn of Hate has ever made any appeal to them. In the last war the songs which the soldiers made up and sang of their own accord were not vengeful but humorous and mock-defeatist [Note, below]. The only enemy they ever named was the sergeant-major.

[Note: For example:

'I don't want to join the bloody Army,
I don't want to go unto the war;
I want no more to roam,
I'd rather stay at home,
Living on the earnings of a whore.

But it was not in that spirit that they fought. (Author's footnote.)]

In England all the boasting and flag-wagging, the 'Rule Britannia' stuff, is done by small minorities. The patriotism of the common people is not vocal or even conscious. They do not retain among their historical memories the name of a single military victory. English literature, like other literatures, is full of battle-poems, but it is worth noticing that the ones that have won for themselves a kind of popularity are always a tale of disasters and retreats. There is no popular poem about Trafalgar or Waterloo, for instance. Sir John Moore's army at Corunna, fighting a desperate rearguard action before escaping overseas (just like Dunkirk!) has more appeal than a brilliant victory. The most stirring battle-poem in English is about a brigade of cavalry which charged in the wrong direction. And of the last war, the four names which have really engraved themselves on the popular memory are Mons, Ypres, Gallipoli and Passchendaele, every time a disaster. The names of the great battles that finally broke the German armies are simply unknown to the general public.

The reason why the English anti-militarism disgusts foreign observers is that it ignores the existence of the British Empire. It looks like sheer hypocrisy. After all, the English have absorbed a quarter of the earth and held on to it by means of a huge navy. How

dare they then turn round and say that war is wicked?

It is quite true that the English are hypocritical about their Empire. In the working class this hypocrisy takes the form of not knowing that the Empire exists. But their dislike of standing armies is a perfectly sound instinct. A navy employs comparatively few people, and it is an external weapon which cannot affect home politics directly. Military dictatorships exist everywhere, but there is no such thing as a naval dictatorship. What English people of nearly all classes loathe from the bottom of their hearts is the swaggering officer type, the jingle of spurs and the crash of boots. Decades before Hitler was ever heard of, the word 'Prussian' had much the same significance in England as 'Nazi' has today. So deep does this feeling go that for a hundred years past the officers of the British army, in peace time, have always worn civilian clothes when off duty.

One rapid but fairly sure guide to the social atmosphere of a country is the parade-step of its army. A military parade is really a kind of ritual dance, something like a ballet, expressing a certain philosophy of life. The goose-step, for instance, is one of the most horrible sights in the world, far more terrifying than a dive-bomber. It is simply an affirmation of naked power; contained in it, quite consciously and intentionally, is the vision of a boot crashing down on a face. Its ugliness is part of its essence, for what it is saying is 'Yes, I am UGLY, and you daren't laugh at me', like the bully who makes faces at his victim. Why is the goose-step not used in England? There are, heaven knows, plenty of army officers who would be only too glad to introduce some such thing. It is not used because the people in the street would laugh. Beyond a certain point, military display is only possible in countries where the common people dare not laugh at the army. The Italians adopted the goose-step at about the time when Italy passed definitely under German control, and, as one would expect, they do it less well than the Germans. The Vichy government, if it survives, is bound to introduce a stiffer parade-ground discipline into what is left of the French army. In the British army the drill is rigid and complicated, full of memories of the eighteenth century, but without definite swagger; the march is merely a formalized walk. It belongs to a

society which is ruled by the sword, no doubt, but a sword which must never be taken out of the scabbard.

And yet the gentleness of English civilization is mixed up with barbarities and anachronisms. Our criminal law is as out-of-date as the muskets in the Tower. Over against the Nazi Storm Trooper you have got to set that typically English figure, the hanging judge, some gouty old bully with his mind rooted in the nineteenth century, handing out savage sentences. In England people are still hanged by the neck and flogged with the cat o' nine tails. Both of these punishments are obscene as well as cruel, but there has never been any genuinely popular outcry against them. People accept them (and Dartmoor, and Borstal) almost as they accept the weather. They are part of 'the law', which is assumed to be unalterable.

Here one comes upon an all-important English trait: the respect for constitutionalism and legality, the belief in 'the law' as something above the State and above the individual, something which is cruel and stupid, of course, but at any rate INCORRUPTIBLE.

It is not that anyone imagines the law to be just. Everyone knows that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. But no one accepts the implications of this, everyone takes it for granted that the law, such as it is, will be respected, and feels a sense of outrage when it is not. Remarks like 'They can't run me in; I haven't done anything wrong', or 'They can't do that; it's against the law', are part of the atmosphere of England. The professed enemies of society have this feeling as strongly as anyone else. One sees it in prison-books like Wilfred Macartney's WALLS HAVE MOUTHS or Jim Phelan's JAIL JOURNEY, in the solemn idiocies that take place at the trials of conscientious objectors, in letters to the papers from eminent Marxist professors, pointing out that this or that is a 'miscarriage of British justice'. Everyone believes in his heart that the law can be, ought to be, and, on the whole, will be impartially administered. The totalitarian idea that there is no such thing as law, there is only power, has never taken root. Even the intelligentsia have only accepted it in theory.

An illusion can become a half-truth, a mask can alter the expression of a face. The familiar arguments to the effect that

democracy is 'just the same as' or 'just as bad as' totalitarianism never take account of this fact. All such arguments boil down to saying that half a loaf is the same as no bread. In England such concepts as justice, liberty and objective truth are still believed in. They may be illusions, but they are very powerful illusions. The belief in them influences conduct, national life is different because of them. In proof of which, look about you. Where are the rubber truncheons, where is the castor oil? The sword is still in the scabbard, and while it stays there corruption cannot go beyond a certain point. The English electoral system, for instance, is an all but open fraud. In a dozen obvious ways it is gerrymandered in the interest of the moneyed class. But until some deep change has occurred in the public mind, it cannot become COMPLETELY corrupt. You do not arrive at the polling booth to find men with revolvers telling you which way to vote, nor are the votes miscounted, nor is there any direct bribery. Even hypocrisy is a powerful safeguard. The hanging judge, that evil old man in scarlet robe and horse-hair wig, whom nothing short of dynamite will ever teach what century he is living in, but who will at any rate interpret the law according to the books and will in no circumstances take a money bribe, is one of the symbolic figures of England. He is a symbol of the strange mixture of reality and illusion, democracy and privilege, humbug and decency, the subtle network of compromises, by which the nation keeps itself in its familiar shape.

iii.

I have spoken all the while of 'the nation', 'England', 'Britain', as though forty-five million souls could somehow be treated as a unit. But is not England notoriously two nations, the rich and the poor? Dare one pretend that there is anything in common between people with £100,000 a year and people with £1 a week? And even Welsh and Scottish readers are likely to have been offended because I have used the word 'England' oftener than 'Britain', as though the whole population dwelt in London and the Home Counties and neither north nor west possessed a culture of its own.

One gets a better view of this question if one considers the minor

point first. It is quite true that the so-called races of Britain feel themselves to be very different from one another. A Scotsman, for instance, does not thank you if you call him an Englishman. You can see the hesitation we feel on this point by the fact that we call our islands by no less than six different names, England, Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom and, in very exalted moments, Albion. Even the differences between north and south England loom large in our own eyes. But somehow these differences fade away the moment that any two Britons are confronted by a European. It is very rare to meet a foreigner, other than an American, who can distinguish between English and Scots or even English and Irish. To a Frenchman, the Breton and the Auvergnat seem very different beings, and the accent of Marseilles is a stock joke in Paris. Yet we speak of 'France' and 'the French', recognizing France as an entity, a single civilization, which in fact it is. So also with ourselves. Looked at from the outsider even the cockney and the Yorkshireman have a strong family resemblance.

And even the distinction between rich and poor dwindles somewhat when one regards the nation from the outside. There is no question about the inequality of wealth in England. It is grosser than in any European country, and you have only to look down the nearest street to see it. Economically, England is certainly two nations, if not three or four. But at the same time the vast majority of the people FEEL themselves to be a single nation and are conscious of resembling one another more than they resemble foreigners. Patriotism is usually stronger than class-hatred, and always stronger than any kind of internationalism. Except for a brief moment in 1920 (the 'Hands off Russia' movement) the British working class have never thought or acted internationally. For two and a half years they watched their comrades in Spain slowly strangled, and never aided them by even a single strike [Note, below]. But when their own country (the country of Lord Nuffield and Mr Montagu Norman) was in danger, their attitude was very different. At the moment when it seemed likely that England might be invaded, Anthony Eden appealed over the radio for Local Defence Volunteers. He got a quarter of a million men in the first twenty-four hours, and another million in the subsequent month. One has only to compare these

figures with, for instance, the number of conscientious objectors to see how vast is the strength of traditional loyalties compared with new ones.

[Note: It is true that they aided them to a certain extent with money. Still, the sums raised for the various aid-Spain funds would not equal five per cent of the turnover of the football pools during the same period. (Author's footnote.)]

In England patriotism takes different forms in different classes, but it runs like a connecting thread through nearly all of them. Only the Europeanized intelligentsia are really immune to it. As a positive emotion it is stronger in the middle class than in the upper class–the cheap public schools, for instance, are more given to patriotic demonstrations than the expensive ones–but the number of definitely treacherous rich men, the Laval-Quisling type, is probably very small. In the working class patriotism is profound, but it is unconscious. The working man's heart does not leap when he sees a Union Jack. But the famous 'insularity' and 'xenophobia' of the English is far stronger in the working class than in the bourgeoisie. In all countries the poor are more national than the rich, but the English working class are outstanding in their abhorrence of foreign habits. Even when they are obliged to live abroad for years they refuse either to accustom themselves to foreign food or to learn foreign languages. Nearly every Englishman of working-class origin considers it effeminate to pronounce a foreign word correctly. During the war of 1914-18 the English working class were in contact with foreigners to an extent that is rarely possible. The sole result was that they brought back a hatred of all Europeans, except the Germans, whose courage they admired. In four years on French soil they did not even acquire a liking for wine. The insularity of the English, their refusal to take foreigners seriously, is a folly that has to be paid for very heavily from time to time. But it plays its part in the English mystique, and the intellectuals who have tried to break it down have generally done more harm than good. At bottom it is the same quality in the English character that repels the tourist and keeps out the invader.

Here one comes back to two English characteristics that I pointed out, seemingly at random, at the beginning of the last chapter. One is

the lack of artistic ability. This is perhaps another way of saying that the English are outside the European culture. For there is one art in which they have shown plenty of talent, namely literature. But this is also the only art that cannot cross frontiers. Literature, especially poetry, and lyric poetry most of all, is a kind of family joke, with little or no value outside its own language-group. Except for Shakespeare, the best English poets are barely known in Europe, even as names. The only poets who are widely read are Byron, who is admired for the wrong reasons, and Oscar Wilde, who is pitied as a victim of English hypocrisy. And linked up with this, though not very obviously, is the lack of philosophical faculty, the absence in nearly all Englishmen of any need for an ordered system of thought or even for the use of logic.

Up to a point, the sense of national unity is a substitute for a 'world-view'. Just because patriotism is all but universal and not even the rich are uninfluenced by it, there can be moments when the whole nation suddenly swings together and does the same thing, like a herd of cattle facing a wolf. There was such a moment, unmistakably, at the time of the disaster in France. After eight months of vaguely wondering what the war was about, the people suddenly knew what they had got to do: first, to get the army away from Dunkirk, and secondly to prevent invasion. It was like the awakening of a giant. Quick! Danger! The Philistines be upon thee, Samson! And then the swift unanimous action–and, then, alas, the prompt relapse into sleep. In a divided nation that would have been exactly the moment for a big peace movement to arise. But does this mean that the instinct of the English will always tell them to do the right thing? Not at all, merely that it will tell them to do the same thing. In the 1931 General Election, for instance, we all did the wrong thing in perfect unison. We were as single-minded as the Gadarene swine. But I honestly doubt whether we can say that we were shoved down the slope against our will.

It follows that British democracy is less of a fraud than it sometimes appears. A foreign observer sees only the huge inequality of wealth, the unfair electoral system, the governing-class control over the press, the radio and education, and concludes that democracy is simply a polite name for dictatorship. But this ignores

the considerable agreement that does unfortunately exist between the leaders and the led. However much one may hate to admit it, it is almost certain that between 1931 and 1940 the National Government represented the will of the mass of the people. It tolerated slums, unemployment and a cowardly foreign policy. Yes, but so did public opinion. It was a stagnant period, and its natural leaders were mediocrities.

In spite of the campaigns of a few thousand left-wingers, it is fairly certain that the bulk of the English people were behind Chamberlain's foreign policy. More, it is fairly certain that the same struggle was going on in Chamberlain's mind as in the minds of ordinary people. His opponents professed to see in him a dark and wily schemer, plotting to sell England to Hitler, but it is far likelier that he was merely a stupid old man doing his best according to his very dim lights. It is difficult otherwise to explain the contradictions of his policy, his failure to grasp any of the courses that were open to him. Like the mass of the people, he did not want to pay the price either of peace or of war. And public opinion was behind him all the while, in policies that were completely incompatible with one another. It was behind him when he went to Munich, when he tried to come to an understanding with Russia, when he gave the guarantee to Poland, when he honoured it, and when he prosecuted the war half-heartedly. Only when the results of his policy became apparent did it turn against him; which is to say that it turned against its own lethargy of the past seven years. Thereupon the people picked a leader nearer to their mood, Churchill, who was at any rate able to grasp that wars are not won without fighting. Later, perhaps, they will pick another leader who can grasp that only Socialist nations can fight effectively.

Do I mean by all this that England is a genuine democracy? No, not even a reader of the DAILY TELEGRAPH could quite swallow that.

England is the most class-ridden country under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly. But in any calculation about it one has got to take into account its emotional unity, the tendency of nearly all its inhabitants to feel alike and act together in moments of supreme crisis. It is the only great country in

Europe that is not obliged to drive hundreds of thousands of its nationals into exile or the concentration camp. At this moment, after a year of war, newspapers and pamphlets abusing the Government, praising the enemy and clamouring for surrender are being sold on the streets, almost without interference. And this is less from a respect for freedom of speech than from a simple perception that these things don't matter. It is safe to let a paper like PEACE NEWS be sold, because it is certain that ninety-five per cent of the population will never want to read it. The nation is bound together by an invisible chain. At any normal time the ruling class will rob, mismanage, sabotage, lead us into the muck; but let popular opinion really make itself heard, let them get a tug from below that they cannot avoid feeling, and it is difficult for them not to respond. The left-wing writers who denounce the whole of the ruling class as 'pro-Fascist' are grossly over-simplifying. Even among the inner clique of politicians who brought us to our present pass, it is doubtful whether there were any CONSCIOUS traitors. The corruption that happens in England is seldom of that kind. Nearly always it is more in the nature of self-deception, of the right hand not knowing what the left hand doeth. And being unconscious, it is limited. One sees this at its most obvious in the English press. Is the English press honest or dishonest? At normal times it is deeply dishonest. All the papers that matter live off their advertisements, and the advertisers exercise an indirect censorship over news. Yet I do not suppose there is one paper in England that can be straightforwardly bribed with hard cash. In the France of the Third Republic all but a very few of the newspapers could notoriously be bought over the counter like so many pounds of cheese. Public life in England has never been OPENLY scandalous. It has not reached the pitch of disintegration at which humbug can be dropped.

England is not the jewelled isle of Shakespeare's much-quoted message, nor is it the inferno depicted by Dr Goebbels. More than either it resembles a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which

the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control–that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase.

iv.

Probably the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton, but the opening battles of all subsequent wars have been lost there. One of the dominant facts in English life during the past three quarters of a century has been the decay of ability in the ruling class.

In the years between 1920 and 1940 it was happening with the speed of a chemical reaction. Yet at the moment of writing it is still possible to speak of a ruling class. Like the knife which has had two new blades and three new handles, the upper fringe of English society is still almost what it was in the mid nineteenth century. After 1832 the old land-owning aristocracy steadily lost power, but instead of disappearing or becoming a fossil they simply intermarried with the merchants, manufacturers and financiers who had replaced them, and soon turned them into accurate copies of themselves. The wealthy ship owner or cotton-miller set up for himself an alibi as a country gentleman, while his sons learned the right mannerisms at public schools which had been designed for just that purpose. England was ruled by an aristocracy constantly recruited from parvenus. And considering what energy the self-made men possessed, and considering that they were buying their way into a class which at any rate had a tradition of public service, one might have expected that able rulers could be produced in some such way.

And yet somehow the ruling class decayed, lost its ability, its daring, finally even its ruthlessness, until a time came when stuffed shirts like Eden or Halifax could stand out as men of exceptional talent. As for Baldwin, one could not even dignify him with the name of stuffed shirt. He was simply a hole in the air. The mishandling of England's domestic problems during the nineteen-twenties had been bad enough, but British foreign policy between 1931 and 1939 is one

of the wonders of the world. Why? What had happened? What was it that at every decisive moment made every British statesman do the wrong thing with so unerring an instinct?

The underlying fact was that the whole position of the moneyed class had long ceased to be justifiable. There they sat, at the centre of a vast empire and a world-wide financial network, drawing interest and profits and spending them–on what? It was fair to say that life within the British Empire was in many ways better than life outside it. Still, the Empire was underdeveloped, India slept in the Middle Ages, the Dominions lay empty, with foreigners jealously barred out, and even England was full of slums and unemployment. Only half a million people, the people in the country houses, definitely benefited from the existing system. Moreover, the tendency of small businesses to merge together into large ones robbed more and more of the moneyed class of their function and turned them into mere owners, their work being done for them by salaried managers and technicians. For long past there had been in England an entirely functionless class, living on money that was invested they hardly knew where, the 'idle rich', the people whose photographs you can look at in the TATLER and the BYSTANDER, always supposing that you want to. The existence of these people was by any standard unjustifiable. They were simply parasites, less useful to society than his fleas are to a dog.

By 1920 there were many people who were aware of all this. By 1930 millions were aware of it. But the British ruling class obviously could not admit to themselves that their usefulness was at an end. Had they done that they would have had to abdicate. For it was not possible for them to turn themselves into mere bandits, like the American millionaires, consciously clinging to unjust privileges and beating down opposition by bribery and tear-gas bombs. After all, they belonged to a class with a certain tradition, they had been to public schools where the duty of dying for your country, if necessary, is laid down as the first and greatest of the Commandments. They had to FEEL themselves true patriots, even while they plundered their countrymen. Clearly there was only one escape for them–into stupidity. They could keep society in its existing shape only by being UNABLE to grasp that any improvement was possible. Difficult

though this was, they achieved it, largely by fixing their eyes on the past and refusing to notice the changes that were going on round them.

There is much in England that this explains. It explains the decay of country life, due to the keeping-up of a sham feudalism which drives the more spirited workers off the land. It explains the immobility of the public schools, which have barely altered since the eighties of the last century. It explains the military incompetence which has again and again startled the world. Since the fifties every war in which England has engaged has started off with a series of disasters, after which the situation has been saved by people comparatively low in the social scale. The higher commanders, drawn from the aristocracy, could never prepare for modern war, because in order to do so they would have had to admit to themselves that the world was changing. They have always clung to obsolete methods and weapons, because they inevitably saw each war as a repetition of the last. Before the Boer War they prepared for the Zulu War, before the 1914 for the Boer War, and before the present war for 1914. Even at this moment hundreds of thousands of men in England are being trained with the bayonet, a weapon entirely useless except for opening tins. It is worth noticing that the navy and, latterly, the air force, have always been more efficient than the regular army. But the navy is only partially, and the air force hardly at all, within the ruling-class orbit.

It must be admitted that so long as things were peaceful the methods of the British ruling class served them well enough. Their own people manifestly tolerated them. However unjustly England might be organized, it was at any rate not torn by class warfare or haunted by secret police. The Empire was peaceful as no area of comparable size has ever been. Throughout its vast extent, nearly a quarter of the earth, there were fewer armed men than would be found necessary by a minor Balkan state. As people to live under, and looking at them merely from a liberal, NEGATIVE standpoint, the British ruling class had their points. They were preferable to the truly modern men, the Nazis and Fascists. But it had long been obvious that they would be helpless against any serious attack from the outside.

They could not struggle against Nazism or Fascism, because they could not understand them. Neither could they have struggled against Communism, if Communism had been a serious force in western Europe. To understand Fascism they would have had to study the theory of Socialism, which would have forced them to realize that the economic system by which they lived was unjust, inefficient and out-of-date. But it was exactly this fact that they had trained themselves never to face. They dealt with Fascism as the cavalry generals of 1914 dealt with the machine-guns–by ignoring it. After years of aggression and massacres, they had grasped only one fact, that Hitler and Mussolini were hostile to Communism. Therefore, it was argued, they MUST be friendly to the British dividend-drawer. Hence the truly frightening spectacle of Conservative M.P.s wildly cheering the news that British ships, bringing food to the Spanish Republican government, had been bombed by Italian aeroplanes. Even when they had begun to grasp that Fascism was dangerous, its essentially revolutionary nature, the huge military effort it was capable of making, the sort of tactics it would use, were quite beyond their comprehension. At the time of the Spanish Civil War, anyone with as much political knowledge as can be acquired from a sixpenny pamphlet on Socialism knew that, if Franco won, the result would be strategically disastrous for England; and yet generals and admirals who had given their lives to the study of war were unable to grasp this fact. This vein of political ignorance runs right through English official life, through Cabinet ministers, ambassadors, consuls, judges, magistrates, policemen. The policeman who arrests the ‘red’ does not understand the theories the ‘red’ is preaching; if he did his own position as bodyguard of the moneyed class might seem less pleasant to him. There is reason to think that even military espionage is hopelessly hampered by ignorance of the new economic doctrines and the ramifications of the underground parties.

The British ruling class were not altogether wrong in thinking that Fascism was on their side. It is a fact that any rich man, unless he is a Jew, has less to fear from Fascism than from either Communism or democratic Socialism. One ought never to forget this, for nearly the whole of German and Italian propaganda is designed to cover it up. The natural instinct of men like Simon, Hoare, Chamberlain etc. was

to come to an agreement with Hitler. But–and here the peculiar feature of English life that I have spoken of, the deep sense of national solidarity, comes in–they could only do so by breaking up the Empire and selling their own people into semi-slavery. A truly corrupt class would have done this without hesitation, as in France. But things had not gone that distance in England. Politicians who would make cringing speeches about 'the duty of loyalty to our conquerors' are hardly to be found in English public life. Tossed to and fro between their incomes and their principles, it was impossible that men like Chamberlain should do anything but make the worst of both worlds.

One thing that has always shown that the English ruling class are MORALLY fairly sound, is that in time of war they are ready enough to get themselves killed. Several dukes, earls and what nots were killed in the recent campaign in Flanders. That could not happen if these people were the cynical scoundrels that they are sometimes declared to be. It is important not to misunderstand their motives, or one cannot predict their actions. What is to be expected of them is not treachery, or physical cowardice, but stupidity, unconscious sabotage, an infallible instinct for doing the wrong thing. They are not wicked, or not altogether wicked; they are merely unteachable. Only when their money and power are gone will the younger among them begin to grasp what century they are living in.

v.

The stagnation of the Empire in the between-war years affected everyone in England, but it had an especially direct effect upon two important sub-sections of the middle class. One was the military and imperialist middle class, generally nicknamed the Blimps, and the other the left-wing intelligentsia. These two seemingly hostile types, symbolic opposites–the half-pay colonel with his bull neck and diminutive brain, like a dinosaur, the highbrow with his domed forehead and stalk-like neck–are mentally linked together and constantly interact upon one another; in any case they are born to a considerable extent into the same families.

Thirty years ago the Blimp class was already losing its vitality.

The middle-class families celebrated by Kipling, the prolific lowbrow families whose sons officered the army and navy and swarmed over all the waste places of the earth from the Yukon to the Irrawaddy, were dwindling before 1914. The thing that had killed them was the telegraph. In a narrowing world, more and more governed from Whitehall, there was every year less room for individual initiative. Men like Clive, Nelson, Nicholson, Gordon would find no place for themselves in the modern British Empire. By 1920 nearly every inch of the colonial empire was in the grip of Whitehall. Well-meaning, over-civilized men, in dark suits and black felt hats, with neatly rolled umbrellas crooked over the left forearm, were imposing their constipated view of life on Malaya and Nigeria, Mombasa and Mandalay. The one-time empire builders were reduced to the status of clerks, buried deeper and deeper under mounds of paper and red tape. In the early twenties one could see, all over the Empire, the older officials, who had known more spacious days, writhing impotently under the changes that were happening. From that time onwards it has been next door to impossible to induce young men of spirit to take any part in imperial administration. And what was true of the official world was true also of the commercial. The great monopoly companies swallowed up hosts of petty traders. Instead of going out to trade adventurously in the Indies one went to an office stool in Bombay or Singapore. And life in Bombay or Singapore was actually duller and safer than life in London. Imperialist sentiment remained strong in the middle class, chiefly owing to family tradition, but the job of administering the Empire had ceased to appeal. Few able men went east of Suez if there was any way of avoiding it.

But the general weakening of imperialism, and to some extent of the whole British morale, that took place during the nineteen-thirties, was partly the work of the left-wing intelligentsia, itself a kind of growth that had sprouted from the stagnation of the Empire.

It should be noted that there is now no intelligentsia that is not in some sense ‘left’. Perhaps the last right-wing intellectual was T. E. Lawrence. Since about 1930 everyone describable as an ‘intellectual’ has lived in a state of chronic discontent with the existing order. Necessarily so, because society as it was constituted had no room for

him. In an Empire that was simply stagnant, neither being developed nor falling to pieces, and in an England ruled by people whose chief asset was their stupidity, to be 'clever' was to be suspect. If you had the kind of brain that could understand the poems of T. S. Eliot or the theories of Karl Marx, the higher-ups would see to it that you were kept out of any important job. The intellectuals could find a function for themselves only in the literary reviews and the left-wing political parties.

The mentality of the English left-wing intelligentsia can be studied in half a dozen weekly and monthly papers. The immediately striking thing about all these papers is their generally negative, querulous attitude, their complete lack at all times of any constructive suggestion. There is little in them except the irresponsible carping of people who have never been and never expect to be in a position of power. Another marked characteristic is the emotional shallowness of people who live in a world of ideas and have little contact with physical reality. Many intellectuals of the Left were flabbily pacifist up to 1935, shrieked for war against Germany in the years 1935-9, and then promptly cooled off when the war started. It is broadly though not precisely true that the people who were most 'anti-Fascist' during the Spanish Civil War are most defeatist now. And underlying this is the really important fact about so many of the English intelligentsia–their severance from the common culture of the country.

In intention, at any rate, the English intelligentsia are Europeanized. They take their cookery from Paris and their opinions from Moscow. In the general patriotism of the country they form a sort of island of dissident thought. England is perhaps the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their own nationality. In left-wing circles it is always felt that there is something slightly disgraceful in being an Englishman and that it is a duty to snigger at every English institution, from horse racing to suet puddings. It is a strange fact, but it is unquestionably true that almost any English intellectual would feel more ashamed of standing to attention during 'God save the King' than of stealing from a poor box. All through the critical years many left-wingers were chipping away at English morale, trying to spread an outlook that was sometimes squashily

pacifist, sometimes violently pro-Russian, but always anti-British. It is questionable how much effect this had, but it certainly had some. If the English people suffered for several years a real weakening of morale, so that the Fascist nations judged that they were 'decadent' and that it was safe to plunge into war, the intellectual sabotage from the Left was partly responsible. Both the NEW STATESMAN and the NEWS CHRONICLE cried out against the Munich settlement, but even they had done something to make it possible. Ten years of systematic Blimp-baiting affected even the Blimps themselves and made it harder than it had been before to get intelligent young men to enter the armed forces. Given the stagnation of the Empire, the military middle class must have decayed in any case, but the spread of a shallow Leftism hastened the process.

It is clear that the special position of the English intellectuals during the past ten years, as purely NEGATIVE creatures, mere anti-Blimps, was a by-product of ruling-class stupidity. Society could not use them, and they had not got it in them to see that devotion to one's country implies 'for better, for worse'. Both Blimps and highbrows took for granted, as though it were a law of nature, the divorce between patriotism and intelligence. If you were a patriot you read BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE and publicly thanked God that you were 'not brainy'. If you were an intellectual you sniggered at the Union Jack and regarded physical courage as barbarous. It is obvious that this preposterous convention cannot continue. The Bloomsbury highbrow, with his mechanical snigger, is as out-of-date as the cavalry colonel. A modern nation cannot afford either of them. Patriotism and intelligence will have to come together again. It is the fact that we are fighting a war, and a very peculiar kind of war, that may make this possible.

vi.

One of the most important developments in England during the past twenty years has been the upward and downward extension of the middle class. It has happened on such a scale as to make the old classification of society into capitalists, proletarians and petit bourgeois (small property-owners) almost obsolete.

England is a country in which property and financial power are concentrated in very few hands. Few people in modern England OWN anything at all, except clothes, furniture and possibly a house. The peasantry have long since disappeared, the independent shopkeeper is being destroyed, the small businessman is diminishing in numbers. But at the same time modern industry is so complicated that it cannot get along without great numbers of managers, salesmen, engineers, chemists and technicians of all kinds, drawing fairly large salaries. And these in turn call into being a professional class of doctors, lawyers, teachers, artists, etc. etc. The tendency of advanced capitalism has therefore been to enlarge the middle class and not to wipe it out as it once seemed likely to do.

But much more important than this is the spread of middle-class ideas and habits among the working class. The British working class are now better off in almost all ways than they were thirty years ago. This is partly due to the efforts of the trade unions, but partly to the mere advance of physical science. It is not always realized that within rather narrow limits the standard of life of a country can rise without a corresponding rise in real wages. Up to a point, civilization can lift itself up by its boot-tags. However unjustly society is organized, certain technical advances are bound to benefit the whole community, because certain kinds of goods are necessarily held in common. A millionaire cannot, for example, light the streets for himself while darkening them for other people. Nearly all citizens of civilized countries now enjoy the use of good roads, germ-free water, police protection, free libraries and probably free education of a kind. Public education in England has been meanly starved of money, but it has nevertheless improved, largely owing to the devoted efforts of the teachers, and the habit of reading has become enormously more widespread. To an increasing extent the rich and the poor read the same books, and they also see the same films and listen to the same radio programmes. And the differences in their way of life have been diminished by the mass-production of cheap clothes and improvements in housing. So far as outward appearance goes, the clothes of rich and poor, especially in the case of women, differ far less than they did thirty or even fifteen years ago. As to housing, England still has slums which are a blot on civilization, but much

building has been done during the past ten years, largely by the local authorities. The modern council house, with its bathroom and electric light, is smaller than the stockbroker's villa, but it is recognizably the same kind of house, which the farm labourer's cottage is not. A person who has grown up in a council housing estate is likely to be–indeed, visibly is–more middle class in outlook than a person who has grown up in a slum.

The effect of all this is a general softening of manners. It is enhanced by the fact that modern industrial methods tend always to demand less muscular effort and therefore to leave people with more energy when their day's work is done. Many workers in the light industries are less truly manual labourers than is a doctor or a grocer. In tastes, habits, manners and outlook the working class and the middle class are drawing together. The unjust distinctions remain, but the real differences diminish. The old-style 'proletarian'–collarless, unshaven and with muscles warped by heavy labour–still exists, but he is constantly decreasing in numbers; he only predominates in the heavy-industry areas of the north of England.

After 1918 there began to appear something that had never existed in England before: people of indeterminate social class. In 1910 every human being in these islands could be 'placed' in an instant by his clothes, manners and accent. That is no longer the case. Above all, it is not the case in the new townships that have developed as a result of cheap motor cars and the southward shift of industry. The place to look for the germs of the future England is in light-industry areas and along the arterial roads. In Slough, Dagenham, Barnet, Letchworth, Hayes–everywhere, indeed, on the outskirts of great towns–the old pattern is gradually changing into something new. In those vast new wildernesses of glass and brick the sharp distinctions of the older kind of town, with its slums and mansions, or of the country, with its manor-houses and squalid cottages, no longer exist. There are wide gradations of income, but it is the same kind of life that is being lived at different levels, in labour-saving flats or council houses, along the concrete roads and in the naked democracy of the swimming-pools. It is a rather restless, cultureless life, centring round tinned food, PICTURE POST, the radio and the internal combustion engine. It is a civilization in which children grow up

with an intimate knowledge of magnetoes and in complete ignorance of the Bible. To that civilization belong the people who are most at home in and most definitely OF the modern world, the technicians and the higher-paid skilled workers, the airmen and their mechanics, the radio experts, film producers, popular journalists and industrial chemists. They are the indeterminate stratum at which the older class distinctions are beginning to break down.

This war, unless we are defeated, will wipe out most of the existing class privileges. There are every day fewer people who wish them to continue. Nor need we fear that as the pattern changes life in England will lose its peculiar flavour. The new red cities of Greater London are crude enough, but these things are only the rash that accompanies a change. In whatever shape England emerges from the war it will be deeply tinged with the characteristics that I have spoken of earlier. The intellectuals who hope to see it Russianized or Germanized will be disappointed. The gentleness, the hypocrisy, the thoughtlessness, the reverence for law and the hatred of uniforms will remain, along with the suet puddings and the misty skies. It needs some very great disaster, such as prolonged subjugation by a foreign enemy, to destroy a national culture. The Stock Exchange will be pulled down, the horse plough will give way to the tractor, the country houses will be turned into children's holiday camps, the Eton and Harrow match will be forgotten, but England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same.

Part II
Shopkeepers at War

i.

I began this book to the tune of German bombs, and I begin this second chapter in the added racket of the barrage. The yellow gun flashes are lighting the sky, the splinters are rattling on the housetops, and London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down. Anyone able to read a map knows that we are in deadly danger. I do not mean that we are beaten or need be beaten. Almost

certainly the outcome depends on our own will. But at this moment we are in the soup, full fathom five, and we have been brought there by follies which we are still committing and which will drown us altogether if we do not mend our ways quickly.

What this war has demonstrated is that private capitalism that is, an economic system in which land, factories, mines and transport are owned privately and operated solely for profit–DOES NOT WORK. It cannot deliver the goods. This fact had been known to millions of people for years past, but nothing ever came of it, because there was no real urge from below to alter the system, and those at the top had trained themselves to be impenetrably stupid on just this point. Argument and propaganda got one nowhere. The lords of property simply sat on their bottoms and proclaimed that all was for the best. Hitler's conquest of Europe, however, was a PHYSICAL debunking of capitalism. War, for all its evil, is at any rate an unanswerable test of strength, like a try-your-grip machine. Great strength returns the penny, and there is no way of faking the result.

When the nautical screw was first invented, there was a controversy that lasted for years as to whether screw-steamers or paddle-steamers were better. The paddle-steamers, like all obsolete things, had their champions, who supported them by ingenious arguments. Finally, however, a distinguished admiral tied a screw-steamer and a paddle steamer of equal horse-power stern to stern and set their engines running. That settled the question once and for all. And it was something similar that happened on the fields of Norway and of Flanders. Once and for all it was proved that a planned economy is stronger than a planless one. But it is necessary here to give some kind of definition to those much-abused words, Socialism and Fascism.

Socialism is usually defined as "common ownership of the means of production". Crudely: the State, representing the whole nation, owns everything, and everyone is a State employee. This does NOT mean that people are stripped of private possessions such as clothes and furniture, but it DOES mean that all productive goods, such as land, mines, ships and machinery, are the property of the State. The State is the sole large-scale producer. It is not certain that Socialism is in all ways superior to capitalism, but it is certain that, unlike

capitalism, it can solve the problems of production and consumption. At normal times a capitalist economy can never consume all that it produces, so that there is always a wasted surplus (wheat burned in furnaces, herrings dumped back into the sea etc etc) and always unemployment. In time of war, on the other hand, it has difficulty in producing all that it needs, because nothing is produced unless someone sees his way to making a profit out of it. In a Socialist economy these problems do not exist. The State simply calculates what goods will be needed and does its best to produce them. Production is only limited by the amount of labour and raw materials. Money, for internal purposes, ceases to be a mysterious all-powerful thing and becomes a sort of coupon or ration-ticket, issued in sufficient quantities to buy up such consumption goods as may be available at the moment.

However, it has become clear in the last few years that "common ownership of the means of production" is not in itself a sufficient definition of Socialism. One must also add the following: approximate equality of incomes (it need be no more than approximate), political democracy, and abolition of all hereditary privilege, especially in education. These are simply the necessary safeguards against the reappearance of a class system. Centralised ownership has very little meaning unless the mass of the people are living roughly upon an equal level, and have some kind of control over the government. "The State" may come to mean no more than a self-elected political party, and oligarchy and privilege can return, based on power rather than on money.

But what then is Fascism?

Fascism, at any rate the German version, is a form of capitalism that borrows from Socialism just such features as will make it efficient for war purposes. Internally, Germany has a good deal in common with a Socialist state. Ownership has never been abolished, there are still capitalists and workers, and–this is the important point, and the real reason why rich men all over the world tend to sympathise with Fascism–generally speaking the same people are capitalists and the same people workers as before the Nazi revolution. But at the same time the State, which is simply the Nazi Party, is in control of everything. It controls investment, raw

materials, rates of interest, working hours, wages. The factory owner still owns his factory, but he is for practical purposes reduced to the status of a manager. Everyone is in effect a State employee, though the salaries vary very greatly. The mere EFFICIENCY of such a system, the elimination of waste and obstruction, is obvious. In seven years it has built up the most powerful war machine the world has ever seen.

But the idea underlying Fascism is irreconcilably different from that which underlies Socialism. Socialism aims, ultimately, at a world-state of free and equal human beings. It takes the equality of human rights for granted. Nazism assumes just the opposite. The driving force behind the Nazi movement is the belief in human INEQUALITY, the superiority of Germans to all other races, the right of Germany to rule the world. Outside the German Reich it does not recognise any obligations. Eminent Nazi professors have "proved" over and over again that only Nordic man is fully human, have even mooted the idea that non Nordic peoples (such as ourselves) can interbreed with gorillas! Therefore, while a species of war-Socialism exists within the German state, its attitude towards conquered nations is frankly that of an exploiter. The function of the Czechs, Poles, French, etc is simply to produce such goods as Germany may need, and get in return just as little as will keep them from open rebellion. If we are conquered, our job will probably be to manufacture weapons for Hitler's forthcoming wars with Russia and America. The Nazis aim, in effect, at setting up a kind of caste system, with four main castes corresponding rather closely to those of the Hindu religion. At the top comes the Nazi party, second come the mass of the German people, third come the conquered European populations. Fourth and last are to come the coloured peoples, the "semi-apes" as Hitler calls them, who are to be reduced quite openly to slavery.

However horrible this system may seem to us, IT WORKS. It works because it is a planned system geared to a definite purpose, world conquest, and not allowing any private interest, either of capitalist or worker, to stand in its way. British capitalism does not work, because it is a competitive system in which private profit is and must be the main objective. It is a system in which all the forces

are pulling in opposite directions and the interests of the individual are as often as not totally opposed to those of the State.

All through the critical years British capitalism, with its immense industrial plant and its unrivalled supply of skilled labour, was unequal to the strain of preparing for war. To prepare for war on the modern scale you have got to divert the greater part of your national income to armaments, which means cutting down on consumption goods. A bombing plane, for instance, is equivalent in price to fifty small motor cars, or eighty thousand pairs of silk stockings, or a million loaves of bread. Clearly you can't have MANY bombing planes without lowering the national standard of life. It is guns or butter, as Marshal Goering remarked. But in Chamberlain's England the transition could not be made. The rich would not face the necessary taxation, and while the rich are still visibly rich it is not possible to tax the poor very heavily either. Moreover, so long as PROFIT was the main object the manufacturer had no incentive to change over from consumption goods to armaments. A businessman's first duty is to his shareholders. Perhaps England needs tanks, but perhaps it pays better to manufacture motor cars. To prevent war material from reaching the enemy is common sense, but to sell in the highest market is a business duty. Right at the end of August 1939 the British dealers were tumbling over one another in their eagerness to sell Germany tin, rubber, copper and shellac-and this in the clear, certain knowledge that war was going to break out in a week or two. It was about as sensible as selling somebody a razor to cut your throat with. But it was "good business".

And now look at the results. After 1934 it was known that Germany was rearming. After 1936 everyone with eyes in his head knew that war was coming. After Munich it was merely a question of how soon the war would begin. In September 1939 war broke out. EIGHT MONTHS LATER it was discovered that, so far as equipment went, the British army was barely beyond the standard of 1918. We saw our soldiers fighting their way desperately to the coast, with one aeroplane against three, with rifles against tanks, with bayonets against tommy-guns. There were not even enough revolvers to supply all the officers. After a year of war the regular army was still short of 300,000 tin hats. There had even, previously, been a

shortage of uniforms–this in one of the greatest woollen-goods producing countries in the world!

What had happened was that the whole moneyed class, unwilling to face a change in their way of life, had shut their eyes to the nature of Fascism and modern war. And false optimism was fed to the general public by the gutter press, which lives on its advertisements and is therefore interested in keeping trade conditions normal. Year after year the Beaverbrook press assured us in huge headlines that THERE WILL BE NO WAR, and as late as the beginning of 1939 Lord Rothermere was describing Hitler as "a great gentleman". And while England in the moment of disaster proved to be short of every war material except ships, it is not recorded that there was any shortage of motor cars, fur coats, gramophones, lipstick, chocolates or silk stockings. And dare anyone pretend that the same tug-of-war between private profit and public necessity is not still continuing? England fights for her life, but business must fight for profits. You can hardly open a newspaper without seeing the two contradictory processes happening side by side. On the very same page you will find the Government urging you to save and the seller of some useless luxury urging you to spend. Lend to Defend, but Guinness is Good for You. Buy a Spitfire, but also buy Haig and Haig, Pond's Face Cream and Black Magic Chocolates.

But one thing gives hope–the visible swing in public opinion. If we can survive this war, the defeat in Flanders will turn out to have been one of the great turning-points in English history. In that spectacular disaster the working class, the middle class and even a section of the business community could see the utter rottenness of private capitalism. Before that the case against capitalism had never been PROVED. Russia, the only definitely Socialist country, was backward and far away. All criticism broke itself against the rat-trap faces of bankers and the brassy laughter of stockbrokers. Socialism? Ha! ha! ha! Where's the money to come from? Ha! ha! ha! The lords of property were firm in their seats, and they knew it. But after the French collapse there came something that could not be laughed away, something that neither chequebooks nor policemen were any use against-the bombing. Zweee–BOOM! What's that? Oh, only a bomb on the Stock Exchange. Zweee–BOOM! Another acre of

somebody's valuable slum-property gone west. Hitler will at any rate go down in history as the man who made the City of London laugh on the wrong side of its face. For the first time in their lives the comfortable were uncomfortable, the professional optimists had to admit that there was something wrong. It was a great step forward. From that time onwards the ghastly job of trying to convince artificially stupefied people that a planned economy might be better than a free-for-all in which the worst man wins-that job will never be quite so ghastly again.

ii.

The difference between Socialism and capitalism is not primarily a difference of technique. One cannot simply change from one system to the other as one might install a new piece of machinery in a factory, and then carry on as before, with the same people in positions of control. Obviously there is also needed a complete shift of power. New blood, new men, new ideas–in the true sense of the word, a revolution.

I have spoken earlier of the soundness and homogeneity of England, the patriotism that runs like a connecting thread through almost all classes. After Dunkirk anyone who had eyes in his head could see this. But it is absurd to pretend that the promise of that moment has been fulfilled. Almost certainly the mass of the people are now ready for the vast changes that are necessary; but those changes have not even begun to happen.

England is a family with the wrong members in control. Almost entirely we are governed by the rich, and by people who step into positions of command by right of birth. Few if any of these people are consciously treacherous, some of them are not even fools, but as a class they are quite incapable of leading us to victory. They could not do it, even if their material interests did not constantly trip them up. As I pointed out earlier, they have been artificially stupefied. Quite apart from anything else, the rule of money sees to it that we shall be governed largely by the old–that is, by people utterly unable to grasp what age they are living in or what enemy they are fighting. Nothing was more desolating at the beginning of this war than the

way in which the whole of the older generation conspired to pretend that it was the war of 1914-18 over again. All the old duds were back on the job, twenty years older, with the skull plainer in their faces. Ian Hay was cheering up the troops, Belloc was writing articles on strategy, Maurois doing broadcasts, Bairnsfather drawing cartoons. It was like a tea-party of ghosts. And that state of affairs has barely altered. The shock of disaster brought a few able men like Bevin to the front, but in general we are still commanded by people who managed to live through the years 1931-9 without even discovering that Hitler was dangerous. A generation of the unteachable is hanging upon us like a necklace of corpses.

As soon as one considers any problem of this war–and it does not matter whether it is the widest aspect of strategy or the tiniest detail of home organisation–one sees that the necessary moves cannot be made while the social structure of England remains what it is. Inevitably, because of their position and upbringing, the ruling class are fighting for their own privileges, which cannot possibly be reconciled with the public interest. It is a mistake to imagine that war aims, strategy, propaganda and industrial organisation exist in watertight compartments. All are interconnected. Every strategic plan, every tactical method, even every weapon will bear the stamp of the social system that produced it. The British ruling class are fighting against Hitler, whom they have always regarded and whom some of them still regard as their protector against Bolshevism. That does not mean that they will deliberately sell out; but it does mean that at every decisive moment they are likely to falter, pull their punches, do the wrong thing.

Until the Churchill Government called some sort of halt to the process, they have done the wrong thing with an unerring instinct ever since 1931. They helped Franco to overthrow the Spanish Government, although anyone not an imbecile could have told them that a Fascist Spain would be hostile to England. They fed Italy with war materials all through the winter of 1939-40, although it was obvious to the whole world that the Italians were going to attack us in the spring. For the sake of a few hundred thousand dividend drawers they are turning India from an ally into an enemy. Moreover, so long as the moneyed classes remain in control, we cannot develop

any but a DEFENSIVE strategy. Every victory means a change in the STATUS QUO. How can we drive the Italians out of Abyssinia without rousing echoes among the coloured peoples of our own Empire? How can we even smash Hitler without the risk of bringing the German Socialists and Communists into power? The left-wingers who wail that "this is a capitalist war" and that "British Imperialism" is fighting for loot have got their heads screwed on backwards. The last thing the British moneyed class wish for is to acquire fresh territory. It would simply be an embarrassment. Their war aim (both unattainable and unmentionable) is simply to hang on to what they have got.

Internally, England is still the rich man's Paradise. All talk of "equality of sacrifice" is nonsense. At the same time as factory workers are asked to put up with longer hours, advertisements for "Butler. One in family, eight in staff" are appearing in the press. The bombed-out populations of the East End go hungry and homeless while wealthier victims simply step into their cars and flee to comfortable country houses. The Home Guard swells to a million men in a few weeks, and is deliberately organised from above in such a way that only people with private incomes can hold positions of command. Even the rationing system is so arranged that it hits the poor all the time, while people with over £2,000 a year are practically unaffected by it. Everywhere privilege is squandering good will. In such circumstances even propaganda becomes almost impossible. As attempts to stir up patriotic feeling, the red posters issued by the Chamberlain Government at the beginning of the war broke all depth-records. Yet they could not have been much other than they were, for how could Chamberlain and his followers take the risk of rousing strong popular feeling AGAINST FASCISM? Anyone who was genuinely hostile to Fascism must also be opposed to Chamberlain himself and to all the others who had helped Hitler into power. So also with external propaganda. In all Lord Halifax's speeches there is not one concrete proposal for which a single inhabitant of Europe would risk the top joint of his little finger. For what war-aim can Halifax, or anyone like him, conceivably have, except to put the clock back to 1933?

It is only by revolution that the native genius of the English

people can be set free. Revolution does not mean red flags and street fighting, it means a fundamental shift of power. Whether it happens with or without bloodshed is largely an accident of time and place. Nor does it mean the dictatorship of a single class. The people in England who grasp what changes are needed and are capable of carrying them through are not confined to any one class, though it is true that very few people with over £2,000 a year are among them. What is wanted is a conscious open revolt by ordinary people against inefficiency, class privilege and the rule of the old. It is not primarily a question of change of government. British governments do, broadly speaking, represent the will of the people, and if we alter our structure from below we shall get the government we need. Ambassadors, generals, officials and colonial administrators who are senile or pro-Fascist are more dangerous than Cabinet ministers whose follies have to be committed in public. Right through our national life we have got to fight against privilege, against the notion that a half-witted public-schoolboy is better fitted for command than an intelligent mechanic. Although there are gifted and honest INDIVIDUALS among them, we have got to break the grip of the moneyed class as a whole. England has got to assume its real shape. The England that is only just beneath the surface, in the factories and the newspaper offices, in the aeroplanes and the submarines, has got to take charge of its own destiny.

In the short run, equality of sacrifice, "war-Communism", is even more important than radical economic changes. It is very necessary that industry should be nationalised, but it is more urgently necessary that such monstrosities as butlers and "private incomes" should disappear forthwith. Almost certainly the main reason why the Spanish Republic could keep up the fight for two and a half years against impossible odds was that there were no gross contrasts of wealth. The people suffered horribly, but they all suffered alike. When the private soldier had not a cigarette, the general had not one either. Given equality of sacrifice, the morale of a country like England would probably be unbreakable. But at present we have nothing to appeal to except traditional patriotism, which is deeper here than elsewhere, but is not necessarily bottomless. At some point or another you have got to deal with the man who says "I should be

no worse off under Hitler". But what answer can you give him–that is, what answer that you can expect him to listen to–while common soldiers risk their lives for two and sixpence a day, and fat women ride about in Rolls-Royce cars, nursing pekineses?

It is quite likely that this war will last three years. It will mean cruel overwork, cold dull winters, uninteresting food, lack of amusements, prolonged bombing. It cannot but lower the general standard of living, because the essential act of war is to manufacture armaments instead of consumable goods. The working class will have to suffer terrible things. And they WILL suffer them, almost indefinitely, provided that they know what they are fighting for. They are not cowards, and they are not even internationally minded. They can stand all that the Spanish workers stood, and more. But they will want some kind of proof that a better life is ahead for themselves and their children. The one sure earnest of that is that when they are taxed and overworked they shall see that the rich are being hit even harder. And if the rich squeal audibly, so much the better.

We can bring these things about, if we really want to. It is not true that public opinion has no power in England. It never makes itself heard without achieving something; it has been responsible for most of the changes for the better during the past six months. But we have moved with glacier-like slowness, and we have learned only from disasters. It took the fall of Paris to get rid of Chamberlain and the unnecessary suffering of scores of thousands of people in the East End to get rid or partially rid of Sir John Anderson. It is not worth losing a battle in order to bury a corpse. For we are fighting against swift evil intelligences, and time presses, and:

history to the defeated May say Alas! but cannot alter or pardon.

iii.

During the last six months there has been much talk of "the Fifth Column". From time to time obscure lunatics have been jailed for making speeches in favour of Hitler, and large numbers of German refugees have been interned, a thing which has almost certainly done us great harm in Europe. It is of course obvious that the idea of a large, organised army of Fifth Columnists suddenly appearing on the

streets with weapons in their hands, as in Holland and Belgium, is ridiculous. Nevertheless a Fifth Column danger does exist. One can only consider it if one also considers in what way England might be defeated.

It does not seem probable that air bombing can settle a major war. England might well be invaded and conquered, but the invasion would be a dangerous gamble, and if it happened and failed it would probably leave us more united and less Blimp-ridden than before. Moreover, if England were overrun by foreign troops the English people would know that they had been beaten and would continue the struggle. It is doubtful whether they could be held down permanently, or whether Hitler wishes to keep an army of a million men stationed in these islands. A government of —,— and — (you can fill in the names) would suit him better. The English can probably not be bullied into surrender, but they might quite easily be bored, cajoled or cheated into it, provided that, as at Munich, they did not know that they were surrendering. It could happen most easily when the war seemed to be going well rather than badly. The threatening tone of so much of the German and Italian propaganda is a psychological mistake. It only gets home on intellectuals. With the general public the proper approach would be "Let's call it a draw". It is when a peace-offer along THOSE lines is made that the pro-Fascists will raise their voices.

But who are the pro-Fascists? The idea of a Hitler victory appeals to the very rich, to the Communists, to Mosley's followers, to the pacifists, and to certain sections among the Catholics. Also, if things went badly enough on the Home Front, the whole of the poorer section of the working class might swing round to a position that was defeatist though not actively pro-Hitler.

In this motley list one can see the daring of German propaganda, its willingness to offer everything to everybody. But the various pro-Fascist forces are not consciously acting together, and they operate in different ways.

The Communists must certainly be regarded as pro-Hitler, and are bound to remain so unless Russian policy changes, but they have not very much influence. Mosley's Blackshirts, though now lying very low, are a more serious danger, because of the footing they probably

possess in the armed forces. Still, even in its palmiest days Mosley's following can hardly have numbered 50,000. Pacifism is a psychological curiosity rather than a political movement. Some of the extremer pacifists, starting out with a complete renunciation of violence, have ended by warmly championing Hitler and even toying with Antisemitism. This is interesting, but it is not important. "Pure" pacifism, which is a by-product of naval power, can only appeal to people in very sheltered positions. Moreover, being negative and irresponsible, it does not inspire much devotion. Of the membership of the Peace Pledge Union, less than 15 per cent even pay their annual subscriptions. None of these bodies of people, pacifists, Communists or Blackshirts, could bring a large scale stop-the-war movement into being by their own efforts. But they might help to make things very much easier for a treacherous government negotiating surrender. Like the French Communists, they might become the half-conscious agents of millionaires.

The real danger is from above. One ought not to pay any attention to Hitler's recent line of talk about being the friend of the poor man, the enemy of plutocracy, etc etc. Hitler's real self is in MEIN KAMPF, and in his actions. He has never persecuted the rich, except when they were Jews or when they tried actively to oppose him. He stands for a centralised economy which robs the capitalist of most of his power but leaves the structure of society much as before. The State controls industry, but there are still rich and poor, masters and men. Therefore, as against genuine Socialism, the moneyed class have always been on his side. This was crystal clear at the time of the Spanish civil war, and clear again at the time when France surrendered. Hitler's puppet government are not working men, but a gang of bankers, gaga generals and corrupt right wing politicians.

That kind of spectacular, CONSCIOUS treachery is less likely to succeed in England, indeed is far less likely even to be tried. Nevertheless, to many payers of supertax this war is simply an insane family squabble which ought to be stopped at all costs. One need not doubt that a "peace" movement is on foot somewhere in high places; probably a shadow Cabinet has already been formed. These people will get their chance not in the moment of defeat but in some stagnant period when boredom is reinforced by discontent. They will

not talk about surrender, only about peace; and doubtless they will persuade themselves, and perhaps other people, that they are acting for the best. An army of unemployed led by millionaires quoting the Sermon on the Mount–that is our danger. But it cannot arise when we have once introduced a reasonable degree of social justice. The lady in the Rolls-Royce car is more damaging to morale than a fleet of Goering's bombing planes.

PART III: THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

i.

The English revolution started several years ago, and it began to gather momentum when the troops came back from Dunkirk. Like all else in England, it happens in a sleepy, unwilling way, but it is happening. The war has speeded it up, but it has also increased, and desperately, the necessity for speed.

Progress and reaction are ceasing to have anything to do with party labels. If one wishes to name a particular moment, one can say that the old distinction between Right and Left broke down when PICTURE POST was first published. What are the politics of PICTURE POST? Or of CAVALCADE, or Priestley's broadcasts, or the leading articles in the EVENING STANDARD? None of the old classifications will fit them. They merely point to the existence of multitudes of unlabelled people who have grasped within the last year or two that something is wrong. But since a classless, ownerless society is generally spoken of as "Socialism", we can give that name to the society towards which we are now moving. The war and the revolution are inseparable. We cannot establish anything that a western nation would regard as Socialism without defeating Hitler; on the other hand we cannot defeat Hitler while we remain economically and socially in the nineteenth century. The past is fighting the future and we have two years, a year, possibly only a few months, to see to it that the future wins.

We cannot look to this or to any similar government to put through the necessary changes of its own accord. The initiative will have to come from below. That means that there will have to arise something that has never existed in England, a Socialist movement

that actually has the mass of the people behind it. But one must start by recognising why it is that English Socialism has failed.

In England there is only one Socialist party that has ever seriously mattered, the Labour Party. It has never been able to achieve any major change, because except in purely domestic matters it has never possessed a genuinely independent policy. It was and is primarily a party of the trade unions, devoted to raising wages and improving working conditions. This meant that all through the critical years it was directly interested in the prosperity of British capitalism. In particular it was interested in the maintenance of the British Empire, for the wealth of England was drawn largely from Asia and Africa. The standard of living of the trade union workers, whom the Labour Party represented, depended indirectly on the sweating of Indian coolies. At the same time the Labour Party was a Socialist party, using Socialist phraseology, thinking in terms of an old-fashioned anti-imperialism and more or less pledged to make restitution to the coloured races. It had to stand for the "independence" of India, just as it had to stand for disarmament and "progress" generally. Nevertheless everyone was aware that this was nonsense. In the age of the tank and the bombing plane, backward agricultural countries like India and the African colonies can no more be independent than can a cat or a dog. Had any Labour government come into office with a clear majority and then proceeded to grant India anything that could truly be called independence, India would simply have been absorbed by Japan, or divided between Japan and Russia.

To a Labour government in power, three imperial policies would have been open. One was to continue administering the Empire exactly as before, which meant dropping all pretensions to Socialism. Another was to set the subject peoples "free", which meant in practice handing them over to Japan, Italy and other predatory powers, and incidentally causing a catastrophic drop in the British standard of living. The third was to develop a POSITIVE imperial policy, and aim at transforming the Empire into a federation of Socialist states, like a looser and freer version of the Union of Soviet Republics. But the Labour Party's history and background made this impossible. It was a party of the trade unions, hopelessly parochial in outlook, with little interest in imperial affairs and no contacts among

the men who actually held the Empire together. It would have had to hand the administration of India and Africa and the whole job of imperial defence to men drawn from a different class and traditionally hostile to Socialism. Overshadowing everything was the doubt whether a Labour government which meant business could make itself obeyed. For all the size of its following, the Labour Party had no footing in the navy, little or none in the army or air force, none whatever in the Colonial Services, and not even a sure footing in the Home Civil Service. In England its position was strong but not unchallengeable, and outside England all the key points were in the hands of its enemies. Once in power, the same dilemma would always have faced it: carry out your promises, and risk revolt, or continue with the same policy as the Conservatives, and stop talking about Socialism. The Labour leaders never found a solution, and from 1935 onwards it was very doubtful whether they had any wish to take office. They had degenerated into a Permanent Opposition.

Outside the Labour Party there existed several extremist parties, of whom the Communists were the strongest. The Communists had considerable influence in the Labour Party in the years 1920-6 and 1935-9. Their chief importance, and that of the whole left wing of the Labour movement, was the part they played in alienating the middle classes from Socialism.

The history of the past seven years has made it perfectly clear that Communism has no chance in western Europe. The appeal of Fascism is enormously greater. In one country after another the Communists have been rooted out by their more up-to-date enemies, the Nazis. In the English-speaking countries they never had a serious footing. The creed they were spreading could appeal only to a rather rare type of person, found chiefly in the middle-class intelligentsia, the type who has ceased to love his own country but still feels the need of patriotism, and therefore develops patriotic sentiments towards Russia. By 1940, after working for twenty years and spending a great deal of money, the British Communists had barely 20,000 members, actually a smaller number than they had started out with in 1920. The other Marxist parties were of even less importance. They had not the Russian money and prestige behind them, and even more than the Communists they were tied to the nineteenth-century

doctrine of the class war. They continued year after year to preach this out-of-date gospel, and never drew any inference from the fact that it got them no followers.

Nor did any strong native Fascist movement grow up. Material conditions were not bad enough, and no leader who could be taken seriously was forthcoming. One would have had to look a long time to find a man more barren of ideas than Sir Oswald Mosley. He was as hollow as a jug. Even the elementary fact that Fascism must not offend national sentiment had escaped him. His entire movement was imitated slavishly from abroad, the uniform and the party programme from Italy and the salute from Germany, with the Jew baiting tacked on as an afterthought, Mosley having actually started his movement with Jews among his most prominent followers. A man of the stamp of Bottomley or Lloyd George could perhaps have brought a real British Fascist movement into existence. But such leaders only appear when the psychological need for them exists.

After twenty years of stagnation and unemployment, the entire English Socialist movement was unable to produce a version of Socialism which the mass of the people could even find desirable. The Labour Party stood for a timid reformism, the Marxists were looking at the modern world through nineteenth-century spectacles. Both ignored agriculture and imperial problems, and both antagonised the middle classes. The suffocating stupidity of left-wing propaganda had frightened away whole classes of necessary people, factory managers, airmen, naval officers, farmers, white-collar workers, shopkeepers, policemen. All of these people had been taught to think of Socialism as something which menaced their livelihood, or as something seditious, alien, "anti-British" as they would have called it. Only the intellectuals, the least useful section of the middle class, gravitated towards the movement.

A Socialist Party which genuinely wished to achieve anything would have started by facing several facts which to this day are considered unmentionable in left-wing circles. It would have recognised that England is more united than most countries, that the British workers have a great deal to lose besides their chains, and that the differences in outlook and habits between class and class are rapidly diminishing. In general, it would have recognised that the

old-fashioned "proletarian revolution" is an impossibility. But all through the between-war years no Socialist programme that was both revolutionary and workable ever appeared; basically, no doubt, because no one genuinely wanted any major change to happen. The Labour leaders wanted to go on and on, drawing their salaries and periodically swapping jobs with the Conservatives. The Communists wanted to go on and on, suffering a comfortable martyrdom, meeting with endless defeats and afterwards putting the blame on other people. The left-wing intelligentsia wanted to go on and on, sniggering at the Blimps, sapping away at middle-class morale, but still keeping their favoured position as hangers-on of the dividend-drawers. Labour Party politics had become a variant of Conservatism, "revolutionary" politics had become a game of make-believe.

Now, however, the circumstances have changed, the drowsy years have ended. Being a Socialist no longer means kicking theoretically against a system which in practice you are fairly well satisfied with. This time our predicament is real. It is "the Philistines be upon thee, Samson". We have got to make our words take physical shape, or perish. We know very well that with its present social structure England cannot survive, and we have got to make other people see that fact and act upon it. We cannot win the war without introducing Socialism, nor establish Socialism without winning the war. At such a time it is possible, as it was not in the peaceful years, to be both revolutionary and realistic. A Socialist movement which can swing the mass of the people behind it, drive the pro-Fascists out of positions of control, wipe out the grosser injustices and let the working class see that they have something to fight for, win over the middle classes instead of antagonising them, produce a workable imperial policy instead of a mixture of humbug and Utopianism, bring patriotism and intelligence into partnership–for the first time, a movement of such a kind becomes possible.

ii.

The fact that we are at war has turned Socialism from a textbook word into a realisable policy.

The inefficiency of private capitalism has been proved all over Europe. Its injustice has been proved in the East End of London. Patriotism, against which the Socialists fought so long, has become a tremendous lever in their hands. People who at any other time would cling like glue to their miserable scraps of privilege, will surrender them fast enough when their country is in danger. War is the greatest of all agents of change. It speeds up all processes, wipes out minor distinctions, brings realities to the surface. Above all, war brings it home to the individual that he is not altogether an individual. It is only because they are aware of this that men will die on the field of battle. At this moment it is not so much a question of surrendering life as of surrendering leisure, comfort, economic liberty, social prestige. There are very few people in England who really want to see their country conquered by Germany. If it can be made clear that defeating Hitler means wiping out class privilege, the great mass of middling people, the £6 a week to £2,000 a year class, will probably be on our side. These people are quite indispensable, because they include most of the technical experts. Obviously the snobbishness and political ignorance of people like airmen and naval officers will be a very great difficulty. But without those airmen, destroyer commanders, etc etc we could not survive for a week. The only approach to them is through their patriotism. An intelligent Socialist movement will use their patriotism, instead of merely insulting it, as hitherto.

But do I mean that there will be no opposition? Of course not. It would be childish to expect anything of the kind.

There will be a bitter political struggle, and there will be unconscious and half-conscious sabotage everywhere. At some point or other it may be necessary to use violence. It is easy to imagine a pro-Fascist rebellion breaking out in, for instance, India. We shall have to fight against bribery, ignorance and snobbery. The bankers and the larger businessmen, the landowners and dividend-drawers, the officials with their prehensile bottoms, will obstruct for all they are worth. Even the middle classes will writhe when their accustomed way of life is menaced. But just because the English sense of national unity has never disintegrated, because patriotism is finally stronger than class-hatred, the chances are that the will of the

majority will prevail. It is no use imagining that one can make fundamental changes without causing a split in the nation; but the treacherous minority will be far smaller in time of war than it would be at any other time.

The swing of opinion is visibly happening, but it cannot be counted on to happen fast enough of its own accord. This war is a race between the consolidation of Hitler's empire and the growth of democratic consciousness. Everywhere in England you can see a ding-dong battle ranging to and fro–in Parliament and in the Government, in the factories and the armed forces, in the pubs and the air-raid shelters, in the newspapers and on the radio. Every day there are tiny defeats, tiny victories. Morrison for Home Security–a few yards forward. Priestley shoved off the air–a few yards back. It is a struggle between the groping and the unteachable, between the young and the old, between the living and the dead. But it is very necessary that the discontent which undoubtedly exists should take a purposeful and not merely obstructive form. It is time for THE PEOPLE to define their war-aims. What is wanted is a simple, concrete programme of action, which can be given all possible publicity, and round which public opinion can group itself.

I suggest that the following six-point programme is the kind of thing we need. The first three points deal with England's internal policy, the other three with the Empire and the world:

1. Nationalisation of land, mines, railways, banks and major industries.

2. Limitation of incomes, on such a scale that the highest tax free income in Britain does not exceed the lowest by more than ten to one.

3. Reform of the educational system along democratic lines.

4. Immediate Dominion status for India, with power to secede when the war is over.

5. Formation of an Imperial General Council, in which the coloured peoples are to be represented.

6. Declaration of formal alliance with China, Abyssinia and all other victims of the Fascist powers.

The general tendency of this programme is unmistakable. It aims quite frankly at turning this war into a revolutionary war and

England into a Socialist democracy. I have deliberately included in it nothing that the simplest person could not understand and see the reason for. In the form in which I have put it, it could be printed on the front page of the DAILY MIRROR. But for the purposes of this book a certain amount of amplification is needed.

1. NATIONALISATION. One can "nationalise" industry by the stroke of a pen, but the actual process is slow and complicated. What is needed is that the ownership of all major industry shall be formally vested in the State, representing the common people. Once that is done it becomes possible to eliminate the class of mere OWNERS who live not by virtue of anything they produce but by the possession of title-deeds and share certificates. State-ownership implies, therefore, that nobody shall live without working. How sudden a change in the conduct of industry it implies is less certain. In a country like England we cannot rip down the whole structure and build again from the bottom, least of all in time of war. Inevitably the majority of industrial concerns will continue with much the same personnel as before, the one-time owners or managing directors carrying on with their jobs as State employees. There is reason to think that many of the smaller capitalists would actually welcome some such arrangement. The resistance will come from the big capitalists, the bankers, the landlords and the idle rich, roughly speaking the class with over £2,000 a year–and even if one counts in all their dependants there are not more than half a million of these people in England. Nationalisation of agricultural land implies cutting out the landlord and the tithe drawer, but not necessarily interfering with the farmer. It is difficult to imagine any reorganisation of English agriculture that would not retain most of the existing farms as units, at any rate at the beginning. The farmer, when he is competent, will continue as a salaried manager. He is virtually that already, with the added disadvantage of having to make a profit and being permanently in debt to the bank. With certain kinds of petty trading, and even the small-scale ownership of land, the State will probably not interfere at all. It would be a great mistake to start by victimising the smallholder class, for instance. These people are necessary, on the whole they are competent, and the amount of work they do depends on the feeling that they are "their

own masters". But the State will certainly impose an upward limit to the ownership of land (probably fifteen acres at the very most), and will never permit any ownership of land in town areas.

From the moment that all productive goods have been declared the property of the State, the common people will feel, as they cannot feel now, that the State is THEMSELVES. They will be ready then to endure the sacrifices that are ahead of us, war or no war. And even if the face of England hardly seems to change, on the day that our main industries are formally nationalised the dominance of a single class will have been broken. From then onwards the emphasis will be shifted from ownership to management, from privilege to competence. It is quite possible that State-ownership will in itself bring about less social change than will be forced upon us by the common hardships of war. But it is the necessary first step without which any REAL reconstruction is impossible.

2. INCOMES. Limitation of incomes implies the fixing of a minimum wage, which implies a managed internal currency based simply on the amount of consumption goods available. And this again implies a stricter rationing scheme than is now in operation. It is no use at this stage of the world's history to suggest that all human beings should have EXACTLY equal incomes. It has been shown over and over again that without some kind of money reward there is no incentive to undertake certain jobs. On the other hand the money reward need not be very large. In practice it is impossible that earnings should be limited quite as rigidly as I have suggested. There will always be anomalies and evasions. But there is no reason why ten to one should not be the maximum normal variation. And within those limits some sense of equality is possible. A man with £3 a week and a man with £1,500 a year can feel themselves fellow creatures, which the Duke of Westminster and the sleepers on the Embankment benches cannot.

3. EDUCATION. In wartime, educational reform must necessarily be promise rather than performance. At the moment we are not in a position to raise the school-leaving age or increase the teaching staffs of the elementary schools. But there are certain immediate steps that we could take towards a democratic educational system. We could start by abolishing the autonomy of the public

schools and the older universities and flooding them with State-aided pupils chosen simply on grounds of ability. At present, public-school education is partly a training in class prejudice and partly a sort of tax that the middle classes pay to the upper class in return for the right to enter certain professions. It is true that that state of affairs is altering. The middle classes have begun to rebel against the expensiveness of education, and the war will bankrupt the majority of the public schools if it continues for another year or two. The evacuation is also producing certain minor changes. But there is a danger that some of the older schools, which will be able to weather the financial storm longest, will survive in some form or another as festering centres of snobbery. As for the 10,000 "private" schools that England possesses, the vast majority of them deserve nothing except suppression. They are simply commercial undertakings, and in many cases their educational level is actually lower than that of the elementary schools. They merely exist because of a widespread idea that there is something disgraceful in being educated by the public authorities. The State could quell this idea by declaring itself responsible for all education, even if at the start this were no more than a gesture. We need gestures as well as actions. It is all too obvious that our talk of "defending democracy" is nonsense while it is a mere accident of birth that decides whether a gifted child shall or shall not get the education it deserves.

4. INDIA. What we must offer India is not "freedom", which, as I have said earlier, is impossible, but alliance, partnership-in a word, equality. But we must also tell the Indians that they are free to secede, if they want to. Without that there can be no equality of partnership, and our claim to be defending the coloured peoples against Fascism will never be believed. But it is a mistake to imagine that if the Indians were free to cut themselves adrift they would immediately do so. When a British government OFFERS them unconditional independence, they will refuse it. For as soon as they have the power to secede the chief reasons for doing so will have disappeared.

A complete severance of the two countries would be a disaster for India no less than for England. Intelligent Indians know this. As things are at present, India not only cannot defend itself, it is hardly

even capable of feeding itself. The whole administration of the country depends on a framework of experts (engineers, forest officers, railwaymen, soldiers, doctors) who are predominantly English and could not be replaced within five or ten years. Moreover, English is the chief lingua franca and nearly the whole of the Indian intelligentsia is deeply Anglicised. Any transference to foreign rule–for if the British marched out of India the Japanese and other powers would immediately march in–would mean an immense dislocation. Neither the Japanese, the Russians, the Germans nor the Italians would be capable of administering India even at the low level of efficiency that is attained by the British. They do not possess the necessary supplies of technical experts or the knowledge of languages and local conditions, and they probably could not win the confidence of indispensable go-betweens such as the Eurasians. If India were simply "liberated", i.e. deprived of British military protection, the first result would be a fresh foreign conquest, and the second a series of enormous famines which would kill millions of people within a few years.

What India needs is the power to work out its own constitution without British interference, but in some kind of partnership that ensures its military protection and technical advice. This is unthinkable until there is a Socialist government in England. For at least eighty years England has artificially prevented the development of India, partly from fear of trade competition if Indian industries were too highly developed, partly because backward peoples are more easily governed than civilised ones. It is a commonplace that the average Indian suffers far more from his own countrymen than from the British. The petty Indian capitalist exploits the town worker with the utmost ruthlessness, the peasant lives from birth to death in the grip of the money-lender. But all this is an indirect result of the British rule, which aims half-consciously at keeping India as backward as possible. The classes most loyal to Britain are the princes, the landowners and the business community–in general, the reactionary classes who are doing fairly well out of the STATUS QUO. The moment that England ceased to stand towards India in the relation of an exploiter, the balance of forces would be altered. No need then for the British to flatter the ridiculous Indian princes, with

their gilded elephants and cardboard armies, to prevent the growth of the Indian trade unions, to play off Moslem against Hindu, to protect the worthless life of the money-lender, to receive the salaams of toadying minor officials, to prefer the half-barbarous Gurkha to the educated Bengali. Once check that stream of dividends that flows from the bodies of Indian coolies to the banking accounts of old ladies in Cheltenham, and the whole sahib-native nexus, with its haughty ignorance on one side and envy and servility on the other, can come to an end. Englishmen and Indians can work side by side for the development of India, and for the training of Indians in all the arts which, so far, they have been systematically prevented from learning. How many of the existing British personnel in India, commercial or official, would fall in with such an arrangement–which would mean ceasing once and for all to be "sahibs"–is a different question. But, broadly speaking, more is to be hoped from the younger men and from those officials (civil engineers, forestry and agricultural experts, doctors, educationists) who have been scientifically educated. The higher officials, the provincial governors, commissioners, judges, etc are hopeless; but they are also the most easily replaceable.

That, roughly, is what would be meant by Dominion status if it were offered to India by a Socialist government. It is an offer of partnership on equal terms until such time as the world has ceased to be ruled by bombing planes. But we must add to it the unconditional right to secede. It is the only way of proving that we mean what we say. And what applies to India applies, MUTATIS MUTANDIS, to Burma, Malaya and most of our African possessions.

5 and 6 explain themselves. They are the necessary preliminary to any claim that we are fighting this war for the protection of peaceful peoples against Fascist aggression.

Is it impossibly hopeful to think that such a policy as this could get a following in England? A year ago, even six months ago, it would have been, but not now. Moreover-and this is the peculiar opportunity of this moment–it could be given the necessary publicity. There is now a considerable weekly press, with a circulation of millions, which would be ready to popularise–if not EXACTLY the programme I have sketched above, at any rate SOME policy along

those lines. There are even three or four daily papers which would be prepared to give it a sympathetic hearing. That is the distance we have travelled in the last six months.

But is such a policy realisable? That depends entirely on ourselves.

Some of the points I have suggested are of the kind that could be carried out immediately, others would take years or decades and even then would not be perfectly achieved. No political programme is ever carried out in its entirety. But what matters is that that or something like it should be our declared policy. It is always the DIRECTION that counts. It is of course quite hopeless to expect the present Government to pledge itself to any policy that implies turning this war into a revolutionary war. It is at best a government of compromise, with Churchill riding two horses like a circus acrobat. Before such measures as limitation of incomes become even thinkable, there will have to be a complete shift of power away from the old ruling class. If during this winter the war settles into another stagnant period, we ought in my opinion to agitate for a General Election, a thing which the Tory Party machine will make frantic efforts to prevent. But even without an election we can get the government we want, provided that we want it urgently enough. A real shove from below will accomplish it. As to who will be in that government when it comes, I make no guess. I only know that the right men will be there when the people really want them, for it is movements that make leaders and not leaders movements.

Within a year, perhaps even within six months, if we are still unconquered, we shall see the rise of something that has never existed before, a specifically ENGLISH Socialist movement. Hitherto there has been only the Labour Party, which was the creation of the working class but did not aim at any fundamental change, and Marxism, which was a German theory interpreted by Russians and unsuccessfully transplanted to England. There was nothing that really touched the heart of the English people. Throughout its entire history the English Socialist movement has never produced a song with a catchy tune–nothing like LA MARSEILLAISE or LA CUCURACHA, for instance. When a Socialist movement native to England appears, the Marxists, like all

others with a vested interest in the past, will be its bitter enemies. Inevitably they will denounce it as "Fascism". Already it is customary among the more soft-boiled intellectuals of the Left to declare that if we fight against the Nazis we shall "go Nazi" ourselves. They might almost equally well say that if we fight against Negroes we shall turn black. To "go Nazi" we should have to have the history of Germany behind us. Nations do not escape from their past merely by making a revolution. An English Socialist government will transform the nation from top to bottom, but it will still bear all over it the unmistakable marks of our own civilisation, the peculiar civilisation which I discussed earlier in this book.

It will not be doctrinaire, nor even logical. It will abolish the House of Lords, but quite probably will not abolish the Monarchy. It will leave anachronisms and loose ends everywhere, the judge in his ridiculous horsehair wig and the lion and the unicorn on the soldier's cap-buttons. It will not set up any explicit class dictatorship. It will group itself round the old Labour Party and its mass following will be in the trade unions, but it will draw into it most of the middle class and many of the younger sons of the bourgeoisie. Most of its directing brains will come from the new indeterminate class of skilled workers, technical experts, airmen, scientists, architects and journalists, the people who feel at home in the radio and ferro-concrete age. But it will never lose touch with the tradition of compromise and the belief in a law that is above the State. It will shoot traitors, but it will give them a solemn trial beforehand and occasionally it will acquit them. It will crush any open revolt promptly and cruelly, but it will interfere very little with the spoken and written word. Political parties with different names will still exist, revolutionary sects will still be publishing their newspapers and making as little impression as ever. It will disestablish the Church, but will not persecute religion. It will retain a vague reverence for the Christian moral code, and from time to time will refer to England as "a Christian country". The Catholic Church will war against it, but the Nonconformist sects and the bulk of the Anglican Church will be able to come to terms with it. It will show a power of assimilating the past which will shock foreign observers and sometimes make them doubt whether any revolution has

happened.

But all the same it will have done the essential thing. It will have nationalised industry, scaled down incomes, set up a classless educational system. Its real nature will be apparent from the hatred which the surviving rich men of the world will feel for it. It will aim not at disintegrating the Empire but at turning it into a federation of Socialist states, freed not so much from the British flag as from the money-lender, the dividend-drawer and the woodenheaded British official. Its war strategy will be totally different from that of any property-ruled state, because it will not be afraid of the revolutionary after-effects when any existing régime is brought down. It will not have the smallest scruple about attacking hostile neutrals or stirring up native rebellion in enemy colonies. It will fight in such a way that even if it is beaten its memory will be dangerous to the victor, as the memory of the French Revolution was dangerous to Metternich's Europe. The dictators will fear it as they could not fear the existing British régime, even if its military strength were ten times what it is.

But at this moment, when the drowsy life of England has barely altered, and the offensive contrast of wealth and poverty still exists everywhere, even amid the bombs, why do I dare to say that all these things "will" happen?

Because the time has come when one can predict the future in terms of an "either–or". Either we turn this war into a revolutionary war (I do not say that our policy will be EXACTLY what I have indicated above–merely that it will be along those general lines) or we lose it, and much more besides. Quite soon it will be possible to say definitely that our feet are set upon one path or the other. But at any rate it is certain that with our present social structure we cannot win. Our real forces, physical, moral or intellectual, cannot be mobilised.

iii.

Patriotism has nothing to do with Conservatism. It is actually the opposite of Conservatism, since it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same. It is the bridge between the future and the past. No real revolutionary has

ever been an internationalist.

During the past twenty years the negative, FAINÉANT outlook which has been fashionable among English left-wingers, the sniggering of the intellectuals at patriotism and physical courage, the persistent effort to chip away English morale and spread a hedonistic, what-do-I-get-out-of-it attitude to life, has done nothing but harm. It would have been harmful even if we had been living in the squashy League of Nations universe that these people imagined. In an age of Fuehrers and bombing planes it was a disaster. However little we may like it, toughness is the price of survival. A nation trained to think hedonistically cannot survive amid peoples who work like slaves and breed like rabbits, and whose chief national industry is war. English Socialists of nearly all colours have wanted to make a stand against Fascism, but at the same time they have aimed at making their own countrymen unwarlike. They have failed, because in England traditional loyalties are stronger than new ones. But in spite of all the "anti-Fascist" heroics of the left-wing press, what chance should we have stood when the real struggle with Fascism came, if the average Englishman had been the kind of creature that the NEW STATESMAN, the DAILY WORKER or even the NEWS CHRONICLE wished to make him?

Up to 1935 virtually all English left-wingers were vaguely pacifist. After 1935 the more vocal of them flung themselves eagerly into the Popular Front movement, which was simply an evasion of the whole problem posed by Fascism. It set out to be "anti-Fascist" in a purely negative way–"against" Fascism without being "for" any discoverable policy-and underneath it lay the flabby idea that when the time came the Russians would do our fighting for us. It is astonishing how this illusion fails to die. Every week sees its spate of letters to the press, pointing out that if we had a government with no Tories in it the Russians could hardly avoid coming round to our side. Or we are to publish high-sounding war-aims (VIDE books like UNSER KAMPF, A HUNDRED MILLION ALLIES–IF WE CHOOSE, etc), whereupon the European populations will infallibly rise on our behalf. It is the same idea all the time-look abroad for your inspiration, get someone else to do your fighting for you.

Underneath it lies the frightful inferiority complex of the English intellectual, the belief that the English are no longer a martial race, no longer capable of enduring.

In truth there is no reason to think that anyone will do our fighting for us yet awhile, except the Chinese, who have been doing it for three years already. [Note: Written before the outbreak of the war in Greece. (Author's footnote.)] The Russians may be driven to fight on our side by the fact of a direct attack, but they have made it clear enough that they will not stand up to the German army if there is any way of avoiding it. In any case they are not likely to be attracted by the spectacle of a left-wing government in England. The present Russian régime must almost certainly be hostile to any revolution in the West. The subject peoples of Europe will rebel when Hitler begins to totter, but not earlier. Our potential allies are not the Europeans but on the one hand the Americans, who will need a year to mobilise their resources even if Big Business can be brought to heel, and on the other hand the coloured peoples, who cannot be even sentimentally on our side till our own revolution has started. For a long time, a year, two years, possibly three years, England has got to be the shock-absorber of the world. We have got to face bombing, hunger, overwork, influenza, boredom and treacherous peace offers. Manifestly it is a time to stiffen morale, not to weaken it. Instead of taking the mechanically anti-British attitude which is usual on the Left, it is better to consider what the world would really be like if the English-speaking culture perished. For it is childish to suppose that the other English-speaking countries, even the USA, will be unaffected if Britain is conquered.

Lord Halifax, and all his tribe, believe that when the war is over things will be exactly as they were before. Back to the crazy pavement of Versailles, back to "democracy", i.e. capitalism, back to dole queues and the Rolls-Royce cars, back to the grey top hats and the sponge-bag trousers, IN SAECULA SAECULORUM. It is of course obvious that nothing of the kind is going to happen. A feeble imitation of it might just possibly happen in the case of a negotiated peace, but only for a short while. LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism is dead. [Note, below] The choice lies between the kind of collective society that Hitler will set up and the kind that can arise if he is

defeated.

[Note: It is interesting to notice that Mr Kennedy, USA Ambassador in London, remarked on his return to New York in October 1940 that as a result of the war "democracy is finished". By "democracy", of course, he meant private capitalism. (Author's footnote.)]

If Hitler wins this war he will consolidate his rule over Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and if his armies have not been too greatly exhausted beforehand, he will wrench vast territories from Soviet Russia. He will set up a graded caste-society in which the German HERRENVOLK ("master race" or "aristocratic race") will rule over Slavs and other lesser peoples whose job it will be to produce low-priced agricultural products. He will reduce the coloured peoples once and for all to outright slavery. The real quarrel of the Fascist powers with British imperialism is that they know that it is disintegrating. Another twenty years along the present line of development, and India will be a peasant republic linked with England only by voluntary alliance. The "semi-apes" of whom Hitler speaks with such loathing will be flying aeroplanes and manufacturing machine-guns. The Fascist dream of a slave empire will be at an end. On the other hand, if we are defeated we simply hand over our own victims to new masters who come fresh to the job and have not developed any scruples.

But more is involved than the fate of the coloured peoples. Two incompatible visions of life are fighting one another. "Between democracy and totalitarianism," says Mussolini, "there can be no compromise." The two creeds cannot even, for any length of time, live side by side. So long as democracy exists, even in its very imperfect English form, totalitarianism is in deadly danger. The whole English-speaking world is haunted by the idea of human equality, and though it would be simply a lie to say that either we or the Americans have ever acted up to our professions, still, the IDEA is there, and it is capable of one day becoming a reality. From the English-speaking culture, if it does not perish, a society of free and equal human beings will ultimately arise. But it is precisely the idea of human equality–the "Jewish" or "Judaeo-Christian" idea of equality–that Hitler came into the world to destroy. He has, heaven

knows, said so often enough. The thought of a world in which black men would be as good as white men and Jews treated as human beings brings him the same horror and despair as the thought of endless slavery brings to us.

It is important to keep in mind how irreconcilable these two viewpoints are. Some time within the next year a pro-Hitler reaction within the left-wing intelligentsia is likely enough. There are premonitory signs of it already. Hitler's positive achievement appeals to the emptiness of these people, and, in the case of those with pacifist leanings, to their masochism. One knows in advance more or less what they will say. They will start by refusing to admit that British capitalism is evolving into something different, or that the defeat of Hitler can mean any more than a victory for the British and American millionaires. And from that they will proceed to argue that, after all, democracy is "just the same as" or "just as bad as" totalitarianism. There is NOT MUCH freedom of speech in England; therefore there is NO MORE than exists in Germany. To be on the dole is a horrible experience; therefore it is NO WORSE to be in the torture-chambers of the Gestapo. In general, two blacks make a white, half a loaf is the same as no bread.

But in reality, whatever may be true about democracy and totalitarianism, it is not true that they are the same. It would not be true, even if British democracy were incapable of evolving beyond its present stage. The whole conception of the militarised continental state, with its secret police, its censored literature and its conscript labour, is utterly different from that of the loose maritime democracy, with its slums and unemployment, its strikes and party politics. It is the difference between land power and sea power, between cruelty and inefficiency, between lying and self-deception, between the SS man and the rent-collector. And in choosing between them one chooses not so much on the strength of what they now are as of what they are capable of becoming. But in a sense it is irrelevant whether democracy, at its higher or at its lowest, is "better" than totalitarianism. To decide that one would have to have access to absolute standards. The only question that matters is where one's real sympathies will lie when the pinch comes. The intellectuals who are so fond of balancing democracy against totalitarianism and

"proving" that one is as bad as the other are simply frivolous people who have never been shoved up against realities. They show the same shallow misunderstanding of Fascism now, when they are beginning to flirt with it, as a year or two ago, when they were squealing against it. The question is not, "Can you make out a debating-society 'case' in favour of Hitler?" The question is, "Do you genuinely accept that case? Are you willing to submit to Hitler's rule? Do you want to see England conquered, or don't you?" It would be better to be sure on that point before frivolously siding with the enemy. For there is no such thing as neutrality in war; in practice one must help one side or the other.

When the pinch comes, no one bred in the western tradition can accept the Fascist vision of life. It is important to realise that now, and to grasp what it entails. With all its sloth, hypocrisy and injustice, the English speaking civilisation is the only large obstacle in Hitler's path. It is a living contradiction of all the "infallible" dogmas of Fascism. That is why all Fascist writers for years past have agreed that England's power must be destroyed. England must be "exterminated", must be "annihilated", must "cease to exist". Strategically it would be possible for this war to end with Hitler in secure possession of Europe, and with the British Empire intact and British sea-power barely affected. But ideologically it is not possible; were Hitler to make an offer along those lines, it could only be treacherously, with a view to conquering England indirectly or renewing the attack at some more favourable moment. England cannot possibly be allowed to remain as a sort of funnel through which deadly ideas from beyond the Atlantic flow into the police states of Europe. And turning it round to our own point of view, we see the vastness of the issue before us, the all-importance of preserving our democracy more or less as we have known it. But to PRESERVE is always to EXTEND. The choice before us is not so much between victory and defeat as between revolution and apathy. If the thing we are fighting for is altogether destroyed, it will have been destroyed partly by our own act.

It could happen that England could introduce the beginnings of Socialism, turn this war into a revolutionary war, and still be defeated. That is at any rate thinkable. But, terrible as it would be for

anyone who is now adult, it would be far less deadly than the "compromise peace" which a few rich men and their hired liars are hoping for. The final ruin of England could only be accomplished by an English government acting under orders from Berlin. But that cannot happen if England has awakened beforehand. For in that case the defeat would be unmistakable, the struggle would continue, the IDEA would survive. The difference between going down fighting, and surrendering without a fight, is by no means a question of "honour" and schoolboy heroics. Hitler said once that to ACCEPT defeat destroys the soul of a nation. This sounds like a piece of claptrap, but it is strictly true. The defeat of 1870 did not lessen the world-influence of France. The Third Republic had more influence, intellectually, than the France of Napoleon III. But the sort of peace that Petain, Laval and Co have accepted can only be purchased by deliberately wiping out the national culture. The Vichy Government will enjoy a spurious independence only on condition that it destroys the distinctive marks of French culture: republicanism, secularism, respect for the intellect, absence of colour prejudice. We cannot be UTTERLY defeated if we have made our revolution beforehand. We may see German troops marching down Whitehall, but another process, ultimately deadly to the German power-dream, will have been started. The Spanish people were defeated, but the things they learned during those two and a half memorable years will one day come back upon the Spanish Fascists like a boomerang.

A piece of Shakespearean bombast was much quoted at the beginning of the war. Even Mr Chamberlain quoted it once, if my memory does not deceive me:

Come the four corners of the world in arms
And we shall shock them: naught shall make us rue
If England to herself do rest but true.

It is right enough, if you interpret it rightly. But England has got to be true to herself. She is not being true to herself while the refugees who have sought our shores are penned up in concentration camps, and company directors work out subtle schemes to dodge their Excess Profits Tax. It is goodbye to the TATLER and the BYSTANDER, and farewell to the lady in the Rolls-Royce car. The heirs of Nelson and of Cromwell are not in the House of Lords. They

are in the fields and the streets, in the factories and the armed forces, in the four-ale bar and the suburban back garden; and at present they are still kept under by a generation of ghosts. Compared with the task of bringing the real England to the surface, even the winning of the war, necessary though it is, is secondary. By revolution we become more ourselves, not less. There is no question of stopping short, striking a compromise, salvaging "democracy", standing still. Nothing ever stands still. We must add to our heritage or lose it, we must grow greater or grow less, we must go forward or backward. I believe in England, and I believe that we shall go forward.

WELLS, HITLER AND THE WORLD STATE (1941)

"In March or April, say the wiseacres, there is to be a stupendous knockout blow at Britain...What Hitler has to do it with, I cannot imagine. His ebbing and dispersed military resources are now probably not so very much greater than the Italians' before they were put to the test in Greece and Africa."

"The German air power has been largely spent. It is behind the times and its first-rate men are mostly dead or disheartened or worn out."

"In 1914 the Hohenzollern army was the best in the world. Behind that screaming little defective in Berlin there is nothing of the sort... Yet our military 'experts' discuss the waiting phantom. In their imaginations it is perfect in its equipment and invincible in discipline. Sometimes it is to strike a decisive 'blow' through Spain and North Africa and on, or march through the Balkans, march from the Danube to Ankara, to Persia, to India, or 'crush Russia', or 'pour' over the Brenner into Italy. The weeks pass and the phantom does none of these things–for one excellent reason. It does not exist to that extent. Most of such inadequate guns and munitions as it possessed must have been taken away from it and fooled away in Hitler's silly feints to invade Britain. And its raw jerry-built discipline is wilting under the creeping realisation that the Blitzkrieg is spent, and the war is coming home to roost."

These quotations are not taken from the CAVALRY QUARTERLY but from a series of newspaper articles by Mr H.G. Wells, written at the beginning of this year and now reprinted in a book entitled GUIDE TO THE NEW WORLD. Since they were written, the German army has overrun the Balkans and reconquered Cyrenaica, it can march through Turkey or Spain at such time as may suit it, and it has undertaken the invasion of Russia. How that campaign will turn out I do not know, but it is worth noticing that the German general staff, whose opinion is probably worth something, would not have begun it if they had not felt fairly certain of finishing it within three months. So much for the idea that the German army is a bogey, its equipment inadequate, its morale breaking down, etc etc.

What has Wells to set against the "screaming little defective in Berlin"? The usual rigmarole about a World State, plus the Sankey Declaration, which is an attempted definition of fundamental human rights, of anti-totalitarian tendency. Except that he is now especially concerned with federal world control of air power, it is the same gospel as he has been preaching almost without interruption for the past forty years, always with an air of angry surprise at the human beings who can fail to grasp anything so obvious.

What is the use of saying that we need federal world control of the air? The whole question is how we are to get it. What is the use of pointing out that a World State is desirable? What matters is that not one of the five great military powers would think of submitting to such a thing. All sensible men for decades past have been substantially in agreement with what Mr Wells says; but the sensible men have no power and, in too many cases, no disposition to sacrifice themselves. Hitler is a criminal lunatic, and Hitler has an army of millions of men, aeroplanes in thousands, tanks in tens of thousands. For his sake a great nation has been willing to overwork itself for six years and then to fight for two years more, whereas for the commonsense, essentially hedonistic world-view which Mr Wells puts forward, hardly a human creature is willing to shed a pint of blood. Before you can even talk of world reconstruction, or even of peace, you have got to eliminate Hitler, which means bringing into being a dynamic not necessarily the same as that of the Nazis, but probably quite as unacceptable to "enlightened" and hedonistic people. What has kept England on its feet during the past year? In part, no doubt, some vague idea about a better future, but chiefly the atavistic emotion of patriotism, the ingrained feeling of the English-speaking peoples that they are superior to foreigners. For the last twenty years the main object of English left-wing intellectuals has been to break this feeling down, and if they had succeeded, we might be watching the SS men patrolling the London streets at this moment. Similarly, why are the Russians fighting like tigers against the German invasion? In part, perhaps, for some half-remembered ideal of Utopian Socialism, but chiefly in defence of Holy Russia (the "sacred soil of the Fatherland", etc etc), which Stalin has revived in an only slightly altered form. The energy that actually shapes the

world springs from emotions–racial pride, leader-worship, religious belief, love of war–which liberal intellectuals mechanically write off as anachronisms, and which they have usually destroyed so completely in themselves as to have lost all power of action.

The people who say that Hitler is Antichrist, or alternatively, the Holy Ghost, are nearer an understanding of the truth than the intellectuals who for ten dreadful years have kept it up that he is merely a figure out of comic opera, not worth taking seriously. All that this idea really reflects is the sheltered conditions of English life. The Left Book Club was at bottom a product of Scotland Yard, just as the Peace Pledge Union is a product of the navy. One development of the last ten years has been the appearance of the "political book", a sort of enlarged pamphlet combining history with political criticism, as an important literary form. But the best writers in this line–Trotsky, Rauschning, Rosenberg, Silone, Borkenau, Koestler and others–have none of them been Englishmen, and nearly all of them have been renegades from one or other extremist party, who have seen totalitarianism at close quarters and known the meaning of exile and persecution. Only in the English-speaking countries was it fashionable to believe, right up to the outbreak of war, that Hitler was an unimportant lunatic and the German tanks made of cardboard. Mr Wells, it will be seen from the quotations I have given above, believes something of the kind still. I do not suppose that either the bombs or the German campaign in Greece have altered his opinion. A lifelong habit of thought stands between him and an understanding of Hitler's power.

Mr Wells, like Dickens, belongs to the non-military middle class. The thunder of guns, the jingle of spurs, the catch in the throat when the old flag goes by, leave him manifestly cold. He has an invincible hatred of the fighting, hunting, swashbuckling side of life, symbolised in all his early books by a violent propaganda against horses. The principal villain of his OUTLINE OF HISTORY is the military adventurer, Napoleon. If one looks through nearly any book that he has written in the last forty years one finds the same idea constantly recurring: the supposed antithesis between the man of science who is working towards a planned World State and the reactionary who is trying to restore a disorderly past. In novels,

Utopias, essays, films, pamphlets, the antithesis crops up, always more or less the same. On the one side science, order, progress, internationalism, aeroplanes, steel, concrete, hygiene: on the other side war, nationalism, religion, monarchy, peasants, Greek professors, poets, horses. History as he sees it is a series of victories won by the scientific man over the romantic man. Now, he is probably right in assuming that a "reasonable", planned form of society, with scientists rather than witch-doctors in control, will prevail sooner or later, but that is a different matter from assuming that it is just round the corner. There survives somewhere or other an interesting controversy which took place between Wells and Churchill at the time of the Russian Revolution. Wells accuses Churchill of not really believing his own propaganda about the Bolsheviks being monsters dripping with blood etc, but of merely fearing that they were going to introduce an era of common sense and scientific control, in which flag-wavers like Churchill himself would have no place. Churchill's estimate of the Bolsheviks, however, was nearer the mark than Wells's. The early Bolsheviks may have been angels or demons, according as one chooses to regard them, but at any rate they were not sensible men. They were not introducing a Wellsian Utopia but a Rule of the Saints, which, like the English Rule of the Saints, was a military despotism enlivened by witchcraft trials. The same misconception reappears in an inverted form in Wells's attitude to the Nazis. Hitler is all the war-lords and witch doctors in history rolled into one. Therefore, argues Wells, he is an absurdity, a ghost from the past, a creature doomed to disappear almost immediately. But unfortunately the equation of science with common sense does not really hold good. The aeroplane, which was looked forward to as a civilising influence but in practice has hardly been used except for dropping bombs, is the symbol of that fact. Modern Germany is far more scientific than England, and far more barbarous. Much of what Wells has imagined and worked for is physically there in Nazi Germany. The order, the planning, the State encouragement of science, the steel, the concrete, the aeroplanes, are all there, but all in the service of ideas appropriate to the Stone Age. Science is fighting on the side of superstition. But obviously it is impossible for Wells to accept this. It would contradict the world-

view on which his own works are based. The war-lords and the witch-doctors MUST fail, the common-sense World State, as seen by a nineteenth-century liberal whose heart does not leap at the sound of bugles, MUST triumph. Treachery and defeatism apart, Hitler CANNOT be a danger. That he should finally win would be an impossible reversal of history, like a Jacobite restoration.

But is it not a sort of parricide for a person of my age (thirty-eight) to find fault with H.G. Wells? Thinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells's own creation. How much influence any mere writer has, and especially a "popular" writer whose work takes effect quickly, is questionable, but I doubt whether anyone who was writing books between 1900 and 1920, at any rate in the English language, influenced the young so much. The minds of all of us, and therefore the physical world, would be perceptibly different if Wells had never existed. Only, just the singleness of mind, the one-sided imagination that made him seem like an inspired prophet in the Edwardian age, make him a shallow, inadequate thinker now. When Wells was young, the antithesis between science and reaction was not false. Society was ruled by narrow-minded, profoundly incurious people, predatory businessmen, dull squires, bishops, politicians who could quote Horace but had never heard of algebra. Science was faintly disreputable and religious belief obligatory. Traditionalism, stupidity, snobbishness, patriotism, superstition and love of war seemed to be all on the same side; there was need of someone who could state the opposite point of view. Back in the nineteen-hundreds it was a wonderful experience for a boy to discover H.G. Wells. There you were, in a world of pedants, clergymen and golfers, with your future employers exhorting you to "get on or get out", your parents systematically warping your sexual life, and your dull-witted schoolmasters sniggering over their Latin tags; and here was this wonderful man who could tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, and who knew that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined. A decade or so before aeroplanes were technically feasible Wells knew that within a little while men would be able to fly. He knew that because he himself wanted to be able to fly, and therefore felt sure that research

in that direction would continue. On the other hand, even when I was a little boy, at a time when the Wright brothers had actually lifted their machine off the ground for fifty-nine seconds, the generally accepted opinion was that if God had meant us to fly He would have given us wings. Up to 1914 Wells was in the main a true prophet. In physical details his vision of the new world has been fulfilled to a surprising extent.

But because he belonged to the nineteenth century and to a non-military nation and class, he could not grasp the tremendous strength of the old world which was symbolised in his mind by fox-hunting Tories. He was, and still is, quite incapable of understanding that nationalism, religious bigotry and feudal loyalty are far more powerful forces than what he himself would describe as sanity. Creatures out of the Dark Ages have come marching into the present, and if they are ghosts they are at any rate ghosts which need a strong magic to lay them. The people who have shown the best understanding of Fascism are either those who have suffered under it or those who have a Fascist streak in themselves. A crude book like THE IRON HEEL, written nearly thirty years ago, is a truer prophecy of the future than either BRAVE NEW WORLD or THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME. If one had to choose among Wells's own contemporaries a writer who could stand towards him as a corrective, one might choose Kipling, who was not deaf to the evil voices of power and military "glory". Kipling would have understood the appeal of Hitler, or for that matter of Stalin, whatever his attitude towards them might be. Wells is too sane to understand the modern world. The succession of lower-middle-class novels which are his greatest achievement stopped short at the other war and never really began again, and since 1920 he has squandered his talents in slaying paper dragons. But how much it is, after all, to have any talents to squander.

LOOKING BACK ON THE SPANISH WAR (1942)

1.

First of all the physical memories, the sounds, the smells and the

surfaces of things.

It is curious that more vividly than anything that came afterwards in the Spanish war I remember the week of so-called training that we received before being sent to the front–the huge cavalry barracks in Barcelona with its draughty stables and cobbled yards, the icy cold of the pump where one washed, the filthy meals made tolerable by pannikins of wine, the Trousered militia-women chopping firewood, and the roll-call in the early mornings where my prosaic English name made a sort of comic interlude among the resounding Spanish ones, Manuel Gonzalez, Pedro Aguilar, Ramon Fenellosa, Roque Ballaster, Jaime Domenech, Sebastian Viltron, Ramon Nuvo Bosch. I name those particular men because I remember the faces of all of them. Except for two who were mere riff-raff and have doubtless become good Falangists by this time, it is probable that all of them are dead. Two of them I know to be dead. The eldest would have been about twenty-five, the youngest sixteen.

One of the essential experiences of war is never being able to escape from disgusting smells of human origin. Latrines are an overworked subject in war literature, and I would not mention them if it were not that the latrine in our barracks did its necessary bit towards puncturing my own illusions about the Spanish civil war. The Latin type of latrine, at which you have to squat, is bad enough at its best, but these were made of some kind of polished stone so slippery that it was all you could do to keep on your feet. In addition they were always blocked. Now I have plenty of other disgusting things in my memory, but I believe it was these latrines that first brought home to me the thought, so often to recur: 'Here we are, soldiers of a revolutionary army, defending Democracy against Fascism, fighting a war which is ABOUT something, and the detail of our lives is just as sordid and degrading as it could be in prison, let alone in a bourgeois army.' Many other things reinforced this impression later; for instance, the boredom and animal hunger of trench life, the squalid intrigues over scraps of food, the mean, nagging quarrels which people exhausted by lack of sleep indulge in.

The essential horror of army life (whoever has been a soldier will know what I mean by the essential horror of army life) is barely affected by the nature of the war you happen to be fighting in.

Discipline, for instance, is ultimately the same in all armies. Orders have to be obeyed and enforced by punishment if necessary, the relationship of officer and man has to be the relationship of superior and inferior. The picture of war set forth in books like ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT is substantially true. Bullets hurt, corpses stink, men under fire are often so frightened that they wet their trousers. It is true that the social background from which an army springs will colour its training, tactics and general efficiency, and also that the consciousness of being in the right can bolster up morale, though this affects the civilian population more than the troops. (People forget that a soldier anywhere near the front line is usually too hungry, or frightened, or cold, or, above all, too tired to bother about the political origins of the war.) But the laws of nature are not suspended for a 'red' army any more than for a 'white' one. A louse is a louse and a bomb is a bomb, even though the cause you are fighting for happens to be just.

Why is it worth while to point out anything so obvious? Because the bulk of the British and American intelligentsia were manifestly unaware of it then, and are now. Our memories are short nowadays, but look back a bit, dig out the files of NEW MASSES or the DAILY WORKER, and just have a look at the romantic warmongering muck that our left-wingers were spilling at that time. All the stale old phrases! And the unimaginative callousness of it! The sang-froid with which London faced the bombing of Madrid! Here I am not bothering about the counter-propagandists of the Right, the Lunns, Garvins ET HOC GENUS; they go without saying. But here were the very people who for twenty years had hooted and jeered at the 'glory' of war, at atrocity stories, at patriotism, even at physical courage, coming out with stuff that with the alteration of a few names would have fitted into the DAILY MAIL of 1918. If there was one thing that the British intelligentsia were committed to, it was the debunking version of war, the theory that war is all corpses and latrines and never leads to any good result. Well, the same people who in 1933 sniggered pityingly if you said that in certain circumstances you would fight for your country, in 1937 were denouncing you as a Trotsky-Fascist if you suggested that the stories in NEW MASSES about freshly wounded men clamouring to get

back into the fighting might be exaggerated. And the Left intelligentsia made their swing-over from 'War is hell' to 'War is glorious' not only with no sense of incongruity but almost without any intervening stage. Later the bulk of them were to make other transitions equally violent. There must be a quite large number of people, a sort of central core of the intelligentsia, who approved the 'King and Country' declaration in 1935, shouted for a' firm line against Germany' in 1937, supported the People's Convention in 1940, and are demanding a Second Front now.

As far as the mass of the people go, the extraordinary swings of opinion which occur nowadays, the emotions which can be turned on and off like a tap, are the result of newspaper and radio hypnosis. In the intelligentsia I should say they result rather from money and mere physical safety. At a given moment they may be 'pro-war' or 'anti-war', but in either case they have no realistic picture of war in their minds. When they enthused over the Spanish war they knew, of course, that people were being killed and that to be killed is unpleasant, but they did feel that for a soldier in the Spanish Republican army the experience of war was somehow not degrading. Somehow the latrines stank less, discipline was less irksome. You have only to glance at the NEW STATESMAN to see that they believed that; exactly similar blah is being written about the Red Army at this moment. We have become too civilized to grasp the obvious. For the truth is very simple. To survive you often have to fight, and to fight you have to dirty yourself. War is evil, and it is often the lesser evil. Those who take the sword perish by the sword, and those who don't take the sword perish by smelly diseases. The fact that such a platitude is worth writing down shows what the years of RENTIER capitalism have done to us.

2.

In connexion with what I have just said, a footnote, on atrocities.

I have little direct evidence about the atrocities in the Spanish civil war. I know that some were committed by the Republicans, and far more (they are still continuing) by the Fascists. But what impressed me then, and has impressed me ever since, is that

atrocities are believed in or disbelieved in solely on grounds of political predilection. Everyone believes in the atrocities of the enemy and disbelieves in those of his own side, without ever bothering to examine the evidence. Recently I drew up a table of atrocities during the period between 1918 and the present; there was never a year when atrocities were not occurring somewhere or other, and there was hardly a single case when the Left and the Right believed in the same stories simultaneously. And stranger yet, at any moment the situation can suddenly reverse itself and yesterday's proved-to-the-hilt atrocity story can become a ridiculous lie, merely because the political landscape has changed.

In the present war we are in the curious situation that our 'atrocity campaign' was done largely before the war started, and done mostly by the Left, the people who normally pride themselves on their incredulity. In the same period the Right, the atrocity-mongers of 1914-18, were gazing at Nazi Germany and flatly refusing to see any evil in it. Then as soon as war broke out it was the pro-Nazis of yesterday who were repeating horror stories, while the anti-Nazis suddenly found themselves doubting whether the Gestapo really existed. Nor was this solely the result of the Russo-German Pact. It was partly because before the war the Left had wrongly believed that Britain and Germany would never fight and were therefore able to be anti-German and anti-British simultaneously; partly also because official war-propaganda, with its disgusting hypocrisy and self-righteousness, always tends to make thinking people sympathize with the enemy. Part of the price we paid for the systematic lying of 1914-17 was the exaggerated pro-German reaction which followed. During the years 1918-33 you were hooted at in left-wing circles if you suggested that Germany bore even a fraction of responsibility for the war. In all the denunciations of Versailles I listened to during those years I don't think I ever once heard the question, 'What would have happened if Germany had won?' even mentioned, let alone discussed. So also with atrocities. The truth, it is felt, becomes untruth when your enemy utters it. Recently I noticed that the very people who swallowed any and every horror story about the Japanese in Nanking in 1937 refused to believe exactly the same stories about Hong Kong in 1942. There was even a tendency to feel that the

Nanking atrocities had become, as it were, retrospectively untrue because the British Government now drew attention to them.

But unfortunately the truth about atrocities is far worse than that they are lied about and made into propaganda. The truth is that they happen. The fact often adduced as a reason for scepticism–that the same horror stories come up in war after war–merely makes it rather more likely that these stories are true. Evidently they are widespread fantasies, and war provides an opportunity of putting them into practice. Also, although it has ceased to be fashionable to say so, there is little question that what one may roughly call the 'whites' commit far more and worse atrocities than the 'reds'. There is not the slightest doubt, for instance, about the behaviour of the Japanese in China. Nor is there much doubt about the long tale of Fascist outrages during the last ten years in Europe. The volume of testimony is enormous, and a respectable proportion of it comes from the German press and radio. These things really happened, that is the thing to keep one's eye on. They happened even though Lord Halifax said they happened. The raping and butchering in Chinese cities, the tortures in the cellars of the Gestapo, the elderly Jewish professors flung into cesspools, the machine-gunning of refugees along the Spanish roads–they all happened, and they did not happen any the less because the DAILY TELEGRAPH has suddenly found out about them when it is five years too late.

3.

Two memories, the first not proving anything in particular, the second, I think, giving one a certain insight into the atmosphere of a revolutionary period:

Early one morning another man and I had gone out to snipe at the Fascists in the trenches outside Huesca. Their line and ours here lay three hundred yards apart, at which range our aged rifles would not shoot accurately, but by sneaking out to a spot about a hundred yards from the Fascist trench you might, if you were lucky, get a shot at someone through a gap in the parapet. Unfortunately the ground between was a flat beet field with no cover except a few ditches, and it was necessary to go out while it was still-dark and return soon after

dawn, before the light became too good. This time no Fascists appeared, and we stayed too long and were caught by the dawn. We were in a ditch, but behind us were two hundred yards of flat ground with hardly enough cover for a rabbit. We were still trying to nerve ourselves to make a dash for it when there was an uproar and a blowing of whistles in the Fascist trench. Some of our aeroplanes were coming over. At this moment, a man presumably carrying a message to an officer, jumped out of the trench and ran along the top of the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him. It is true that I am a poor shot and unlikely to hit a running man at a hundred yards, and also that I was thinking chiefly about getting back to our trench while the Fascists had their attention fixed on the aeroplanes. Still, I did not shoot partly because of that detail about the trousers. I had come here to shoot at 'Fascists'; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a 'Fascist', he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him.

What does this incident demonstrate? Nothing very much, because it is the kind of thing that happens all the time in all wars. The other is different. I don't suppose that in telling it I can make it moving to you who read it, but I ask you to believe that it is moving to me, as an incident characteristic of the moral atmosphere of a particular moment in time.

One of the recruits who joined us while I was at the barracks was a wild-looking boy from the back streets of Barcelona. He was ragged and barefooted. He was also extremely dark (Arab blood, I dare say), and made gestures you do not usually see a European make; one in particular–the arm outstretched, the palm vertical–was a gesture characteristic of Indians. One day a bundle of cigars, which you could still buy dirt cheap at that time, was stolen out of my bunk. Rather foolishly I reported this to the officer, and one of the scallywags I have already mentioned promptly came forward and said quite untruly that twenty-five pesetas had been stolen from his bunk. For some reason the officer instantly decided that the brown-faced boy must be the thief. They were very hard on stealing in the militia, and in theory people could be shot for it. The wretched boy allowed himself to be led off to the guardroom to be searched. What

most struck me was that he barely attempted to protest his innocence. In the fatalism of his attitude you could see the desperate poverty in which he had been bred. The officer ordered him to take his clothes off. With a humility which was horrible to me he stripped himself naked, and his clothes were searched. Of course neither the cigars nor the money were there; in fact he had not stolen them. What was most painful of all was that he seemed no less ashamed after his innocence had been established. That night I took him to the pictures and gave him brandy and chocolate. But that too was horrible–I mean the attempt to wipe out an injury with money. For a few minutes I had half believed him to be a thief, and that could not be wiped out.

Well, a few weeks later at the front I had trouble with one of the men in my section. By this time I was a 'cabo', or corporal, in command of twelve men. It was static warfare, horribly cold, and the chief job was getting sentries to stay awake at their posts. One day a man suddenly refused to go to a certain post, which he said quite truly was exposed to enemy fire. He was a feeble creature, and I seized hold of him and began to drag him towards his post. This roused the feelings of the others against me, for Spaniards, I think, resent being touched more than we do. Instantly I was surrounded by a ring of shouting men:' Fascist! Fascist! Let that man go! This isn't a bourgeois army. Fascist!' etc., etc. As best I could in my bad Spanish I shouted back that orders had got to be obeyed, and the row developed into one of those enormous arguments by means of which discipline is gradually hammered out in revolutionary armies. Some said I was right, others said I was wrong. But the point is that the one who took my side the most warmly of all was the brown-faced boy. As soon as he saw what was happening he sprang into the ring and began passionately defending me. With his strange, wild, Indian gesture he kept exclaiming, 'He's the best corporal we've got!' (NO HAY CABO COMO EL!) Later on he applied for leave to exchange into my section.

Why is this incident touching to me? Because in any normal circumstances it would have been impossible for good feelings ever to be re-established between this boy and myself. The implied accusation of theft would not have been made any better, probably

somewhat worse, by my efforts to make amends. One of the effects of safe and civilized life is an immense oversensitiveness which makes all the primary emotions seem somewhat disgusting. Generosity is as painful as meanness, gratitude as hateful as ingratitude. But in Spain in 1936 we were not living in a normal time. It was a time when generous feelings and gestures were easier than they ordinarily are. I could relate a dozen similar incidents, not really communicable but bound up in my own mind with the special atmosphere of the time, the shabby clothes and the gay-coloured revolutionary posters, the universal use of the word 'comrade', the anti-Fascist ballads printed on flimsy paper and sold for a penny, the phrases like 'international proletarian solidarty', pathetically repeated by ignorant men who believed them to mean something. Could you feel friendly towards somebody, and stick up for him in a quarrel, after you had been ignominiously searched in his presence for property you were supposed to have stolen from him? No, you couldn't; but you might if you had both been through some emotionally widening experience. That is one of the by-products of revolution, though in this case it was only the beginnings of a revolution, and obviously foredoomed to failure.

4.

The struggle for power between the Spanish Republican parties is an unhappy, far-off thing which I have no wish to revive at this date. I only mention it in order to say: believe nothing, or next to nothing, of what you read about internal affairs on the Government side. It is all, from whatever source, party propaganda–that is to say, lies. The broad truth about the war is simple enough. The Spanish bourgeoisie saw their chance of crushing the labour movement, and took it, aided by the Nazis and by the forces of reaction all over the world. It is doubtful whether more than that will ever be established.

I remember saying once to Arthur Koestler, 'History stopped in 1936', at which he nodded in immediate understanding. We were both thinking of totalitarianism in general, but more particularly of the Spanish civil war. Early in life I have noticed that no event is ever correctly reported in a newspaper, but in Spain, for the first

time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie. I saw great battles reported where there had been no fighting, and complete silence where hundreds of men had been killed. I saw troops who had fought bravely denounced as cowards and traitors, and others who had never seen a shot fired hailed as the heroes of imaginary victories; and I saw newspapers in London retailing these lies and eager intellectuals building emotional superstructures over events that had never happened. I saw, in fact, history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various 'party lines'. Yet in a way, horrible as all this was, it was unimportant. It concerned secondary issues–namely, the struggle for power between the Comintern and the Spanish left-wing parties, and the efforts of the Russian Government to prevent revolution in Spain. But the broad picture of the war which the Spanish Government presented to the world was not untruthful. The main issues were what it said they were. But as for the Fascists and their backers, how could they come even as near to the truth as that? How could they possibly mention their real aims? Their version of the war was pure fantasy, and in the circumstances it could not have been otherwise.

The only propaganda line open to the Nazis and Fascists was to represent themselves as Christian patriots saving Spain from a Russian dictatorship. This involved pretending that life in Government Spain was just one long massacre (VIDE the CATHOLIC HERALD or the DAILY MAIL–but these were child's play compared with the Continental Fascist press), and it involved immensely exaggerating the scale of Russian intervention. Out of the huge pyramid of lies which the Catholic and reactionary press all over the world built up, let me take just one point–the presence in Spain of a Russian army. Devout Franco partisans all believed in this; estimates of its strength went as high as half a million. Now, there was no Russian army in Spain. There may have been a handful of airmen and other technicians, a few hundred at the most, but an army there was not. Some thousands of foreigners who fought in Spain, not to mention millions of Spaniards, were witnesses of this. Well, their testimony made no impression at all upon the Franco

propagandists, not one of whom had set foot in Government Spain. Simultaneously these people refused utterly to admit the fact of German or Italian intervention at the same time as the Germany and Italian press were openly boasting about the exploits of their' legionaries'. I have chosen to mention only one point, but in fact the whole of Fascist propaganda about the war was on this level.

This kind of thing is frightening to me, because it often gives me the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. After all, the chances are that those lies, or at any rate similar lies, will pass into history. How will the history of the Spanish war be written? If Franco remains in power his nominees will write the history books, and (to stick to my chosen point) that Russian army which never existed will become historical fact, and schoolchildren will learn about it generations hence. But suppose Fascism is finally defeated and some kind of democratic government restored in Spain in the fairly near future; even then, how is the history of the war to be written? What kind of records will Franco have left behind him? Suppose even that the records kept on the Government side are recoverable–even so, how is a true history of the war to be written? For, as I have pointed out already, the Government, also dealt extensively in lies. From the anti-Fascist angle one could write a broadly truthful history of the war, but it would be a partisan history, unreliable on every minor point. Yet, after all, some kind of history will be written, and after those who actually remember the war are dead, it will be universally accepted. So for all practical purposes the lie will have become truth.

I know it is the fashion to say that most of recorded history is lies anyway. I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history COULD be truthfully written. In the past people deliberately lied, or they unconsciously coloured what they wrote, or they struggled after the truth, well knowing that they must make many mistakes; but in each case they believed that 'facts' existed and were more or less discoverable. And in practice there was always a considerable body of fact which would have been agreed to by almost everyone. If you look up the history of the last war in, for instance, the ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, you

will find that a respectable amount of the material is drawn from German sources. A British and a German historian would disagree deeply on many things, even on fundamentals, but there would still be that body of, as it were, neutral fact on which neither would seriously challenge the other. It is just this common basis of agreement, with its implication that human beings are all one species of animal, that totalitarianism destroys. Nazi theory indeed specifically denies that such a thing as 'the truth' exists. There is, for instance, no such thing as 'Science'. There is only 'German Science', 'Jewish Science', etc. The implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but THE PAST. If the Leader says of such and such an event, 'It never happened'–well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five–well, two and two are five. This prospect frightens me much more than bombs–and after our experiences of the last few years that is not a frivolous statement.

But is it perhaps childish or morbid to terrify oneself with visions of a totalitarian future? Before writing off the totalitarian world as a nightmare that can't come true, just remember that in 1925 the world of today would have seemed a nightmare that couldn't come true. Against that shifting phantasmagoric world in which black may be white tomorrow and yesterday's weather can be changed by decree, there are in reality only two safeguards. One is that however much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind your back, and you consequently can't violate it in ways that impair military efficiency. The other is that so long as some parts of the earth remain unconquered, the liberal tradition can be kept alive. Let Fascism, or possibly even a combination of several Fascisms, conquer the whole world, and those two conditions no longer exist. We in England underrate the danger of this kind of thing, because our traditions and our past security have given us a sentimental belief that it all comes right in the end and the thing you most fear never really happens. Nourished for hundreds of years on a literature in which Right invariably triumphs in the last chapter, we believe half-instinctively that evil always defeats itself in the long run. Pacifism, for instance, is founded largely on this belief. Don't resist evil, and it will somehow destroy itself. But why should it? What evidence is

there that it does? And what instance is there of a modern industrialized state collapsing unless conquered from the outside by military force?

Consider for instance the re-institution of slavery. Who could have imagined twenty years ago that slavery would return to Europe? Well, slavery has been restored under our noses. The forced-labour camps all over Europe and North Africa where Poles, Russians, Jews and political prisoners of every race toil at road-making or swamp-draining for their bare rations, are simple chattel slavery. The most one can say is that the buying and selling of slaves by individuals is not yet permitted. In other ways–the breaking-up of families, for instance–the conditions are probably worse than they were on the American cotton plantations. There is no reason for thinking that this state of affairs will change while any totalitarian domination endures. We don't grasp its full implications, because in our mystical way we feel that a régime founded on slavery MUST collapse. But it is worth comparing the duration of the slave empires of antiquity with that of any modern state. Civilizations founded on slavery have lasted for such periods as four thousand years.

When I think of antiquity, the detail that frightens me is that those hundreds of millions of slaves on whose backs civilization rested generation after generation have left behind them no record whatever. We do not even know their names. In the whole of Greek and Roman history, how many slaves' names are known to you? I can think of two, or possibly three. One is Spartacus and the other is Epictetus. Also, in the Roman room at the British Museum there is a glass jar with the maker's name inscribed on the bottom, 'FELIX FECIT'. I have a mental picture of poor Felix (a Gaul with red hair and a metal collar round his neck), but in fact he may not have been a slave; so there are only two slaves whose names I definitely know, and probably few people can remember more. The rest have gone down into utter silence.

5.

The backbone of the resistance against Franco was the Spanish working class, especially the urban trade union members. In the long

run–it is important to remember that it is only in the long run–the working class remains the most reliable enemy of Fascism, simply because the working-class stands to gain most by a decent reconstruction of society. Unlike other classes or categories, it can't be permanently bribed.

To say this is not to idealize the working class. In the long struggle that has followed the Russian Revolution it is the manual workers who have been defeated, and it is impossible not to feel that it was their own fault. Time after time, in country after country, the organized working-class movements have been crushed by open, illegal violence, and their comrades abroad, linked to them in theoretical solidarity, have simply looked on and done nothing; and underneath this, secret cause of many betrayals, has lain the fact that between white and coloured workers there is not even lip-service to solidarity. Who can believe in the class-conscious international proletariat after the events of the past ten years? To the British working class the massacre of their comrades in Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, or wherever it might be seemed less interesting and less important than yesterday's football match. Yet this does not alter the fact that the working class will go on struggling against Fascism after the others have caved in. One feature of the Nazi conquest of France was the astonishing defections among the intelligentsia, including some of the left-wing political intelligentsia. The intelligentsia are the people who squeal loudest against Fascism, and yet a respectable proportion of them collapse into defeatism when the pinch comes. They are far-sighted enough to see the odds against them, and moreover they can be bribed–for it is evident that the Nazis think it worth while to bribe intellectuals. With the working class it is the other way about. Too ignorant to see through the trick that is being played on them, they easily swallow the promises of Fascism, yet sooner or later they always take up the struggle again. They must do so, because in their own bodies they always discover that the promises of Fascism cannot be fulfilled. To win over the working class permanently, the Fascists would have to raise the general standard of living, which they are unable and probably unwilling to do. The struggle of the working class is like the growth of a plant. The plant is blind and stupid, but it knows enough to keep pushing

upwards towards the light, and it will do this in the face of endless discouragements. What are the workers struggling for? Simply for the decent life which they are more and more aware is now technically possible. Their consciousness of this aim ebbs and flows. In Spain, for a while, people were acting consciously, moving towards a goal which they wanted to reach and believed they could reach. It accounted for the curiously buoyant feeling that life in Government Spain had during the early months of the war. The common people knew in their bones that the Republic was their friend and Franco was their enemy. They knew that they were in the right, because they were fighting for something which the world owed them and was able to give them.

One has to remember this to see the Spanish war in its true perspective. When one thinks of the cruelty, squalor, and futility of War–and in this particular case of the intrigues, the persecutions, the lies and the misunderstandings–there is always the temptation to say: 'One side is as bad as the other. I am neutral'. In practice, however, one cannot be neutral, and there is hardly such a thing as a war in which it makes no difference who wins. Nearly always one stands more or less for progress, the other side more or less for reaction. The hatred which the Spanish Republic excited in millionaires, dukes, cardinals, play-boys, Blimps, and what-not would in itself be enough to show one how the land lay. In essence it was a class war. If it had been won, the cause of the common people everywhere would have been strengthened. It was lost, and the dividend-drawers all over the world rubbed their hands. That was the real issue; all else was froth on its surface.

6.

The outcome of the Spanish war was settled in London, Paris, Rome, Berlin–at any rate not in Spain. After the summer of 1937 those with eyes in their heads realized that the Government could not win the war unless there were some profound change in the international set-up, and in deciding to fight on Negrin and the others may have been partly influenced by the expectation that the world war which actually broke out in 1939 was coming in 1938. The much-

publicized disunity on the Government side was not a main cause of defeat. The Government militias were hurriedly raised, ill-armed and unimaginative in their military outlook, but they would have been the same if complete political agreement had existed from the start. At the outbreak of war the average Spanish factory-worker did not even know how to fire a rifle (there had never been universal conscription in Spain), and the traditional pacifism of the Left was a great handicap. The thousands of foreigners who served in Spain made good infantry, but there were very few experts of any kind among them. The Trotskyist thesis that the war could have been won if the revolution had not been sabotaged was probably false. To nationalize factories, demolish churches, and issue revolutionary manifestoes would not have made the armies more efficient. The Fascists won because they were the stronger; they had modern arms and the others hadn't. No political strategy could offset that.

The most baffling thing in the Spanish war was the behaviour of the great powers. The war was actually won for Franco by the Germans and Italians, whose motives were obvious enough. The motives of France and Britain are less easy to understand. In 1936 it was clear to everyone that if Britain would only help the Spanish Government, even to the extent of a few million pounds' worth of arms, Franco would collapse and German strategy would be severely dislocated. By that time one did not need to be a clairvoyant to foresee that war between Britain and Germany was coming; one could even foretell within a year or two when it would come. Yet in the most mean, cowardly, hypocritical way the British ruling class did all they could to hand Spain over to Franco and the Nazis. Why? Because they were pro-Fascist, was the obvious answer. Undoubtedly they were, and yet when it came to the final showdown they chose to Stand up to Germany. It is still very uncertain what plan they acted on in backing Franco, and they may have had no clear plan at all. Whether the British ruling class are wicked or merely stupid is one of the most difficult questions of our time, and at certain moments a very important question. As to the Russians, their motives in the Spanish war are completely inscrutable. Did they, as the pinks believed, intervene in Spain in order to defend Democracy and thwart the Nazis? Then why did they intervene on such a

niggardly scale and finally leave Spain in the lurch? Or did they, as the Catholics maintained, intervene in order to foster revolution in Spain? Then why did they do all in their power to crush the Spanish revolutionary movements, defend private property and hand power to the middle class as against the working class? Or did they, as the Trotskyists suggested, intervene simply in order to PREVENT a Spanish revolution? Then why not have backed Franco? Indeed, their actions are most easily explained if one assumes that they were acting on several contradictory motives. I believe that in the future we shall come to feel that Stalin's foreign policy, instead of being so diabolically clever as it is claimed to be, has been merely opportunistic and stupid. But at any rate, the Spanish civil war demonstrated that the Nazis knew what they were doing and their opponents did not. The war was fought at a low technical level and its major strategy was very simple. That side which had arms would win. The Nazis and the Italians gave arms to the Spanish Fascist friends, and the western democracies and the Russians didn't give arms to those who should have been their friends. So the Spanish Republic perished, having' gained what no republic missed'.

Whether it was right, as all left-wingers in other countries undoubtedly did, to encourage the Spaniards to go on fighting when they could not win is a question hard to answer. I myself think it was right, because I believe that it is better even from the point of view of survival to fight and be conquered than to surrender without fighting. The effects on the grand strategy of the struggle against Fascism cannot be assessed yet. The ragged, weaponless armies of the Republic held out for two and a half years, which was undoubtedly longer than their enemies expected. But whether that dislocated the Fascist timetable, or whether, on the other hand, it merely postponed the major war and gave the Nazis extra time to get their war machine into trim, is still uncertain.

7.

I never think of the Spanish war without two memories coming into my mind. One is of the hospital ward at Lerida and the rather sad voices of the wounded militiamen singing some song with a refrain

that ended–

UNA RESOLUCION,
LUCHAR HAST' AL FIN!

Well, they fought to the end all right. For the last eighteen months of the war the Republican armies must have been fighting almost without cigarettes, and with precious little food. Even when I left Spain in the middle of 1937, meat and bread were scarce, tobacco a rarity, coffee and sugar almost unobtainable.

The other memory is of the Italian militiaman who shook my hand in the guardroom, the day I joined the militia. I wrote about this man at the beginning of my book on the Spanish war [Homage to Catalonia], and do not want to repeat what I said there. When I remember–oh, how vividly!–his shabby uniform and fierce, pathetic, innocent face, the complex side-issues of the war seem to fade away and I see clearly that there was at any rate no doubt as to who was in the right. In spite of power politics and journalistic lying, the central issue of the war was the attempt of people like this to win the decent life which they knew to be their birthright. It is difficult to think of this particular man's probable end without several kinds of bitterness. Since I met him in the Lenin Barracks he was probably a Trotskyist or an Anarchist, and in the peculiar conditions of our time, when people of that sort are not killed by the Gestapo they are usually killed by the G.P.U. But that does not affect the long-term issues. This man's face, which I saw only for a minute or two, remains with me as a sort of visual reminder of what the war was really about. He symbolizes for me the flower of the European working class, harried by the police of all countries, the people who fill the mass graves of the Spanish battlefields and are now, to the tune of several millions, rotting in forced-labour camps.

When one thinks of all the people who support or have supported Fascism, one stands amazed at their diversity. What a crew! Think of a programme which at any rate for a while could bring Hitler, Petain, Montagu Norman, Pavelitch, William Randolph Hearst, Streicher, Buchman, Ezra Pound, Juan March, Cocteau, Thyssen, Father Coughlin, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Arnold Lunn, Antonescu,

Spengler, Beverley Nichols, Lady Houston, and Marinetti all into the same boat! But the clue is really very simple. They are all people with something to lose, or people who long for a hierarchical society and dread the prospect of a world of free and equal human beings. Behind all the ballyhoo that is talked about 'godless' Russia and the 'materialism' of the working class lies the simple intention of those with money or privileges to cling to them. Ditto, though it contains a partial truth, with all the talk about the worthlessness of social reconstruction not accompanied by a 'change of heart'. The pious ones, from the Pope to the yogis of California, are great on the' change of heart', much more reassuring from their point of view than a change in the economic system. Petain attributes the fall of France to the common people's 'love of pleasure'. One sees this in its right perspective if one stops to wonder how much pleasure the ordinary French peasant's or working-man's life would contain compared with Pétain's own. The damned impertinence of these politicians, priests, literary men, and what-not who lecture the working-class socialist for his 'materialism'! All that the working man demands is what these others would consider the indispensable minimum without which human life cannot be lived at all. Enough to eat, freedom from the haunting terror of unemployment, the knowledge that your children will get a fair chance, a bath once a day, clean linen reasonably often, a roof that doesn't leak, and short enough working hours to leave you with a little energy when the day is done. Not one of those who preach against 'materialism' would consider life livable without these things. And how easily that minimum could be attained if we chose to set our minds to it for only twenty years! To raise the standard of living of the whole world to that of Britain would not be a greater undertaking than the war we have just fought. I don't claim, and I don't know who does, that that wouldn't solve anything in itself. It is merely that privation and brute labour have to be abolished before the real problems of humanity can be tackled. The major problem of our time is the decay of the belief in personal immortality, and it cannot be dealt with while the average human being is either drudging like an ox or shivering in fear of the secret police. How right the working classes are in their 'materialism'! How right they are to realize that the belly comes before the soul, not in

the scale of values but in point of time! Understand that, and the long horror that we are enduring becomes at least intelligible. All the considerations are likely to make one falter–the siren voices of a Pétain or of a Gandhi, the inescapable fact that in order to fight one has to degrade oneself, the equivocal moral position of Britain, with its democratic phrases and its coolie empire, the sinister development of Soviet Russia, the squalid farce of left-wing politics–all this fades away and one sees only the struggle of the gradually awakening common people against the lords of property and their hired liars and bumsuckers. The question is very simple. Shall people like that Italian soldier be allowed to live the decent, fully human life which is now technically achievable, or shan't they? Shall the common man be pushed back into the mud, or shall he not? I myself believe, perhaps on insufficient grounds, that the common man will win his fight sooner or later, but I want it to be sooner and not later–some time within the next hundred years, say, and not some time within the next ten thousand years. That was the real issue of the Spanish war, and of the last war, and perhaps of other wars yet to come.

I never saw the Italian militiaman again, nor did I ever learn his name. It can be taken as quite certain that he is dead. Nearly two years later, when the war was visibly lost, I wrote these verses in his memory:

The Italian soldier shook my hand
Beside the guard-room table;
The strong hand and the subtle hand
Whose palms are only able

To meet within the sound of guns,
But oh! what peace I knew then
In gazing on his battered face
Purer than any woman's!

For the flyblown words that make me spew
Still in his ears were holy,
And he was born knowing what I had learned
Out of books and slowly.
The treacherous guns had told their tale And we both had bought

it, But my gold brick was made of gold–Oh! who ever would have thought it?

Good luck go with you, Italian soldier!
But luck is not for the brave;
What would the world give back to you?
Always less than you gave.

Between the shadow and the ghost,
Between the white and the red,
Between the bullet and the lie,
Where would you hide your head?

For where is Manuel Gonzalez,
And where is Pedro Aguilar,
And where is Ramon Fenellosa?
The earthworms know where they are.

Your name and your deeds were forgotten
Before your bones were dry,
And the lie that slew you is buried
Under a deeper lie;

But the thing that I saw in your face
No power can disinherit:
No bomb that ever burst
Shatters the crystal spirit.

RUDYARD KIPLING (1942)

It was a pity that Mr. Eliot should be so much on the defensive in the long essay with which he prefaces this selection of Kipling's poetry, but it was not to be avoided, because before one can even speak about Kipling one has to clear away a legend that has been created by two sets of people who have not read his works. Kipling is in the peculiar position of having been a byword for fifty years. During five literary generations every enlightened person has despised him, and at the end of that time nine-tenths of those enlightened persons are forgotten and Kipling is in some sense still there. Mr. Eliot never satisfactorily explains this fact, because in answering the shallow and familiar charge that Kipling is a 'Fascist', he falls into the opposite error of defending him where he is not defensible. It is no use pretending that Kipling's view of life, as a whole, can be accepted or even forgiven by any civilized person. It is no use claiming, for instance, that when Kipling describes a British soldier beating a 'nigger' with a cleaning rod in order to get money out of him, he is acting merely as a reporter and does not necessarily approve what he describes. There is not the slightest sign anywhere in Kipling's work that he disapproves of that kind of conduct–on the contrary, there is a definite strain of sadism in him, over and above the brutality which a writer of that type has to have. Kipling is a jingo imperialist, he is morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting. It is better to start by admitting that, and then to try to find out why it is that he survives while the refined people who have sniggered at him seem to wear so badly.

And yet the 'Fascist' charge has to be answered, because the first clue to any understanding of Kipling, morally or politically, is the fact that he was NOT a Fascist. He was further from being one than the most humane or the most 'progressive' person is able to be nowadays. An interesting instance of the way in which quotations are parroted to and fro without any attempt to look up their context or discover their meaning is the line from 'Recessional', 'Lesser breeds without the Law'. This line is always good for a snigger in pansy-left circles. It is assumed as a matter of course that the 'lesser breeds' are

‘natives’, and a mental picture is called up of some pukka sahib in a pith helmet kicking a coolie. In its context the sense of the line is almost the exact opposite of this. The phrase ‘lesser breeds’ refers almost certainly to the Germans, and especially the pan-German writers, who are ‘without the Law’ in the sense of being lawless, not in the sense of being powerless. The whole poem, conventionally thought of as an orgy of boasting, is a denunciation of power politics, British as well as German. Two stanzas are worth quoting (I am quoting this as politics, not as poetry):

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds without the Law–Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget–lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word–Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!

Much of Kipling’s phraseology is taken from the Bible, and no doubt in the second stanza he had in mind the text from Psalm CXXVII: ‘Except the lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.’ It is not a text that makes much impression on the post-Hitler mind. No one, in our time, believes in any sanction greater than military power; no one believes that it is possible to overcome force except by greater force. There is no ‘Law’, there is only power. I am not saying that that is a true belief, merely that it is the belief which all modern men do actually hold. Those who pretend otherwise are either intellectual cowards, or power-worshippers under a thin disguise, or have simply not caught up with the age they are living in. Kipling’s outlook is pre-fascist. He still believes that pride comes before a fall and that the gods punish HUBRIS. He does not foresee the tank, the bombing plane, the radio and the secret police, or their

psychological results.

But in saying this, does not one unsay what I said above about Kipling's jingoism and brutality? No, one is merely saying that the nineteenth-century imperialist outlook and the modern gangster outlook are two different things. Kipling belongs very definitely to the period 1885-1902. The Great War and its aftermath embittered him, but he shows little sign of having learned anything from any event later than the Boer War. He was the prophet of British Imperialism in its expansionist phase (even more than his poems, his solitary novel, THE LIGHT THAT FAILED, gives you the atmosphere of that time) and also the unofficial historian of the British Army, the old mercenary army which began to change its shape in 1914. All his confidence, his bouncing vulgar vitality, sprang out of limitations which no Fascist or near-Fascist shares.

Kipling spent the later part of his life in sulking, and no doubt it was political disappointment rather than literary vanity that account for this. Somehow history had not gone according to plan. After the greatest victory she had ever known, Britain was a lesser world power than before, and Kipling was quite acute enough to see this. The virtue had gone out of the classes he idealized, the young were hedonistic or disaffected, the desire to paint the map red had evaporated. He could not understand what was happening, because he had never had any grasp of the economic forces underlying imperial expansion. It is notable that Kipling does not seem to realize, any more than the average soldier or colonial administrator, that an empire is primarily a money-making concern. Imperialism as he sees it is a sort of forcible evangelizing. You turn a Gatling gun on a mob of unarmed 'natives', and then you establish 'the Law', which includes roads, railways and a court-house. He could not foresee, therefore, that the same motives which brought the Empire into existence would end by destroying it. It was the same motive, for example, that caused the Malayan jungles to be cleared for rubber estates, and which now causes those estates to be handed over intact to the Japanese. The modern totalitarians know what they are doing, and the nineteenth-century English did not know what they were doing. Both attitudes have their advantages, but Kipling was never able to move forward from one into the other. His outlook, allowing

for the fact that after all he was an artist, was that of the salaried bureaucrat who despises the 'box-wallah' and often lives a lifetime without realizing that the 'box-wallah' calls the tune.

But because he identifies himself with the official class, he does possess one thing which 'enlightened' people seldom or never possess, and that is a sense of responsibility. The middle-class Left hate him for this quite as much as for his cruelty and vulgarity. All left-wing parties in the highly industrialized countries are at bottom a sham, because they make it their business to fight against something which they do not really wish to destroy. They have internationalist aims, and at the same time they struggle to keep up a standard of life with which those aims are incompatible. We all live by robbing Asiatic coolies, and those of us who are 'enlightened' all maintain that those coolies ought to be set free; but our standard of living, and hence our 'enlightenment', demands that the robbery shall continue. A humanitarian is always a hypocrite, and Kipling's understanding of this is perhaps the central secret of his power to create telling phrases. It would be difficult to hit off the one-eyed pacifism of the English in fewer words than in the phrase, 'making mock of uniforms that guard you while you sleep'. It is true that Kipling does not understand the economic aspect of the relationship between the highbrow and the blimp. He does not see that the map is painted red chiefly in order that the coolie may be exploited. Instead of the coolie he sees the Indian Civil Servant; but even on that plane his grasp of function, of who protects whom, is very sound. He sees clearly that men can only be highly civilized while other men, inevitably less civilized, are there to guard and feed them.

How far does Kipling really identify himself with the administrators, soldiers and engineers whose praises he sings? Not so completely as is sometimes assumed. He had travelled very widely while he was still a young man, he had grown up with a brilliant mind in mainly philistine surroundings, and some streak in him that may have been partly neurotic led him to prefer the active man to the sensitive man. The nineteenth-century Anglo-Indians, to name the least sympathetic of his idols, were at any rate people who did things. It may be that all that they did was evil, but they changed the face of the earth (it is instructive to look at a map of Asia and compare the

railway system of India with that of the surrounding countries), whereas they could have achieved nothing, could not have maintained themselves in power for a single week, if the normal Anglo-Indian outlook had been that of, say, E.M. Forster. Tawdry and shallow though it is, Kipling's is the only literary picture that we possess of nineteenth-century Anglo-India, and he could only make it because he was just coarse enough to be able to exist and keep his mouth shut in clubs and regimental messes. But he did not greatly resemble the people he admired. I know from several private sources that many of the Anglo-Indians who were Kipling's contemporaries did not like or approve of him. They said, no doubt truly, that he knew nothing about India, and on the other hand, he was from their point of view too much of a highbrow. While in India he tended to mix with 'the wrong' people, and because of his dark complexion he was wrongly suspected of having a streak of Asiatic blood. Much in his development is traceable to his having been born in India and having left school early. With a slightly different background he might have been a good novelist or a superlative writer of music-hall songs. But how true is it that he was a vulgar flag-waver, a sort of publicity agent for Cecil Rhodes? It is true, but it is not true that he was a yes-man or a time-server. After his early days, if then, he never courted public opinion. Mr. Eliot says that what is held against him is that he expressed unpopular views in a popular style. This narrows the issue by assuming that 'unpopular' means unpopular with the intelligentsia, but it is a fact that Kipling's 'message' was one that the big public did not want, and, indeed, has never accepted. The mass of the people, in the nineties as now, were anti-militarist, bored by the Empire, and only unconsciously patriotic. Kipling's official admirers are and were the 'service' middle class, the people who read BLACKWOOD'S. In the stupid early years of this century, the blimps, having at last discovered someone who could be called a poet and who was on their side, set Kipling on a pedestal, and some of his more sententious poems, such as 'If', were given almost biblical status. But it is doubtful whether the blimps have ever read him with attention, any more than they have read the Bible. Much of what he says they could not possibly approve. Few people who have criticized England from the inside have said bitterer things about her

than this gutter patriot. As a rule it is the British working class that he is attacking, but not always. That phrase about 'the flannelled fools at the wicket and the muddied oafs at the goal' sticks like an arrow to this day, and it is aimed at the Eton and Harrow match as well as the Cup-Tie Final. Some of the verses he wrote about the Boer War have a curiously modern ring, so far as their subject-matter goes. 'Stellenbosch', which must have been written about 1902, sums up what every intelligent infantry officer was saying in 1918, or is saying now, for that matter.

Kipling's romantic ideas about England and the Empire might not have mattered if he could have held them without having the class-prejudices which at that time went with them. If one examines his best and most representative work, his soldier poems, especially BARRACK-ROOM BALLADS, one notices that what more than anything else spoils them is an underlying air of patronage. Kipling idealizes the army officer, especially the junior officer, and that to an idiotic extent, but the private soldier, though lovable and romantic, has to be a comic. He is always made to speak in a sort of stylized Cockney, not very broad but with all the aitches and final "g's" carefully omitted. Very often the result is as embarrassing as the humorous recitation at a church social. And this accounts for the curious fact that one can often improve Kipling's poems, make them less facetious and less blatant, by simply going through them and transplanting them from Cockney into standard speech. This is especially true of his refrains, which often have a truly lyrical quality. Two examples will do (one is about a funeral and the other about a wedding):

So it's knock out your pipes and follow me!
And it's finish up your swipes and follow me!
Oh, hark to the big drum calling,
Follow me–follow me home!

and again:

Cheer for the Sergeant's wedding–Give them one cheer more!
Grey gun-horses in the lando,
And a rogue is married to a whore!

Here I have restored the aitches, etc. Kipling ought to have known better. He ought to have seen that the two closing lines of the first of

these stanzas are very beautiful lines, and that ought to have overriden his impulse to make fun of a working-man's accent. In the ancient ballads the lord and the peasant speak the same language. This is impossible to Kipling, who is looking down a distorting class-perspective, and by a piece of poetic justice one of his best lines is spoiled–for 'follow me 'ome' is much uglier than 'follow me home'. But even where it makes no difference musically the facetiousness of his stage Cockney dialect is irritating. However, he is more often quoted aloud than read on the printed page, and most people instinctively make the necessary alterations when they quote him.

Can one imagine any private soldier, in the nineties or now, reading BARRACK-ROOM BALLADS and feeling that here was a writer who spoke for him? It is very hard to do so. Any soldier capable of reading a book of verse would notice at once that Kipling is almost unconscious of the class war that goes on in an army as much as elsewhere. It is not only that he thinks the soldier comic, but that he thinks him patriotic, feudal, a ready admirer of his officers and proud to be a soldier of the Queen. Of course that is partly true, or battles could not be fought, but 'What have I done for thee, England, my England?' is essentially a middle-class query. Almost any working man would follow it up immediately with 'What has England done for me?' In so far as Kipling grasps this, he simply sets it down to 'the intense selfishness of the lower classes' (his own phrase). When he is writing not of British but of 'loyal' Indians he carries the 'Salaam, sahib' motif to sometimes disgusting lengths. Yet it remains true that he has far more interest in the common soldier, far more anxiety that he shall get a fair deal, than most of the 'liberals' of his day or our own. He sees that the soldier is neglected, meanly underpaid and hypocritically despised by the people whose incomes he safeguards. 'I came to realize', he says in his posthumous memoirs, 'the bare horrors of the private's life, and the unnecessary torments he endured'. He is accused of glorifying war, and perhaps he does so, but not in the usual manner, by pretending that war is a sort of football match. Like most people capable of writing battle poetry, Kipling had never been in battle, but his vision of war is realistic. He knows that bullets hurt, that under fire everyone is terrified, that the ordinary soldier never knows what the war is about

or what is happening except in his own corner of the battlefield, and that British troops, like other troops, frequently run away:

I 'eard the knives be'ind me, but I dursn't face my man,
Nor I don't know where I went to, 'cause I didn't stop to see,
Till I 'eard a beggar squealin' out for quarter as 'e ran,
An' I thought I knew the voice an'–it was me!

Modernize the style of this, and it might have come out of one of the debunking war books of the nineteen-twenties. Or again:

An' now the hugly bullets come peckin' through the dust,
An' no one wants to face 'em, but every beggar must;
So, like a man in irons, which isn't glad to go,
They moves 'em off by companies uncommon stiff an' slow.

Compare this with:

Forward the Light Brigade!
Was there a man dismayed?
No! though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.

If anything, Kipling overdoes the horrors, for the wars of his youth were hardly wars at all by our standards. Perhaps that is due to the neurotic strain in him, the hunger for cruelty. But at least he knows that men ordered to attack impossible objectives ARE dismayed, and also that fourpence a day is not a generous pension.

How complete or truthful a picture has Kipling left us of the long-service, mercenary army of the late nineteenth century? One must say of this, as of what Kipling wrote about nineteenth-century Anglo-India, that it is not only the best but almost the only literary picture we have. He has put on record an immense amount of stuff that one could otherwise only gather from verbal tradition or from unreadable regimental histories. Perhaps his picture of army life seems fuller and more accurate than it is because any middle-class English person is likely to know enough to fill up the gaps. At any rate, reading the essay on Kipling that Mr. Edmund Wilson has just published or is just about to publish [Note, below], I was struck by the number of things that are boringly familiar to us and seem to be barely intelligible to an American. But from the body of Kipling's early work there does seem to emerge a vivid and not seriously misleading picture of the old pre-machine-gun army–the sweltering

barracks in Gibraltar or Lucknow, the red coats, the pipeclayed belts and the pillbox hats, the beer, the fights, the floggings, hangings and crucifixions, the bugle-calls, the smell of oats and horsepiss, the bellowing sergeants with foot-long moustaches, the bloody skirmishes, invariably mismanaged, the crowded troopships, the cholera-stricken camps, the 'native' concubines, the ultimate death in the workhouse. It is a crude, vulgar picture, in which a patriotic music-hall turn seems to have got mixed up with one of Zola's gorier passages, but from it future generations will be able to gather some idea of what a long-term volunteer army was like. On about the same level they will be able to learn something of British India in the days when motor-cars and refrigerators were unheard of. It is an error to imagine that we might have had better books on these subjects if, for example, George Moore, or Gissing, or Thomas Hardy, had had Kipling's opportunities. That is the kind of accident that cannot happen. It was not possible that nineteenth-century England should produce a book like WAR AND PEACE, or like Tolstoy's minor stories of army life, such as Sebastopol or THE COSSACKS, not because the talent was necessarily lacking but because no one with sufficient sensitiveness to write such books would ever have made the appropriate contacts. Tolstoy lived in a great military empire in which it seemed natural for almost any young man of family to spend a few years in the army, whereas the British Empire was and still is demilitarized to a degree which continental observers find almost incredible. Civilized men do not readily move away from the centres of civilization, and in most languages there is a great dearth of what one might call colonial literature. It took a very improbable combination of circumstances to produce Kipling's gaudy tableau, in which Private Ortheris and Mrs. Hauksbee pose against a background of palm trees to the sound of temple bells, and one necessary circumstance was that Kipling himself was only half civilized.

[Note: Published in a volume of Collected Essays, THE WOUND AND THE BOW. Author's footnote 1945]

Kipling is the only English writer of our time who has added phrases to the language. The phrases and neologisms which we take over and use without remembering their origin do not always come

from writers we admire. It is strange, for instance, to hear the Nazi broadcasters referring to the Russian soldiers as 'robots', thus unconsciously borrowing a word from a Czech democrat whom they would have killed if they could have laid hands on him. Here are half a dozen phrases coined by Kipling which one sees quoted in leaderettes in the gutter press or overhears in saloon bars from people who have barely heard his name. It will be seen that they all have a certain characteristic in common:

East is East, and West is West.

The white man's burden.

What do they know of England who only England know?

The female of the species is more deadly than the male.

Somewhere East of Suez.

Paying the Dane-geld.

There are various others, including some that have outlived their context by many years. The phrase 'killing Kruger with your mouth', for instance, was current till very recently. It is also possible that it was Kipling who first let loose the use of the word 'Huns' for Germans; at any rate he began using it as soon as the guns opened fire in 1914. But what the phrases I have listed above have in common is that they are all of them phrases which one utters semi-derisively (as it might be 'For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May'), but which one is bound to make use of sooner or later. Nothing could exceed the contempt of the NEW STATESMAN, for instance, for Kipling, but how many times during the Munich period did the NEW STATESMAN find itself quoting that phrase about paying the Dane-geld? [Note, below.] The fact is that Kipling, apart from his snack-bar wisdom and his gift for packing much cheap picturesqueness into a few words ('palm and pine'–'east of Suez'–'the road to Mandalay'), is generally talking about things that are of urgent interest. It does not matter, from this point of view, that thinking and decent people generally find themselves on the other side of the fence from him. 'White man's burden' instantly conjures up a real problem, even if one feels that it ought to be altered to 'black man's burden'. One may disagree to the middle of one's bones with the political attitude implied in 'The Islanders', but one cannot say that it is a frivolous attitude. Kipling

deals in thoughts which are both vulgar and permanent. This raises the question of his special status as a poet, or verse-writer.

[Note: On the first page of his recent book, ADAM AND EVE, Mr. Middleton Murry quotes the well-known lines:

There are nine and sixty ways

Of constructing tribal lays,

And every single one of them is right.

He attributes these lines to Thackeray. This is probably what is known as a 'Freudian error.' A civilized person would prefer not to quote Kipling–i.e. would prefer not to feel that it was Kipling who had expressed his thought for him. (Author's footnote 1945.)]

Mr. Eliot describes Kipling's metrical work as 'verse' and not 'poetry', but adds that it is 'GREAT verse', and further qualifies this by saying that a writer can only be described as a 'great verse-writer' if there is some of his work 'of which we cannot say whether it is verse or poetry'. Apparently Kipling was a versifier who occasionally wrote poems, in which case it was a pity that Mr. Eliot did not specify these poems by name. The trouble is that whenever an aesthetic judgement on Kipling's work seems to be called for, Mr. Eliot is too much on the defensive to be able to speak plainly. What he does not say, and what I think one ought to start by saying in any discussion of Kipling, is that most of Kipling's verse is so horribly vulgar that it gives one the same sensation as one gets from watching a third-rate music-hall performer recite 'The Pigtail of Wu Fang Fu' with the purple limelight on his face, AND yet there is much of it that is capable of giving pleasure to people who know what poetry means. At his worst, and also his most vital, in poems like 'Gunga Din' or 'Danny Deever', Kipling is almost a shameful pleasure, like the taste for cheap sweets that some people secretly carry into middle life. But even with his best passages one has the same sense of being seduced by something spurious, and yet unquestionably seduced. Unless one is merely a snob and a liar it is impossible to say that no one who cares for poetry could get any pleasure out of such lines as:

For the wind is in the palm trees, and the temple bells they say,

'Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay!'

and yet those lines are not poetry in the same sense as 'Felix

Randal' or 'When icicles hang by the wall' are poetry. One can, perhaps, place Kipling more satisfactorily than by juggling with the words 'verse' and 'poetry', if one describes him simply as a good bad poet. He is as a poet what Harriet Beecher Stowe was as a novelist. And the mere existence of work of this kind, which is perceived by generation after generation to be vulgar and yet goes on being read, tells one something about the age we live in.

There is a great deal of good bad poetry in English, all of it, I should say, subsequent to 1790. Examples of good bad poems–I am deliberately choosing diverse ones–are 'The Bridge of Sighs', 'When all the world is young, lad', 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', Bret Harte's 'Dickens in Camp', 'The Burial of Sir John Moore', 'Jenny Kissed Me', 'Keith of Ravelston', 'Casabianca'. All of these reek of sentimentality, and yet–not these particular poems, perhaps, but poems of this kind, are capable of giving true pleasure to people who can see clearly what is wrong with them. One could fill a fair-sized anthology with good bad poems, if it were not for the significant fact that good bad poetry is usually too well known to be worth reprinting.

It is no use pretending that in an age like our own, 'good' poetry can have any genuine popularity. It is, and must be, the cult of a very few people, the least tolerated of the arts. Perhaps that statement needs a certain amount of qualification. True poetry can sometimes be acceptable to the mass of the people when it disguises itself as something else. One can see an example of this in the folk-poetry that England still possesses, certain nursery rhymes and mnemonic rhymes, for instance, and the songs that soldiers make up, including the words that go to some of the bugle-calls. But in general ours is a civilization in which the very word 'poetry' evokes a hostile snigger or, at best, the sort of frozen disgust that most people feel when they hear the word 'God'. If you are good at playing the concertina you could probably go into the nearest public bar and get yourself an appreciative audience within five minutes. But what would be the attitude of that same audience if you suggested reading them Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance? Good bad poetry, however, can get across to the most unpromising audiences if the right atmosphere has been worked up beforehand. Some months back Churchill

produced a great effect by quoting Clough's 'Endeavour' in one of his broadcast speeches. I listened to this speech among people who could certainly not be accused of caring for poetry, and I am convinced that the lapse into verse impressed them and did not embarrass them. But not even Churchill could have got away with it if he had quoted anything much better than this.

In so far as a writer of verse can be popular, Kipling has been and probably still is popular. In his own lifetime some of his poems travelled far beyond the bounds of the reading public, beyond the world of school prize-days, Boy Scout sing-songs, limp-leather editions, poker-work and calendars, and out into the yet vaster world of the music halls. Nevertheless, Mr. Eliot thinks it worth while to edit him, thus confessing to a taste which others share but are not always honest enough to mention. The fact that such a thing as good bad poetry can exist is a sign of the emotional overlap between the intellectual and the ordinary man. The intellectual is different from the ordinary man, but only in certain sections of his personality, and even then not all the time. But what is the peculiarity of a good bad poem? A good bad poem is a graceful monument to the obvious. It records in memorable form–for verse is a mnemonic device, among other things–some emotion which very nearly every human being can share. The merit of a poem like 'When all the world is young, lad' is that, however sentimental it may be, its sentiment is 'true' sentiment in the sense that you are bound to find yourself thinking the thought it expresses sooner or later; and then, if you happen to know the poem, it will come back into your mind and seem better than it did before. Such poems are a kind of rhyming proverb, and it is a fact that definitely popular poetry is usually gnomic or sententious. One example from Kipling will do:

White hands cling to the bridle rein,
Slipping the spur from the booted heel;
Tenderest voices cry 'Turn again!'
Red lips tarnish the scabbarded steel:
Down to Gehenna or up to the Throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone.

There is a vulgar thought vigorously expressed. It may not be true, but at any rate it is a thought that everyone thinks. Sooner or later

you will have occasion to feel that he travels the fastest who travels alone, and there the thought is, ready made and, as it were, waiting for you. So the chances are that, having once heard this line, you will remember it.

One reason for Kipling's power as a good bad poet I have already suggested–his sense of responsibility, which made it possible for him to have a world-view, even though it happened to be a false one. Although he had no direct connexion with any political party, Kipling was a Conservative, a thing that does not exist nowadays. Those who now call themselves Conservatives are either Liberals, Fascists or the accomplices of Fascists. He identified himself with the ruling power and not with the opposition. In a gifted writer this seems to us strange and even disgusting, but it did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on reality. The ruling power is always faced with the question, 'In such and such circumstances, what would you DO?', whereas the opposition is not obliged to take responsibility or make any real decisions. Where it is a permanent and pensioned opposition, as in England, the quality of its thought deteriorates accordingly. Moreover, anyone who starts out with a pessimistic, reactionary view of life tends to be justified by events, for Utopia never arrives and 'the gods of the copybook headings', as Kipling himself put it, always return. Kipling sold out to the British governing class, not financially but emotionally. This warped his political judgement, for the British ruling class were not what he imagined, and it led him into abysses of folly and snobbery, but he gained a corresponding advantage from having at least tried to imagine what action and responsibility are like. It is a great thing in his favour that he is not witty, not 'daring', has no wish to ÉPATER LES BOURGEOIS. He dealt largely in platitudes, and since we live in a world of platitudes, much of what he said sticks. Even his worst follies seem less shallow and less irritating than the 'enlightened' utterances of the same period, such as Wilde's epigrams or the collection of cracker-mottoes at the end of MAN AND SUPERMAN.

MARK TWAIN–THE LICENSED JESTER (1943)

Mark Twain has crashed the lofty gates of the Everyman library, but only with TOM SAWYER and HUCKLEBERRY FINN, already fairly well known under the guise of 'children's books' (which they are not). His best and most characteristic books, ROUGHING IT, THE INNOCENTS AT HOME, and even LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI, are little remembered in this country, though no doubt in America the patriotism which is everywhere mixed up with literary judgement keeps them alive.

Although Mark Twain produced a surprising variety of books, ranging from a namby-pamby 'life' of Joan of Arc to a pamphlet so obscene that it has never been publicly printed, all that is best in his work centres about the Mississippi river and the wild mining towns of the West. Born in 1835 (he came of a Southern family, a family just rich enough to own one or perhaps two slaves), he had had his youth and early manhood in the golden age of America, the period when the great plains were opened up, when wealth and opportunity seemed limitless, and human beings felt free, indeed were free, as they had never been before and may not be again for centuries. LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI and the two other books that I have mentioned are a ragbag of anecdotes, scenic descriptions and social history both serious and burlesque, but they have a central theme which could perhaps be put into these words: 'This is how human beings behave when they are not frightened of the sack.' In writing these books Mark Twain is not consciously writing a hymn to liberty. Primarily he is interested in 'character', in the fantastic, almost lunatic variations which human nature is capable of when economic pressure and tradition are both removed from it. The raftsmen, Mississippi pilots, miners and bandits whom he describes are probably not much exaggerated, but they are as different from modern men, and from one another, as the gargoyles of a medieval cathedral. They could develop their strange and sometimes sinister individuality because of the lack of any outside pressure. The State hardly existed, the churches were weak and spoke with many voices, and land was to be had for the taking. If you disliked your job you

simply hit the boss in the eye and moved further west; and moreover, money was so plentiful that the smallest coin in circulation was worth a shilling. The American pioneers were not supermen, and they were not especially courageous. Whole towns of hardy gold miners let themselves be terrorized by bandits whom they lacked the public spirit to put down. They were not even free from class distinctions. The desperado who stalked through the streets of the mining settlement, with a Derringer pistol in his waistcoat pocket and twenty corpses to his credit, was dressed in a frock coat and shiny top-hat, described himself firmly as a 'gentleman' and was meticulous about table manners. But at least it was NOT the case that a man's destiny was settled from his birth. The 'log cabin to White House' myth was true while the free land lasted. In a way, it was for this that the Paris mob had stormed the Bastille, and when one reads Mark Twain, Bret Harte and Whitman it is hard to feel that their effort was wasted.

However, Mark Twain aimed at being something more than a chronicler of the Mississippi and the Gold Rush. In his own day he was famous all over the world as a humorist and comic lecturer. In New York, London, Berlin, Vienna, Melbourne and Calcutta vast audiences rocked with laughter over jokes which have now, almost without exception, ceased to be funny. (It is worth noticing that Mark Twain's lectures were only a success with Anglo-Saxon and German audiences. The relatively grown-up Latin races–whose own humour, he complained, always centred round sex and politics–never cared for them.) But in addition, Mark Twain had some pretensions to being a social critic, even a species of philosopher. He had in him an iconoclastic, even revolutionary vein which he obviously wanted to follow up and yet somehow never did follow up. He might have been a destroyer of humbugs and a prophet of democracy more valuable than Whitman, because healthier and more humorous. Instead he became that dubious thing a 'public figure', flattered by passport officials and entertained by royalty, and his career reflects the deterioration in American life that set in after the Civil War.

Mark Twain has sometimes been compared with his contemporary, Anatole France. This comparison is not so pointless as it may sound. Both men were the spiritual children of Voltaire,

both had an ironical, sceptical view of life, and a native pessimism overlaid by gaiety; both knew that the existing social order is a swindle and its cherished beliefs mostly delusions. Both were bigoted atheists and convinced (in Mark Twain's case this was Darwin's doing) of the unbearable cruelty of the universe. But there the resemblance ends. Not only is the Frenchman enormously more learned, more civilized, more alive aesthetically, but he is also more courageous. He does attack the things he disbelieves in; he does not, like Mark swain, always take refuge behind the amiable mask of the 'public figure' and the licensed jester. He is ready to risk the anger of the Church and to take the unpopular side in a controversy–in the Dreyfus case, for example. Mark Twain, except perhaps in one short essay 'What is Man?', never attacks established beliefs in a way that is likely to get him into trouble. Nor could he ever wean himself from the notion, which is perhaps especially an American notion, that success and virtue are the same thing.

In LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI there is a queer little illustration of the central weakness of Mark Twain's character. In the earlier part of this mainly autobiographical book the dates have been altered. Mark Twain describes his adventures as a Mississippi pilot as though he had been a boy of about seventeen at the time, whereas in fact he was a young man of nearly thirty. There is a reason for this. The same part of the book describes his exploits in the Civil War, which were distinctly inglorious. Moreover, Mark Twain started by fighting, if he can be said to have fought, on the Southern side, and then changed his allegiance before the war was over. This kind of behaviour is more excusable in a boy than in a man, whence the adjustment of the dates. It is also clear enough, however, that he changed sides because he saw that the North was going to win; and this tendency to side with the stronger whenever possible, to believe that might must be right, is apparent throughout his career. In ROUGHING IT there is an interesting account of a bandit named Slade, who, among countless other outrages, had committed twenty-eight murders. It is perfectly clear that Mark Twain admires this disgusting scoundrel. Slade was successful; therefore he was admirable. This outlook, no less common today, is summed up in the significant American expression 'to MAKE GOOD'.

In the money-grubbing period that followed the Civil War it was hard for anyone of Mark Twain's temperament to refuse to be a success. The old, simple, stump-whittling, tobacco-chewing democracy which Abraham Lincoln typified was perishing: it was now the age of cheap immigrant labour and the growth of Big Business. Mark Twain mildly satirized his contemporaries in The GILDED AGE, but he also gave himself up to the prevailing fever, and made and lost vast sums of money. He even for a period of years deserted writing for business; and he squandered his time on buffooneries, not merely lecture tours and public banquets, but, for instance, the writing of a book like A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT, which is a deliberate flattery of all that is worst and most vulgar in American life. The man who might have been a kind of rustic Voltaire became the world's leading after-dinner speaker, charming alike for his anecdotes and his power to make businessmen feel themselves public benefactors.

It is usual to blame Mark Twain's wife for his failure to write the books he ought to have written, and it is evident that she did tyrannize over him pretty thoroughly. Each morning, Mark Twain would show her what he had written the day before, and Mrs. Clemens (Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Clemens) would go over it with the blue pencil, cutting out everything that she thought unsuitable. She seems to have been a drastic blue-penciller even by nineteenth-century standards. There is an account in W.D. Howells's book MY MARK TWAIN of the fuss that occurred over a terrible expletive that had crept into HUCKLEBERRY FINN. Mark Twain appealed to Howells, who admitted that it was 'just what Huck would have said', but agreed with Mrs. Clemens that the word could not possibly be printed. The word was 'hell'. Nevertheless, no writer is really the intellectual slave of his wife. Mrs. Clemens could not have stopped Mark Twain writing any book he really wanted to write. She may have made his surrender to society easier, but the surrender happened because of that flaw in his own nature, his inability to despise success.

Several of Mark Twain's books are bound to survive, because they contain invaluable social history. His life covered the great period of American expansion. When he was a child it was a normal

day's outing to go with a picnic lunch and watch the hanging of an Abolitionist, and when he died the aeroplane was ceasing to be a novelty. This period in America produced relatively little literature, and but for Mark Twain our picture of a Mississippi paddle-steamer, or a stage-coach crossing the plains, would be much dimmer than it is. But most people who have studied his work have come away with a feeling that he might have done something more. He gives all the while a strange impression of being about to say something and then funking it, so that LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI and the rest of them seem to be haunted by the ghost of a greater and much more coherent book. Significantly, he starts his autobiography by remarking that a man's inner life is indescribable. We do not know what he would have said–it is just possible that the unprocurable pamphlet, 1601, would supply a clue but we may guess that it would have wrecked his reputation and reduced his income to reasonable proportions.

POETRY AND THE MICROPHONE (1943)

About a year ago I and a number of others were engaged in broadcasting literary programmes to India, and among other things we broadcast a good deal of verse by contemporary and near-contemporary English writers–for example, Eliot, Herbert Read, Auden, Spender, Dylan Thomas, Henry Treece, Alex Comfort, Robert Bridges, Edmund Blunden, D.H. Lawrence. Whenever it was possible we had poems broadcast by the people who wrote them. Just why these particular programmes (a small and remote out-flanking movement in the radio war) were instituted there is no need to explain here, but I should add that the fact that we were broadcasting to an Indian audience dictated our technique to some extent. The essential point was that our literary broadcasts were aimed at the Indian university students, a small and hostile audience, unapproachable by anything that could be described as British propaganda. It was known in advance that we could not hope for more than a few thousand listeners at the most, and this gave us an excuse to be more "highbrow" than is generally possible on the air.

If you are broadcasting poetry to people who know your language but don't share your cultural background, a certain amount of comment and explanation is unavoidable, and the formula we usually followed was to broadcast what purported to be a monthly literary magazine. The editorial staff were supposedly sitting in their office, discussing what to put into the next number. Somebody suggested one poem, someone else suggested another, there was a short discussion and then came the poem itself, read in a different voice, preferably the author's own. This poem naturally called up another, and so the programme continued, usually with at least half a minute of discussion between any two items. For a half-hour programme, six voices seemed to be the best number. A programme of this sort was necessarily somewhat shapeless, but it could be given a certain appearance of unity by making it revolve round a single central theme. For example, one number of our imaginary magazine was devoted to the subject of war. It included two poems by Edmund Blunden, Auden's "September 1941 ", extracts from a long poem by

G.S. Fraser ("A Letter to Anne Ridler"), Byron's "Isles of Greece" and an extract from T.E. Lawrence's REVOLT IN THE DESERT. These half-dozen items, with the arguments that preceded and followed them, covered reasonably well the possible attitudes towards war. The poems and the prose extract took about twenty minutes to broadcast, the arguments about eight minutes.

This formula may seem slightly ridiculous and also rather patronising, but its advantage is that the element of mere instruction, the textbook motif, which is quite unavoidable if one is going to broadcast serious and sometimes "difficult" verse, becomes a lot less forbidding when it appears as an informal discussion. The various speakers can ostensibly say to one another what they are in reality saying to the audience. Also, by such an approach you at least give a poem a context, which is just what poetry lacks from the average man's point of view. But of course there are other methods. One which we frequently used was to set a poem in music. It is announced that in a few minutes' time such and such a poem will be broadcast; then the music plays for perhaps a minute, then fades out into the poem, which follows without any title or announcement, then the music is faded again and plays up for another minute or two–the whole thing taking perhaps five minutes. It is necessary to choose appropriate music, but needless to say, the real purpose of the music is to insulate the poem from the rest of the programme. By this method you can have, say, a Shakespeare sonnet within three minutes of a news bulletin without, at any rate to my ear, any gross incongruity.

These programmes that I have been speaking of were of no great value in themselves, but I have mentioned them because of the ideas they aroused in myself and some others about the possibilities of the radio as a means of popularising poetry. I was early struck by the fact that the broadcasting of a poem by the person who wrote it does not merely produce an effect upon the audience, if any, but also on the poet himself. One must remember that extremely little in the way of broadcasting poetry has been done in England, and that many people who write verse have never even considered the idea of reading it aloud. By being set down at a microphone, especially if this happens at all regularly, the poet is brought into a new relationship with his

work, not otherwise attainable in our time and country. It is a commonplace that in modern times–the last two hundred years, say–poetry has come to have less and less connection either with music or with the spoken word. It needs print in order to exist at all, and it is no more expected that a poet, as such, will know how to sing or even to declaim than it is expected that an architect will know how to plaster a ceiling. Lyrical and rhetorical poetry have almost ceased to be written, and a hostility towards poetry on the part of the common man has come to be taken for granted in any country where everyone can read. And where such a breach exists it is always inclined to widen, because the concept of poetry as primarily something printed, and something intelligible only to a minority, encourages obscurity and "cleverness". How many people do not feel quasi-instinctively that there must be something wrong with any poem whose meaning can be taken in at a single glance? It seems unlikely that these tendencies will be checked unless it again becomes normal to read verse aloud, and it is difficult to see how this can be brought about except by using the radio as a medium. But the special advantage of the radio, its power to select the right audience, and to do away with stage-fright and embarrassment, ought here to be noticed.

In broadcasting your audience is conjectural, but it is an audience of ONE. Millions may be listening, but each is listening alone, or as a member of a small group, and each has (or ought to have) the feeling that you are speaking to him individually. More than this, it is reasonable to assume that your audience is sympathetic, or at least interested, for anyone who is bored can promptly switch you off by turning a knob. But though presumably sympathetic, the audience HAS NO POWER OVER YOU. It is just here that a broadcast differs from a speech or a lecture. On the platform, as anyone used to public speaking knows, it is almost impossible not to take your tone from the audience. It is always obvious within a few minutes what they will respond to and what they will not, and in practice you are almost compelled to speak for the benefit of what you estimate as the stupidest person present, and also to ingratiate yourself by means of the ballyhoo known as "personality". If you don't do so, the result is always an atmosphere of frigid embarrassment. That grisly thing, a "poetry reading", is what it is because there will always be some

among the audience who are bored or all but frankly hostile and who can't remove themselves by the simple act of turning a knob. And it is at bottom the same difficulty–the fact that a theatre audience is not a selected one–that makes it impossible to get a decent performance of Shakespeare in England. On the air these conditions do not exist. The poet FEELS that he is addressing people to whom poetry means something, and it is a fact that poets who are used to broadcasting can read into the microphone with a virtuosity they would not equal if they had a visible audience in front of them. The element of make-believe that enters here does not greatly matter. The point is that in the only way now possible the poet has been brought into a situation in which reading verse aloud seems a natural unembarrassing thing, a normal exchange between man and man: also he has been led to think of his work as SOUND rather than as a pattern on paper. By that much the reconciliation between poetry and the common man is nearer. It already exists at the poet's end of the aether-waves, whatever may be happening at the other end.

However, what is happening at the other end cannot be disregarded. It will be seen that I have been speaking as though the whole subject of poetry were embarrassing, almost indecent, as though popularising poetry were essentially a strategic manoeuvre, like getting a dose of medicine down a child's throat or establishing tolerance for a persecuted sect. But unfortunately that or something like it is the case. There can be no doubt that in our civilisation poetry is by far the most discredited of the arts, the only art, indeed, in which the average man refuses to discern any value. Arnold Bennett was hardly exaggerating when he said that in the English-speaking countries the word "poetry" would disperse a crowd quicker than a fire-hose. And as I have pointed out, a breach of this kind tends to widen simply because of its existence, the common man becoming more and more anti-poetry, the poet more and more arrogant and unintelligible, until the divorce between poetry and popular culture is accepted as a sort of law of nature, although in fact it belongs only to our own time and to a comparatively small area of the earth. We live in an age in which the average human being in the highly civilised countries is aesthetically inferior to the lowest savage. This state of affairs is generally looked upon as being

incurable by any CONSCIOUS act, and on the other hand is expected to right itself of its own accord as soon as society takes a comelier shape. With slight variations the Marxist, the Anarchist and the religious believer will all tell you this, and in broad terms it is undoubtedly true. The ugliness amid which we live has spiritual and economic causes and is not to be explained by the mere going-astray of tradition at some point or other. But it does not follow that no improvement is possible within our present framework, nor that an aesthetic improvement is not a necessary part of the general redemption of society. It is worth stopping to wonder, therefore, whether it would not be possible even now to rescue poetry from its special position as the most hated of the arts and win for it at least the same degree of toleration as exists for music. But one has to start by asking, in what way and to what extent is poetry unpopular?

On the face of it, the unpopularity of poetry is as complete as it could be. But on second thoughts, this has to be qualified in a rather peculiar way. To begin with, there is still an appreciable amount of folk poetry (nursery rhymes etc) which is universally known and quoted and forms part of the background of everyone's mind. There is also a handful of ancient songs and ballads which have never gone out of favour. In addition there is the popularity, or at least the toleration, of "good bad" poetry, generally of a patriotic or sentimental kind. This might seem beside the point if it were not that "good bad" poetry has all the characteristics which, ostensibly, make the average man dislike true poetry. It is in verse, it rhymes, it deals in lofty sentiments and unusual language–all this to a very marked degree, for it is almost axiomatic that bad poetry is more "poetical" than good poetry. Yet if not actively liked it is at least tolerated. For example, just before writing this I have been listening to a couple of BBC comedians doing their usual turn before the 9 o'clock news. In the last three minutes one of the two comedians suddenly announces that he "wants to be serious for a moment" and proceeds to recite a piece of patriotic balderdash entitled "A Fine Old English Gentleman", in praise of His Majesty the King. Now, what is the reaction of the audience to this sudden lapse into the worst sort of rhyming heroics? It cannot be very violently negative, or there would be a sufficient volume of indignant letters to stop the BBC doing this

kind of thing. One must conclude that though the big public is hostile to POETRY, it is not strongly hostile to VERSE. After all, if rhyme and metre were disliked for their own sakes, neither songs nor dirty limericks could be popular. Poetry is disliked because it is associated with untelligibility, intellectual pretentiousness and a general feeling of Sunday-on-a-weekday. Its name creates in advance the same sort of bad impression as the word "God", or a parson's dog-collar. To a certain extent, popularising poetry is a question of breaking down an acquired inhibition. It is a question of getting people to listen instead of uttering a mechanical raspberry. If true poetry could be introduced to the big public in such a way as to make it seem NORMAL, as that piece of rubbish I have just listened to presumably seemed normal, then part of the prejudice against it might be overcome.

It is difficult to believe that poetry can ever be popularised again without some deliberate effort at the education of public taste, involving strategy and perhaps even subterfuge. T.S. Eliot once suggested that poetry, particularly dramatic poetry, might be brought back into the consciousness of ordinary people through the medium of the music hall; he might have added the pantomime, whose vast possibilities do not seem ever to have been completely explored. "Sweeney Agonistes" was perhaps written with some such idea in mind, and it would in fact be conceivable as a music-hall turn, or at least as a scene in a revue. I have suggested the radio as a more hopeful medium, and I have pointed out its technical advantages, particularly from the point of view of the poet. The reason why such a suggestion sounds hopeless at first hearing is that few people are able to imagine the radio being used for the dissemination of anything except tripe. People listen to the stuff that does actually dribble from the loud-speakers of the world, and conclude that it is for that and nothing else that the wireless exists. Indeed the very word "wireless" calls up a picture either of roaring dictators or of genteel throaty voices announcing that three of our aircraft have failed to return. Poetry on the air sounds like the Muses in striped trousers. Nevertheless one ought not to confuse the capabilities of an instrument with the use it is actually put to. Broadcasting is what it is, not because there is something inherently vulgar, silly and dishonest about the whole apparatus of microphone and transmitter,

but because all the broadcasting that now happens all over the world is under the control of governments or great monopoly companies which are actively interested in maintaining the STATUS QUO and therefore in preventing the common man from becoming too intelligent. Something of the same kind has happened to the cinema, which, like the radio, made its appearance during the monopoly stage of capitalism and is fantastically expensive to operate. In all the arts the tendency is similar. More and more the channels of production are under the control of bureaucrats, whose aim is to destroy the artist or at least to castrate him. This would be a bleak outlook if it were not that the totalitarianisation which is now going on, and must undoubtedly continue to go on, in every country of the world, is mitigated by another process which it was not easy to foresee even as short a time as five years ago.

This is, that the huge bureaucratic machines of which we are all part are beginning to work creakily because of their mere size and their constant growth. The tendency of the modern state is to wipe out the freedom of the intellect, and yet at the same time every state, especially under the pressure of war, finds itself more and more in need of an intelligentsia to do its publicity for it. The modern state needs, for example, pamphlet-writers, poster artists, illustrators, broadcasters, lecturers, film producers, actors, song composers, even painters and sculptors, not to mention psychologists, sociologists, bio-chemists, mathematicians and what not. The British Government started the present war with the more or less openly declared intention of keeping the literary intelligentsia out of it; yet after three years of war almost every writer, however undesirable his political history or opinions, has been sucked into the various Ministries or the BBC and even those who enter the armed forces tend to find themselves after a while in Public Relations or some other essentially literary job. The Government has absorbed these people, unwillingly enough, because it found itself unable to get on without them. The ideal, from the official point of view, would have been to put all publicity into the hands of "safe" people like A.P. Herbert or Ian Hay: but since not enough of these were available, the existing intelligentsia had to be utilised, and the tone and even to some extent the content of official propaganda have been modified accordingly.

No one acquainted with the Government pamphlets, ABCA (The Army Bureau of Current Affairs.) lectures, documentary films and broadcasts to occupied countries which have been issued during the past two years imagines that our rulers would sponsor this kind of thing if they could help it. Only, the bigger the machine of government becomes, the more loose ends and forgotten corners there are in it. This is perhaps a small consolation, but it is not a despicable one. It means that in countries where there is already a strong liberal tradition, bureaucratic tyranny can perhaps never be complete. The striped-trousered ones will rule, but so long as they are forced to maintain an intelligentsia, the intelligentsia will have a certain amount of autonomy. If the Government needs, for example, documentary films, it must employ people specially interested in the technique of the film, and it must allow them the necessary minimum of freedom; consequently, films that are all wrong from the bureaucratic point of view will always have a tendency to appear. So also with painting, photography, script-writing, reportage, lecturing and all the other arts and half-arts of which a complex modern state has need.

The application of this to the radio is obvious. At present the loudspeaker is the enemy of the creative writer, but this may not necessarily remain true when the volume and scope of broadcasting increase. As things are, although the BBC does keep up a feeble show of interest in contemporary literature, it is harder to capture five minutes on the air in which to broadcast a poem than twelve hours in which to disseminate lying propaganda, tinned music, stale jokes, faked "discussions" or what-have-you. But that state of affairs may alter in the way I have indicated, and when that time comes serious experiment in the broadcasting of verse, with complete disregard for the various hostile influences which prevent any such thing at present, would become possible. I don't claim it as certain that such an experiment would have very great results. The radio was bureaucratised so early in its career that the relationship between broadcasting and literature has never been thought out. It is not certain that the microphone is the instrument by which poetry could be brought back to the common people and it is not even certain that poetry would gain by being more of a spoken and less of a written

thing. But I do urge that these possibilities exist, and that those who care for literature might turn their minds more often to this much-despised medium, whose powers for good have perhaps been obscured by the voices of Professor Joad and Doctor Goebbels.

W B YEATS (1943)

One thing that Marxist criticism has not succeeded in doing is to trace the connection between "tendency" and literary style. The subject-matter and imagery of a book can be explained in sociological terms, but its texture seemingly cannot. Yet some such connection there must be. One knows, for instance, that a Socialist would not write like Chesterton or a Tory imperialist like Bernard Shaw, though HOW one knows it is not easy to say. In the case of Yeats, there must be some kind of connection between his wayward, even tortured style of writing and his rather sinister vision of life. Mr Menon is chiefly concerned with the esoteric philosophy underlying Yeats's work, but the quotations which are scattered all through his interesting book serve to remind one how artificial Yeats's manner of writing was. As a rule, this artificiality is accepted as Irishism, or Yeats is even credited with simplicity because he uses short words, but in fact one seldom comes on six consecutive lines of his verse in which there is not an archaism or an affected turn of speech. To take the nearest example:

Grant me an old man's Frenzy,
My self must I remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till Truth obeyed his call.

The unnecessary "that" imports a feeling of affectation, and the same tendency is present in all but Yeats's best passages. One is seldom long away from a suspicion of "quaintness", something that links up not only with the 'nineties, the Ivory Tower and the "calf covers of pissed-on green", but also with Rackham's drawings, Liberty art-fabrics and the PETER PAN never-never land, of which, after all, "The Happy Townland" is merely a more appetising example. This does not matter, because, on the whole, Yeats gets away with it, and if his straining after effect is often irritating, it can also produce phrases ("the chill, footless years", "the mackerel-crowded seas") which suddenly overwhelm one like a girl's face

seen across a room. He is an exception to the rule that poets do not use poetical language:

How many centuries spent
The sedentary soul
In toils of measurement
Beyond eagle or mole,
Beyond hearing or seeing,
Or Archimedes' guess,
To raise into being
That loveliness?

Here he does not flinch from a squashy vulgar word like "loveliness" and after all it does not seriously spoil this wonderful passage. But the same tendencies, together with a sort of raggedness which is no doubt intentional, weaken his epigrams and polemical poems. For instance (I am quoting from memory) the epigram against the critics who damned THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD:

Once when midnight smote the air
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
On every crowded street to stare
Upon great Juan riding by;
Even like these to rail and sweat,
Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

The power which Yeats has within himself gives him the analogy ready made and produces the tremendous scorn of the last line, but even in this short poem there are six or seven unnecessary words. It would probably have been deadlier if it had been neater.

Mr Menon's book is incidentally a short biography of Yeats, but he is above all interested in Yeats's philosophical "system", which in his opinion supplies the subject-matter of more of Yeats's poems than is generally recognised. This system is set forth fragmentarily in various places, and at full length in A VISION, a privately printed book which I have never read but which Mr Menon quotes from extensively. Yeats gave conflicting accounts of its origin, and Mr Menon hints pretty broadly that the "documents" on which it was ostensibly founded were imaginary. Yeats's philosophical system,

says Mr Menon, "was at the back of his intellectual life almost from the beginning. His poetry is full of it. Without it his later poetry becomes almost completely unintelligible." As soon as we begin to read about the so-called system we are in the middle of a hocus-pocus of Great Wheels, gyres, cycles of the moon, reincarnation, disembodied spirits, astrology and what not. Yeats hedges as to the literalness with which he believed in all this, but he certainly dabbled in spiritualism and astrology, and in earlier life had made experiments in alchemy. Although almost buried under explanations, very difficult to understand, about the phases of the moon, the central idea of his philosophical system seems to be our old friend, the cyclical universe, in which everything happens over and over again. One has not, perhaps, the right to laugh at Yeats for his mystical beliefs–for I believe it could be shown that SOME degree of belief in magic is almost universal–but neither ought one to write such things off as mere unimportant eccentricities. It is Mr Menon's perception of this that gives his book its deepest interest. "In the first flush of admiration and enthusiasm," he says, "most people dismissed the fantastical philosophy as the price we have to pay for a great and curious intellect. One did not quite realise where he was heading. And those who did, like Pound and perhaps Eliot, approved the stand that he finally took. The first reaction to this did not come, as one might have expected, from the politically-minded young English poets. They were puzzled because a less rigid or artificial system than that of A VISION might not have produced the great poetry of Yeats's last days." It might not, and yet Yeats's philosophy has some very sinister implications, as Mr Menon points out.

Translated into political terms, Yeats's tendency is Fascist. Throughout most of his life, and long before Fascism was ever heard of, he had had the outlook of those who reach Fascism by the aristocratic route. He is a great hater of democracy, of the modern world, science, machinery, the concept of progress–above all, of the idea of human equality. Much of the imagery of his work is feudal, and it is clear that he was not altogether free from ordinary snobbishness. Later these tendencies took clearer shape and led him to "the exultant acceptance of authoritarianism as the only solution. Even violence and tyranny are not necessarily evil because the

people, knowing not evil and good, would become perfectly acquiescent to tyranny...Everything must come from the top. Nothing can come from the masses." Not much interested in politics, and no doubt disgusted by his brief incursions into public life, Yeats nevertheless makes political pronouncements. He is too big a man to share the illusions of Liberalism, and as early as 1920 he foretells in a justly famous passage ("The Second Coming") the kind of world that we have actually moved into. But he appears to welcome the coming age, which is to be "hierarchical, masculine, harsh, surgical", and is influenced both by Ezra Pound and by various Italian Fascist writers. He describes the new civilisation which he hopes and believes will arrive: "an aristocratic civilisation in its most completed form, every detail of life hierarchical, every great man's door crowded at dawn by petitioners, great wealth everywhere in a few men's hands, all dependent upon a few, up to the Emperor himself, who is a God dependent on a greater God, and everywhere, in Court, in the family, an inequality made law." The innocence of this statement is as interesting as its snobbishness. To begin with, in a single phrase, "great wealth in a few men's hands", Yeats lays bare the central reality of Fascism, which the whole of its propaganda is designed to cover up. The merely political Fascist claims always to be fighting for justice: Yeats, the poet, sees at a glance that Fascism means injustice, and acclaims it for that very reason. But at the same time he fails to see that the new authoritarian civilisation, if it arrives, will not be aristocratic, or what he means by aristocratic. It will not be ruled by noblemen with Van Dyck faces, but by anonymous millionaires, shiny-bottomed bureaucrats and murdering gangsters. Others who have made the same mistake have afterwards changed their views and one ought not to assume that Yeats, if he had lived longer, would necessarily have followed his friend Pound, even in sympathy. But the tendency of the passage I have quoted above is obvious, and its complete throwing overboard of whatever good the past two thousand years have achieved is a disquieting symptom.

How do Yeat's political ideas link up with his leaning towards occultism? It is not clear at first glance why hatred of democracy and a tendency to believe in crystal-gazing should go together. Mr Menon only discusses this rather shortly, but it is possible to make

two guesses. To begin with, the theory that civilisation moves in recurring cycles is one way out for people who hate the concept of human equality. If it is true that "all this", or something like it, "has happened before", then science and the modern world are debunked at one stroke and progress becomes for ever impossible. It does not much matter if the lower orders are getting above themselves, for, after all, we shall soon be returning to an age of tyranny. Yeats is by no means alone in this outlook. If the universe is moving round on a wheel, the future must be foreseeable, perhaps even in some detail. It is merely a question of discovering the laws of its motion, as the early astronomers discovered the solar year. Believe that, and it becomes difficult not to believe in astrology or some similar system. A year before the war, examining a copy of GRINGOIRE, the French Fascist weekly, much read by army officers, I found in it no less than thirty-eight advertisements of clairvoyants. Secondly, the very concept of occultism carries with it the idea that knowledge must be a secret thing, limited to a small circle of initiates. But the same idea is integral to Fascism. Those who dread the prospect of universal suffrage, popular education, freedom of thought, emancipation of women, will start off with a predilection towards secret cults. There is another link between Fascism and magic in the profound hostility of both to the Christian ethical code.

No doubt Yeats wavered in his beliefs and held at different times many different opinions, some enlightened, some not. Mr Menon repeats for him Eliot's claim that he had the longest period of development of any poet who has ever lived. But there is one thing that seems constant, at least in all of his work that I can remember, and that is his hatred of modern western civilisation and desire to return to the Bronze Age, or perhaps to the Middle Ages. Like all such thinkers, he tends to write in praise of ignorance. The Fool in his remarkable play, THE HOUR-GLASS, is a Chestertonian figure, "God's fool", the "natural born innocent", who is always wiser than the wise man. The philosopher in the play dies on the knowledge that all his lifetime of thought has been wasted (I am quoting from memory again):

The stream of the world has changed its course,
And with the stream my thoughts have run

Into some cloudly, thunderous spring
That is its mountain-source;
Ay, to a frenzy of the mind,
That all that we have done's undone
Our speculation but as the wind.

Beautiful words, but by implication profoundly obscurantist and reactionary; for if it is really true that a village idiot, as such, is wiser than a philosopher, then it would be better if the alphabet had never been invented. Of course, all praise of the past is partly sentimental, because we do not live in the past. The poor do not praise poverty. Before you can despise the machine, the machine must set you free from brute labour. But that is not to say that Yeats's yearning for a more primitive and more hierarchical age was not sincere. How much of all this is traceable to mere snobbishness, product of Yeats's own position as an impoverished offshoot of the aristocracy, is a different question. And the connection between his obscurantist opinions and his tendency towards "quaintness" of language remains to be worked out; Mr Menon hardly touches upon it.

This is a very short book, and I would greatly like to see Mr Menon go ahead and write another book on Yeats, starting where this one leaves off. "If the greatest poet of our times is exultantly ringing in an era of Fascism, it seems a somewhat disturbing symptom," he says on the last page, and leaves it at that. It is a disturbing symptom, because it is not an isolated one. By and large the best writers of our time have been reactionary in tendency, and though Fascism does not offer any real return to the past, those who yearn for the past will accept Fascism sooner than its probable alternatives. But there are other lines of approach, as we have seen during the past two or three years. The relationship between Fascism and the literary intelligentsia badly needs investigating, and Yeats might well be the starting-point. He is best studied by someone like Mr Menon, who can approach a poet primarily as a poet, but who also knows that a writer's political and religious beliefs are not excrescences to be laughed away, but something that will leave their mark even on the smallest detail of his work.

ARTHUR KOESTLER (1944)

One striking fact about English literature during the present century is the extent to which it has been dominated by foreigners–for example, Conrad, Henry James, Shaw, Joyce, Yeats, Pound and Eliot. Still, if you chose to make this a matter of national prestige and examine our achievement in the various branches of literature, you would find that England made a fairly good showing until you came to what may be roughly described as political writing, or pamphleteering. I mean by this the special class of literature that has arisen out of the European political struggle since the rise of Fascism. Under this heading novels, autobiographies, books of "reportage", sociological treatises and plain pamphlets can all be lumped together, all of them having a common origin and to a great extent the same emotional atmosphere.

Some out of the outstanding figures in this school of writers are Silone, Malraux, Salvemini, Borkenau, Victor Serge and Koestler himself. Some of these are imaginative writers, some not, but they are all alike in that they are trying to write contemporary history, but UNOFFICIAL history, the kind that is ignored in the text-books and lied about in the newspapers. Also they are all alike in being continental Europeans. It may be an exaggeration, but it cannot be a very great one, to say that whenever a book dealing with totalitarianism appears in this country, and still seems worth reading six months after publication, it is a book translated from some foreign language. English writers, over the past dozen years, have poured forth an enormous spate of political literature, but they have produced almost nothing of aesthetic value, and very little of historical value either. The Left Book Club, for instance, has been running ever since 1936. How many of its chosen volumes can you even remember the names of? Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Spain, Abyssinia, Austria, Czechoslovakia–all that these and kindred subjects have produced, in England, are slick books of reportage, dishonest pamphlets in which propaganda is swallowed whole and then spewed up again, half digested, and a very few reliable guide books and text-books. There has been nothing resembling, for

instance, FONTAMARA or DARKNESS AT NOON, because there is almost no English writer to whom it has happened to see totalitarianism from the inside. In Europe, during the past decade and more, things have been happening to middle-class people which in England do not even happen to the working class. Most of the European writers I mentioned above, and scores of others like them, have been obliged to break the law in order to engage in politics at all; some of them have thrown bombs and fought in street battles, many have been in prison or the concentration camp, or fled across frontiers with false names and forged passports. One cannot imagine, say, Professor Laski indulging in activities of that kind. England is lacking, therefore, in what one might call concentration-camp literature. The special world created by secret-police forces, censorship of opinion, torture and frame-up trials is, of course, known about and to some extent disapproved of, but it has made very little emotional impact. One result of this is that there exists in England almost no literature of disillusionment about the Soviet Union. There is the attitude of ignorant disapproval, and there is the attitude of uncritical admiration, but very little in between. Opinion on the Moscow sabotage trials, for instance, was divided, but divided chiefly on the question of whether the accused were guilty. Few people were able to see that, whether justified or not, the trials were an unspeakable horror. And English disapproval of the Nazi outrages has also been an unreal thing, turned on and off like a tap according to political expediency. To understand such things one has to be able to imagine oneself as the victim, and for an Englishman to write Darkness at Noon would be as unlikely an accident as for a slave-trader to write UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.

Koestler's published work really centres about the Moscow trials. His main theme is the decadence of revolutions owing to the corrupting effects of power, but the special nature of the Stalin dictatorship has driven him back into a position not far removed from pessimistic Conservatism. I do not know how many books he has written in all. He is a Hungarian whose earlier books were written in German, and five books have been published in England: SPANISH TESTAMENT, THE GLADIATORS, DARKNESS AT NOON, SCUM. OF THE EARTH, and ARRIVAL AND

DEPARTURE. The subject-matter of all of them is similar, and none of them ever escapes for more than a few pages from the atmosphere of nightmare. Of the five books, the action of three takes place entirely or almost entirely in prison.

In the opening months of the Spanish civil war Koestler was the NEWS CHRONICLE'S correspondent in Spain, and early in 1937 he was taken prisoner when the Fascists captured Malaga. He was nearly shot out of hand, then spent some months imprisoned in a fortress, listening every night to the roar of rifle fire as batch after batch of Republicans was executed, and being most of the time in acute danger of execution himself. This was not a chance adventure which "might have happened to anybody", but was in accordance with Koestler's life-style. A politically indifferent person would not have been in Spain at that date, a more cautious observer would have got out of Malaga before the Fascists arrived, and a British or American newspaper man would have been treated with more consideration. The book that Koestler wrote about this, SPANISH TESTAMENT, has remarkable passages, but apart from the scrappiness that is usual in a book of reportage, it is definitely false in places. In the prison scenes Koestler successfully establishes the nightmare atmosphere which is, so to speak, his patent, but the rest of the book is too much coloured by the Popular Front orthodoxy of the time. One or two passages even look as though they had been doctored for the purposes of the Left Book Club. At that time Koestler still was, or recently had been, a member of the Communist Party, and the complex politics of the civil war made it impossible for any Communist to write honestly about the internal struggle on the Government side. The sin of nearly all left-wingers from 1933 onwards is that they have wanted to be anti-Fascist without being anti-totalitarian. In 1937 Koestler already knew this, but did not feel free to say so. He came much nearer to saying it–indeed, he did say it, though he put on a mask to do so–in his next book, THE GLADIATORS, which was published about a year before the war and for some reason attracted very little attention.

THE GLADIATORS is in some ways an unsatisfactory book. It is about Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator who raised a slaves' rebellion in Italy round about 65 BC, and any book on such a subject is

handicapped by challenging comparison with SALAMMBÔ. In our own age it would not be possible to write a book like SALAMMBÔ even if one had the talent. The great thing about Salammbô, even more important than its physical detail, is its utter mercilessness. Flaubert could think himself into the stony cruelty of antiquity, because in the mid-nineteenth century one still had peace of mind. One had time to travel in the past. Nowadays the present and the future are too terrifying to be escaped from, and if one bothers with history it is in order to find modern meanings there. Koestler makes Spartacus into an allegorical figure, a primitive version of the proletarian dictator. Whereas Flaubert has been able, by a prolonged effort of the imagination, to make his mercenaries truly pre-Christian, Spartacus is a modern man dressed up. But this might not matter if Koestler were fully aware of what his allegory means. Revolutions always go wrong–that is the main theme. It is on the question of WHY they go wrong that he falters, and his uncertainty enters into the story and makes the central figures enigmatic and unreal.

For several years the rebellious slaves are uniformly successful. Their numbers swell to a hundred thousand, they overrun great areas of Southern Italy, they defeat one punitive expedition after another, they ally themselves with the pirates who at that time were the masters of the Mediterranean, and finally they set to work to build a city of their own, to be named the City of the Sun. In this city human beings are to be free and equal, and above all, they are to be happy: no slavery, no hunger, no injustice, no floggings, no executions. It is the dream of a just society which seems to haunt the human imagination ineradicably and in all ages, whether it is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society, or whether it is thought of as a Golden Age which once existed in the past and from which we have degenerated. Needless to say, the slaves fail to achieve it. No sooner have they formed themselves into a community than their way of life turns out to be as unjust, laborious and fear-ridden as any other. Even the cross, symbol of slavery, has to be revived for the punishment of malefactors. The turning-point comes when Spartacus finds himself obliged to crucify twenty of his oldest and most faithful followers. After that the City of the Sun is doomed, the slaves split up and are defeated in detail, the last fifteen thousand of them being

captured and crucified in one batch.

The serious weakness of this story is that the motives of Spartacus himself are never made clear. The Roman lawyer Fulvius, who joins the rebellion and acts as its chronicler, sets forth the familiar dilemma of ends and means. You can achieve nothing unless you are willing to use force and cunning, but in using them you pervert your original aims. Spartacus, however, is not represented as power hungry, nor, on the other hand, as a visionary. He is driven onwards by some obscure force which he does not understand, and he is frequently in two minds as to whether it would not be better to throw up the whole adventure and flee to Alexandria while the going is good. The slaves' republic is in any case wrecked rather by hedonism than by the struggle for power. The slaves are discontented with their liberty because they still have to work, and the final break-up happens because the more turbulent and less civilised slaves, chiefly Gauls and Germans, continue to behave like bandits after the republic has been established. This may be a true account of events–naturally we know very little about the slave rebellions of antiquity–but by allowing the Sun City to be destroyed because Crixus the Gaul cannot be prevented from looting and raping, Koestler has faltered between allegory and history. If Spartacus is the prototype of the modern revolutionary–and obviously he is intended as that–he should have gone astray because of the impossibility of combining power with righteousness. As it is, he is an almost passive figure, acted upon rather than acting, and at times not convincing. The story partly fails because the central problem of revolution has been avoided or, at least, has not been solved.

It is again avoided in a subtler way in the next book, Koestler's masterpiece, DARKNESS AT NOON. Here, however, the story is not spoiled, because it deals with individuals and its interest is psychological. It is an episode picked out from a background that does not have to be questioned. DARKNESS AT NOON describes the imprisonment and death of an Old Bolshevik, Rubashov, who first denies and ultimately confesses to crimes which he is well aware he has not committed. The grown-upness, the lack of surprise or denunciation, the pity and irony with which the story is told, show the advantage, when one is handling a theme of this kind, of being a

European. The book reaches the stature of tragedy, whereas an English or American writer could at most have made it into a polemical tract. Koestler has digested his material and can treat it on the aesthetic level. At the same time his handling of it has a political implication, not important in this case but likely to be damaging in later books.

Naturally the whole book centres round one question: Why did Rubashov confess? He is not guilty–that is, not guilty of anything except the essential crime of disliking the Stalin régime. The concrete acts of treason in which he is supposed to have engaged are all imaginary. He has not even been tortured, or not very severely. He is worn down by solitude, toothache, lack of tobacco, bright lights glaring in his eyes, and continuous questioning, but these in themselves would not be enough to overcome a hardened revolutionary. The Nazis have previously done worse to him without breaking his spirit. The confessions obtained in the Russian state trials are capable of three explanations:

1. That the accused were guilty.

2. That they were tortured, and perhaps blackmailed by threats to relatives and friends.

3. That they were actuated by despair, mental bankruptcy and the habit of loyalty to the Party.

For Koestler's purpose in DARKNESS AT NOON, 1 is ruled out, and though this is not the place to discuss the Russian purges, I must add that what little verifiable evidence there is suggests that the trials of the Bolsheviks were frame-ups. If one assumes that the accused were not guilty–at any rate, not guilty of the particular things they confessed to–then 2 is the common-sense explanation. Koestler, however, plumps for 3, which is also accepted by the Trotskyist Boris Souvarine, in his pamphlet CAUCHEMAR EN URSS. Rubashov ultimately confesses because he cannot find in his own mind any reason for not doing so. Justice and objective truth have long ceased to have any meaning for him. For decades he has been simply the creature of the Party, and what the Party now demands is that he shall confess to non-existent crimes. In the end, though he had to be bullied and weakened first, he is somewhat proud of his decision to confess. He feels superior to the poor Czarist officer who

inhabits the next cell and who talks to Rubashov by tapping on the wall. The Czarist officer is shocked when he learns that Rubashov intends to capitulate. As he sees it from his "bourgeois" angle, everyone ought to stick to his guns, even a Bolshevik. Honour, he says, consists in doing what you think right. "Honour is to be useful without fuss," Rubashov taps back; and he reflects with a certain satisfaction that he is tapping with his pince-nez while the other, the relic of the past, is tapping with a monocle. Like Bukharin, Rubashov is "looking out upon black darkness". What is there, what code, what loyalty, what notion of good and evil, for the sake of which he can defy the Party and endure further torment? He is not only alone, he is also hollow. He has himself committed worse crimes than the one that is now being perpetrated against him. For example, as a secret envoy of the Party in Nazi Germany, he has got rid of disobedient followers by betraying them to the Gestapo. Curiously enough, if he has any inner strength to draw upon, it is the memories of his boyhood when he was the son of a landowner. The last thing he remembers, when he is shot from behind, is the leaves of poplar trees on his father's estate. Rubashov belongs to the older generation of Bolsheviks that was largely wiped out in the purges. He is aware of art and literature, and of the world outside Russia. He contrasts sharply with Gletkin, the young GPU man who conducts his interrogation, and who is the typical "good party man", completely without scruples or curiosity, a thinking gramophone. Rubashov, unlike Gletkin, does not have the Revolution as his starting-point. His mind was not a blank sheet when the Party got hold of it. His superiority to the other is finally traceable to his bourgeois origin.

One cannot, I think, argue that DARKNESS AT NOON is simply a story dealing with the adventures of an imaginary individual. Clearly it is a political book, founded on history and offering an interpretation of disputed events. Rubashov might be called Trotsky, Bukharin Rakovsky or some other relatively civilised figure among the Old Bolsheviks. If one writes about the Moscow trials one must answer the question, "Why did the accused confess?" and which answer one makes is a political decision. Koestler answers, in effect, "Because these people had been rotted by the Revolution which they served", and in doing so he comes near to claiming that revolutions

are of their nature bad. If one assumes that the accused in the Moscow trials were made to confess by means of some kind of terrorism, one is only saying that one particular set of revolutionary leaders has gone astray. Individuals, and not the situation, are to blame. The implication of Koestler's book, however, is that Rubashov in power would be no better than Gletkin: or rather, only better in that his outlook is still partly pre-revolutionary. Revolution, Koestler seems to say, is a corrupting process. Really enter into the Revolution and you must end up as either Rubashov or Gletkin. It is not merely that "power corrupts": so also do the ways of attaining power. Therefore, all efforts to regenerate society BY VIOLENT MEANS lead to the cellars of the OGPU, Lenin leads to Stalin, and would have come to resemble Stalin if he had happened to survive.

Of course, Koestler does not say this quite explicitly, and perhaps is not altogether conscious of it. He is writing about darkness, but it is darkness at what ought to be noon. Part of the time he feels that things might have turned out differently. The notion that so-and-so has "betrayed", that things have only gone wrong because of individual wickedness, is ever present in left-wing thought. Later, in ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE, Koestler swings over much further towards the anti-revolutionary position, but in between these two books there is another, SCUM OF THE EARTH, which is straight autobiography and has only an indirect bearing upon the problems raised by DARKNESS AT NOON. True to his life-style, Koestler was caught in France by the outbreak of war and, as a foreigner and a known anti-Fascist, was promptly arrested and interned by the Daladier Government. He spent the first nine months of war mostly in a prison camp, then, during the collapse of France, escaped and travelled by devious routes to England, where he was once again thrown into prison as an enemy alien. This time he was soon released, however. The book is a valuable piece of reportage, and together with a few other scraps of honest writing that happened to be produced at the time of the débâcle, it is a reminder of the depths that bourgeois democracy can descend to. At this moment, with France newly liberated and the witch-hunt after collaborators in full swing, we are apt to forget that in 1940 various observers on the spot considered that about forty per cent of the French population was

either actively pro-German or completely apathetic. Truthful war books are never acceptable to non-combatants, and Koestler's book did not have a very good reception. Nobody came well out of it–neither the bourgeois politicians, whose idea of conducting an anti-Fascist war was to jail every left-winger they could lay their hands on, nor the French Communists, who were effectively pro-Nazi and did their best to sabotage the French war effort, nor the common people, who were just as likely to follow mountebanks like Doriot as responsible leaders. Koestler records some fantastic conversations with fellow victims in the concentration camp, and adds that till then, like most middle-class Socialists and Communists, he had never made contact with real proletarians, only with the educated minority. He draws the pessimistic conclusion: "Without education of the masses, no social progress; without social progress, no education of the masses". In SCUM OF THE EARTH Koestler ceases to idealise the common people. He has abandoned Stalinism, but he is not a Trotskyist either. This is the book's real link with ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE, in which what is normally called a revolutionary outlook is dropped, perhaps for good.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE is not a satisfactory book. The pretence that it is a novel is very thin; in effect it is a tract purporting to show that revolutionary creeds are rationalisations of neurotic impulses. With all too neat a symmetry, the book begins and ends with the same action–a leap into a foreign country. A young ex-Communist who has made his escape from Hungary jumps ashore in Portugal, where he hopes to enter the service of Britain, at that time the only power fighting against Germany. His enthusiasm is somewhat cooled by the fact that the British Consulate is uninterested in him and almost ignores him for a period of several months, during which his money runs out and other astuter refugees escape to America. He is successively tempted by the World in the form of a Nazi propagandist, the Flesh in the form of a French girl, and–after a nervous breakdown–the Devil in the form of a psychoanalyst. The psychoanalyst drags out of him the fact that his revolutionary enthusiasm is not founded on any real belief in historical necessity, but on a morbid guilt complex arising from an attempt in early childhood to blind his baby brother. By the time that

he gets an opportunity of serving the Allies he has lost all reason for wanting to do so, and he is on the point of leaving for America when his irrational impulses seize hold of him again. In practice he cannot abandon the struggle. When the book ends, he is floating down in a parachute over the dark landscape of his native country, where he will be employed as a secret agent of Britain.

As a political statement (and the book is not much more), this is insufficient. Of course it is true in many cases, and it may be true in all cases, that revolutionary activity is the result of personal maladjustment. Those who struggle against society are, on the whole, those who have reason to dislike it, and normal healthy people are no more attracted by violence and illegality than they are by war. The young Nazi in ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE makes the penetrating remark that one can see what is wrong with the left-wing movement by the ugliness of its women. But after all, this does not invalidate the Socialist case. Actions have results, irrespective of their motives. Marx's ultimate motives may well have been envy and spite, but this does not prove that his conclusions were false. In making the hero of ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE take his final decision from a mere instinct not to shirk action and danger, Koestler is making him suffer a sudden loss of intelligence. With such a history as he has behind him, he would be able to see that certain things have to be done, whether our reasons for doing them are "good" or "bad". History has to move in a certain direction, even if it has to be pushed that way by neurotics. In ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE Peter's idols are overthrown one after the other. The Russian Revolution has degenerated, Britain, symbolised by the aged consul with gouty fingers, is no better, the international class-conscious proletariat is a myth. But the conclusion (since, after all, Koestler and his hero "support" the war) ought to be that getting rid of Hitler is still a worth-while objective, a necessary bit of scavenging in which motives are almost irrelevant.

To take a rational political decision one must have a picture of the future. At present Koestler seems to have none, or rather to have two which cancel out. As an ultimate objective he believes in the Earthly Paradise, the Sun State which the gladiators set out to establish, and which has haunted the imagination of Socialists, Anarchists and

religious heretics for hundreds of years. But his intelligence tells him that the Earthly Paradise is receding into the far distance and that what is actually ahead of us is bloodshed, tyranny and privation. Recently he described himself as a "short-term pessimist". Every kind of horror is blowing up over the horizon, but somehow it will all come right in the end. This outlook is probably gaining ground among thinking people: it results from the very great difficulty, once one has abandoned orthodox religious belief, of accepting life on earth as inherently miserable, and on the other hand, from the realisation that to make life liveable is a much bigger problem than it recently seemed. Since about 1930 the world has given no reason for optimism whatever. Nothing is in sight except a welter of lies, hatred, cruelty and ignorance, and beyond our present troubles loom vaster ones which are only now entering into the European consciousness. It is quite possible that man's major problems will NEVER be solved. But it is also unthinkable! Who is there who dares to look at the world of today and say to himself, "It will always be like this: even in a million years it cannot get appreciably better?" So you get the quasi-mystical belief that for the present there is no remedy, all political action is useless, but that somewhere in space and time human life will cease to be the miserable brutish thing it now is.

The only easy way out is that of the religious believer, who regards this life merely as a preparation for the next. But few thinking people now believe in life after death, and the number of those who do is probably diminishing. The Christian churches would probably not survive on their own merits if their economic basis were destroyed.

The real problem is how to restore the religious attitude while accepting death as final. Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness. It is most unlikely, however, that Koestler would accept this. There is a well-marked hedonistic strain in his writings, and his failure to find a political position after breaking with Stalinism is a result of this.

The Russian Revolution, the central event in Koestler's fife, started out with high hopes. We forget these things now, but a quarter of a century ago it was confidently expected that the Russian

Revolution would lead to Utopia. Obviously this has not happened. Koestler is too acute not to see this, and too sensitive not to remember the original objective. Moreover, from his European angle he can see such things as purges and mass deportations for what they are; he is not, like Shaw or Laski, looking at them through the wrong end of the telescope. Therefore he draws the conclusion: This is what revolutions lead to. There is nothing for it except to be a "short-term pessimist" i.e. to keep out of politics, make a sort of oasis within which you and your friends can remain sane, and hope that somehow things will be better in a hundred years. At the basis of this lies his hedonism, which leads him to think of the Earthly Paradise as desirable. Perhaps, however, whether desirable or not, it isn't possible. Perhaps some degree of suffering is ineradicable from human life, perhaps the choice before man is always a choice of evils, perhaps even the aim of Socialism is not to make the world perfect but to make it better. All revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure. It is his unwillingness to admit this that has led Koestler's mind temporarily into a blind alley and that makes ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE seem shallow compared with the earlier books.

BENEFIT OF CLERGY: SOME NOTES ON SALVADOR DALI (1944)

Autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful. A man who gives a good account of himself is probably lying, since any life when viewed from the inside is simply a series of defeats. However, even the most flagrantly dishonest book (Frank Harris's autobiographical writings are an example) can without intending it give a true picture of its author. Dali's recently published LIFE comes under this heading. Some of the incidents in it are flatly incredible, others have been rearranged and romanticised, and not merely the humiliation but the persistent ORDINARINESS of everyday life has been cut out. Dali is even by his own diagnosis narcissistic, and his autobiography is simply a strip-tease act conducted in pink limelight. But as a record of fantasy, of the perversion of instinct that has been made possible by the machine age, it has great value.

Here, then, are some of the episodes in Dali's life, from his earliest years onward. Which of them are true and which are imaginary hardly matters: the point is that this is the kind of thing that Dali would have LIKED to do.

When he is six years old there is some excitement over the appearance of Halley's comet:

Suddenly one of my father's office clerks appeared in the drawing-room doorway and announced that the comet could be seen from the terrace... While crossing the hall I caught sight of my little three-year-old sister crawling unobtrusively through a doorway. I stopped, hesitated a second, then gave her a terrible kick in the head as though it had been a ball, and continued running, carried away with a 'delirious joy' induced by this savage act. But my father, who was behind me, caught me and led me down in to his office, where I remained as a punishment till dinner-time.

A year earlier than this Dali had 'suddenly, as most of my ideas occur,' flung another little boy off a suspension bridge. Several other incidents of the same kind are recorded, including (THIS WAS WHEN HE WAS TWENTY-NINE YEARS OLD) knocking down

and trampling on a girl 'until they had to tear her, bleeding, out of my reach.'

When he is about five he gets hold of a wounded bat which he puts into a tin pail. Next morning he finds that the bat is almost dead and is covered with ants which are devouring it. He puts it in his mouth, ants and all, and bites it almost in half.

When he is an adolescent a girl falls desperately in love with him. He kisses and caresses her so as to excite her as much as possible, but refuses to go further. He resolves to keep this up for five years (he calls it his 'five-year plan'), enjoying her humiliation and the sense of power it gives him. He frequently tells her that at the end of the five years he will desert her, and when the time comes he does so.

Till well into adult life he keeps up the practice of masturbation, and likes to do this, apparently, in front of a looking-glass. For ordinary purposes he is impotent, it appears, till the age of thirty or so. When he first meets his future wife, Gala, he is greatly tempted to push her off a precipice. He is aware that there is something that she wants him to do to her, and after their first kiss the confession is made:

I threw back Gala's head, pulling it by the hair, and trembling with complete hysteria, I commanded:

'Now tell me what you want me to do with you! But tell me slowly, looking me in the eye, with the crudest, the most ferociously erotic words that can make both of us feel the greatest shame!'

Then Gala, transforming the last glimmer of her expression of pleasure into the hard light of her own tyranny, answered:

'I want you to kill me!'

He is somewhat disappointed by this demand, since it is merely what he wanted to do already. He contemplates throwing her off the bell-tower of the Cathedral of Toledo, but refrains from doing so.

During the Spanish Civil War he astutely avoids taking sides, and makes a trip to Italy. He feels himself more and more drawn towards the aristocracy, frequents smart SALONS, finds himself wealthy patrons, and is photographed with the plump Vicomte de Noailles, whom he describes as his 'Maecenas.' When the European War approaches he has one preoccupation only: how to find a place which has good cookery and from which he can make a quick bolt if danger

comes too near. He fixes on Bordeaux, and duly flees to Spain during the Battle of France. He stays in Spain long enough to pick up a few anti-red atrocity stories, then makes for America. The story ends in a blaze of respectability. Dali, at thirty-seven, has become a devoted husband, is cured of his aberrations, or some of them, and is completely reconciled to the Catholic Church. He is also, one gathers, making a good deal of money.

However, he has by no means ceased to take pride in the pictures of his Surrealist period, with titles like 'The Great Masturbator', 'Sodomy of a Skull with a Grand Piano', etc. There are reproductions of these all the way through the book. Many of Dali's drawings are simply representational and have a characteristic to be noted later. But from his Surrealist paintings and photographs the two things that stand our are sexual perversity and necrophilia. Sexual objects and symbols–some of them well known, like our old friend the high-heeled slipper, others, like the crutch and the cup of warm milk, patented by Dali himself–recur over and over again, and there is a fairly well-marked excretory motif as well. In his painting, Le Jeu Lugubre, he says, 'the drawers bespattered with excrement were painted with such minute and realistic complacency that the whole little Surrealist group was anguished by the question: Is he coprophagic or not?' Dali adds firmly that he is NOT, and that he regards this aberration as 'repulsive', but it seems to be only at that point that his interest in excrement stops. Even when he recounts the experience of watching a woman urinate standing up, he has to add the detail that she misses her aim and dirties her shoes. It is not given to any one person to have all the vices, and Dali also boasts that he is not homosexual, but otherwise he seems to have as good an outfit of perversions as anyone could wish for.

However, his most notable characteristic is his necrophilia. He himself freely admits to this, and claims to have been cured of it. Dead faces, skulls, corpses of animals occur fairly frequently in his pictures, and the ants which devoured the dying bat make countless reappearances. One photograph shows an exhumed corpse, far gone in decomposition. Another shows the dead donkeys putrefying on top of grand pianos which formed part of the Surrealist film, Le Chien Andalou. Dali still looks back on these donkeys with great

enthusiasm.

I 'made up' the putrefaction of the donkeys with great pots of sticky glue which I poured over them. Also I emptied their eye-sockets and made them larger by hacking them out with scissors. In the same way I furiously cut their mouths open to make the rows of their teeth show to better advantage, and I added several jaws to each mouth, so that it would appear that although the donkeys were already rotting they were vomiting up a little more their own death, above those other rows of teeth formed by the keys of the black pianos.

And finally there is the picture–apparently some kind of faked photograph–of 'Mannequin rotting in a taxicab.' Over the already somewhat bloated face and breast of the apparently dead girl, huge snails were crawling. In the caption below the picture Dali notes that these are Burgundy snails–that is, the edible kind.

Of course, in this long book of 400 quarto pages there is more than I have indicated, but I do not think that I have given an unfair account of his moral atmosphere and mental scenery. It is a book that stinks. If it were possible for a book to give a physical stink off its pages, this one would–a thought that might please Dali, who before wooing his future wife for the first time rubbed himself all over with an ointment made of goat's dung boiled up in fish glue. But against this has to be set the fact that Dali is a draughtsman of very exceptional gifts. He is also, to judge by the minuteness and the sureness of his drawings, a very hard worker. He is an exhibitionist and a careerist, but he is not a fraud. He has fifty times more talent than most of the people who would denounce his morals and jeer at his paintings. And these two sets of facts, taken together, raise a question which for lack of any basis of agreement seldom gets a real discussion.

The point is that you have here a direct, unmistakable assault on sanity and decency; and even–since some of Dali's pictures would tend to poison the imagination like a pornographic postcard–on life itself. What Dali has done and what he has imagined is debatable, but in his outlook, his character, the bedrock decency of a human being does not exist. He is as anti-social as a flea. Clearly, such people are undesirable, and a society in which they can flourish has something

wrong with it.

Now, if you showed this book, with its illustrations, to Lord Elton, to Mr. Alfred Noyes, to THE TIMES leader writers who exult over the 'eclipse of the highbrow'–in fact, to any 'sensible' art-hating English person–it is easy to imagine what kind of response you would get. They would flatly refuse to see any merit in Dali whatever. Such people are not only unable to admit that what is morally degraded can be asthetically right, but their real demand of every artist is that he shall pat them on the back and tell them that thought is unnecessary. And they can be especially dangerous at a time like the present, when the Ministry of Information and the British Council put power into their hands. For their impulse is not only to crush every new talent as it appears, but to castrate the past as well. Witness the renewed highbrow-baiting that is now going on in this country and America, with its outcry not only against Joyce, Proust and Lawrence, but even against T. S. Eliot.

But if you talk to the kind of person who CAN see Dali's merits, the response that you get is not as a rule very much better. If you say that Dali, though a brilliant draughtsman, is a dirty little scoundrel, you are looked upon as a savage. If you say that you don't like rotting corpses, and that people who do like rotting corpses are mentally diseased, it is assumed that you lack the aesthetic sense. Since 'Mannequin rotting in a taxicab' is a good composition. And between these two fallacies there is no middle position, but we seldom hear much about it. On the one side KULTURBOLSCHEVISMUS: on the other (though the phrase itself is out of fashion) 'Art for Art's sake.' Obscenity is a very difficult question to discuss honestly. People are too frightened either of seeming to be shocked or of seeming not to be shocked, to be able to define the relationship between art and morals.

It will be seen that what the defenders of Dali are claiming is a kind of BENEFIT OF CLERGY. The artist is to be exempt from the moral laws that are binding on ordinary people. Just pronounce the magic word 'Art', and everything is O.K.: kicking little girls in the head is O.K.; even a film like L'Age d'Or is O.K. [Note, below] It is also O.K. that Dali should batten on France for years and then scuttle off like rat as soon as France is in danger. So long as you can paint

well enough to pass the test, all shall be forgiven you.

[Note: Dali mentions L'Age d'Or and adds that its first public showing was broken up by hooligans, but he does not say in detail what it was about. According to Henry Miller's account of it, it showed among other things some fairly detailed shots of a woman defecating. (Author's Footnote)]

One can see how false this is if one extends it to cover ordinary crime. In an age like our own, when the artist is an altogether exceptional person, he must be allowed a certain amount of irresponsibility, just as a pregnant woman is. Still, no one would say that a pregnant woman should be allowed to commit murder, nor would anyone make such a claim for the artist, however gifted. If Shakespeare returned to the earth to-morrow, and if it were found that his favourite recreation was raping little girls in railway carriages, we should not tell him to go ahead with it on the ground that he might write another KING LEAR. And, after all, the worst crimes are not always the punishable ones. By encouraging necrophilic reveries one probably does quite as much harm as by, say, picking pockets at the races. One ought to be able to hold in one's head simultaneously the two facts that Dali is a good draughtsman and a disgusting human being. The one does not invalidate or, in a sense, affect the other. The first thing that we demand of a wall is that it shall stand up. If it stands up, it is a good wall, and the question of what purpose it serves is separable from that. And yet even the best wall in the world deserves to be pulled down if it surrounds a concentration camp. In the same way it should be possible to say, 'This is a good book or a good picture, and it ought to be burned by the public hangman.' Unless one can say that, at least in imagination, one is shirking the implications of the fact that an artist is also a citizen and a human being.

Not, of course, that Dali's autobiography, or his pictures, ought to be suppressed. Short of the dirty postcards that used to be sold in Mediterranean seaport towns, it is doubtful policy to suppress anything, and Dali's fantasies probably cast useful light on the decay of capitalist civilisation. But what he clearly needs is diagnosis. The question is not so much WHAT he is as WHY he is like that. It ought not to be in doubt that his is a diseased intelligence, probably not

much altered by his alleged conversion, since genuine penitents, or people who have returned to sanity, do not flaunt their past vices in that complacent way. He is a symptom of the world's illness. The important thing is not to denounce him as a cad who ought to be horsewhipped, or to defend him as a genius who ought not to be questioned, but to find out WHY he exhibits that particular set of aberrations.

The answer is probably discoverable in his pictures, and those I myself am not competent to examine. But I can point to one clue which perhaps takes one part of the distance. This is the old-fashioned, over-ornate Edwardian style of drawing to which Dali tends to revert when he is not being Surrealist. Some of Dali's drawings are reminiscent of Dürer, one (p. 113) seems to show the influence of Beardsley, another (p. 269) seems to borrow something from Blake. But the most persistent strain is the Edwardian one. When I opened the book for the first time and looked at its innumerable marginal illustrations, I was haunted by a resemblance which I could not immediately pin down. I fetched up at the ornamental candlestick at the beginning of Part I (p. 7). What did this remind me of? Finally I tracked it down. It reminded me of a large vulgar, expensively got-up edition of Anatole France (in translation) which must have been published about 1914. That had ornamental chapter headings and tailpieces after this style. Dali's candlestick displays at one end a curly fish-like creature that looks curiously familiar (it seems to be based on the conventional dolphin), and at the other is the burning candle. This candle, which recurs in one picture after another, is a very old friend. You will find it, with the same picturesque gouts of wax arranged on its sides, in those phoney electric lights done up as candlesticks which are popular in sham-Tudor country hotels. This candle, and the design beneath it, convey at once an intense feeling of sentimentality. As though to counteract this, Dali has spattered a quillful of ink all over the page, but without avail. The same impression keeps popping up on page after page. The sign at the bottom of page 62, for instance, would nearly go into PETER PAN. The figure on page 224, in spite of having her cranium elongated in to an immense sausage-like shape, is the witch of the fairy-tale books. The horse on page 234 and the unicorn on page 218

might be illustrations to James Branch Cabell. The rather pansified drawings of youths on pages 97, 100 and elsewhere convey the same impression. Picturesqueness keeps breaking in. Take away the skulls, ants, lobsters, telephones and other paraphernalia, and every now and again you are back in the world of Barrie, Rackham, Dunsany and WHERE THE RAINBOW ENDS.

Curiously, enough, some of the naughty-naughty touches in Dali's autobiography tie up with the same period. When I read the passage I quoted at the beginning, about the kicking of the little sister's head, I was aware of another phantom resemblance. What was it? Of course! RUTHLESS RHYMES FOR HEARTLESS HOMES, by Harry Graham. Such rhymes were very popular round about 1912, and one that ran:

Poor little Willy is crying so sore,
A sad little boy is he,
For he's broken his little sister's neck
And he'll have no jam for tea.

might almost have been founded on Dali's anecdote. Dali, of course, is aware of his Edwardian leanings, and makes capital out of them, more or less in a spirit of pastiche. He professes an especial affection for the year 1900, and claims that every ornamental object of 1900 is full of mystery, poetry, eroticism, madness, perversity, et. Pastiche, however, usually implies a real affection for the thing parodied. It seems to be, if not the rule, at any rate distinctly common for an intellectual bent to be accompanied by a non-rational, even childish urge in the same direction. A sculptor, for instance, is interested in planes and curves, but he is also a person who enjoys the physical act of mucking about with clay or stone. An engineer is a person who enjoys the feel of tools, the noise of dynamos and smell of oil. A psychiatrist usually has a leaning toward some sexual aberration himself. Darwin became a biologist partly because he was a country gentleman and fond of animals. It may be therefore, that Dali's seemingly perverse cult of Edwardian things (for example, his 'discovery' of the 1900 subway entrances) is merely the symptom of a much deeper, less conscious affection. The innumerable, beautifully executed copies of textbook illustrations, solemnly labelled LE ROSSIGNOL, UNE MONTRE and so on, which he

scatters all over his margins, may be meant partly as a joke. The little boy in knickerbockers playing with a diabolo on page 103 is a perfect period piece. But perhaps these things are also there because Dali can't help drawing that kind of thing because it is to that period and that style of drawing that he really belongs.

If so, his aberrations are partly explicable. Perhaps they are a way of assuring himself that he is not commonplace. The two qualities that Dali unquestionably possesses are a gift for drawing and an atrocious egoism. 'At seven', he says in the first paragraph of his book, 'I wanted to be Napoleon. And my ambition has been growing steadily ever since.' This is worded in a deliberately startling way, but no doubt it is substantially true. Such feelings are common enough. 'I knew I was a genius', somebody once said to me, 'long before I knew what I was going to be a genius about.' And suppose that you have nothing in you except your egoism and a dexterity that goes no higher than the elbow; suppose that your real gift is for a detailed, academic, representational style of drawing, your real MÉTIER to be an illustrator of scientific textbooks. How then do you become Napoleon?

There is always one escape: INTO WICKEDNESS. Always do the thing that will shock and wound people. At five, throw a little boy off a bridge, strike an old doctor across the face with a whip and break his spectacles–or, at any rate, dream about doing such things. Twenty years later, gouge the eyes out of dead donkeys with a pair of scissors. Along those lines you can always feel yourself original. And after all, it pays! It is much less dangerous than crime. Making all allowance for the probable suppressions in Dali's autobiography, it is clear that he had not had to suffer for his eccentricities as he would have done in an earlier age. He grew up into the corrupt world of the nineteen-twenties, when sophistication was immensely widespread and every European capital swarmed with aristocrats and RENTIERS who had given up sport and politics and taken to patronising the arts. If you threw dead donkeys at people, they threw money back. A phobia for grasshoppers–which a few decades back would merely have provoked a snigger–was now an interesting 'complex' which could be profitably exploited. And when that particular world collapsed before the German Army, America was

waiting. You could even top it all up with religious conversion, moving at one hop and without a shadow of repentance from the fashionable SALONS of Paris to Abraham's bosom.

That, perhaps is the essential outline of Dali's history. But why his aberrations should be the particular ones they were, and why it should be so easy to 'sell' such horrors as rotting corpses to a sophisticated public–those are questions for the psychologist and the sociological critic. Marxist criticism has a short way with such phenomena as Surrealism. They are 'bourgeois decadence' (much play is made with the phrases 'corpse poisons' and 'decaying RENTIER class'), and that is that. But though this probably states a fact, it does not establish a connection. One would still like to know WHY Dali's leaning was towards necrophilia (and not, say, homosexuality), and WHY the RENTIERS and the aristocrats would buy his pictures instead of hunting and making love like their grandfathers. Mere moral disapproval does not get one any further. But neither ought one to pretend, in the name of 'detachment', that such pictures as 'Mannequin rotting in a taxicab' are morally neutral. They are diseased and disgusting, and any investigation ought to start out from that fact.

RAFFLES AND MISS BLANDISH (1944)

Nearly half a century after his first appearance, Raffles, 'the amateur cracksman', is still one of the best-known characters in English fiction. Very few people would need telling that he played cricket for England, had bachelor chambers in the Albany and burgled the Mayfair houses which he also entered as a guest. Just for that reason he and his exploits make a suitable background against which to examine a more modern crime story such as NO ORCHIDS FOR MISS BLANDISH. Any such choice is necessarily arbitrary–I might equally well have chosen ARSÈNE LUPIN for instance–but at any rate NO ORCHIDS and the Raffles books [Note, below] have the common quality of being crime stories which play the limelight on the criminal rather than the policeman. For sociological purposes they can be compared. NO ORCHIDS is the 1939 version of glamorized crime, RAFFLES the 1900 version. What I am concerned with here is the immense difference in moral atmosphere between the two books, and the change in the popular attitude that this probably implies.

[Note: RAFFLES, A THIEF IN THE NIGHT and MR. JUSTICE RAFFLES, by E. W. Hornung. The third of these is definitely a failure, and only the first has the true Raffles atmosphere. Hornung wrote a number of crime stories, usually with a tendency to take the side of the criminal. A successful book in rather the same vein as RAFFLES is STIUGAREE. (Author's footnote.)]

At this date, the charm of RAFFLES is partly in the period atmosphere and partly in the technical excellence of the stories. Hornung was a very conscientious and on his level a very able writer. Anyone who cares for sheer efficiency must admire his work. However, the truly dramatic thing, about Raffles, the thing that makes him a sort of byword even to this day (only a few weeks ago, in a burglary case, a magistrate referred to the prisoner as 'a Raffles in real life'), is the fact that he is a GENTLEMAN. Raffles is presented to us and this is rubbed home in countless scraps of dialogue and casual remarks–not as an honest man who has gone astray, but as a public-school man who has gone astray. His remorse,

when he feels any, is almost purely social; he has disgraced 'the old school', he has lost his right to enter 'decent society', he has forfeited his amateur status and become a cad. Neither Raffles nor Bunny appears to feel at all strongly that stealing is wrong in itself, though Raffles does once justify himself by the casual remark that 'the distribution of property is all wrong anyway'. They think of themselves not as sinners but as renegades, or simply as outcasts. And the moral code of most of us is still so close to Raffles' own that we do feel his situation to be an especially ironical one. A West End club man who is really a burglar! That is almost a story in itself, is it not? But how if it were a plumber or a greengrocer who was really a burglar? Would there be anything inherently dramatic in that? No although the theme of the 'double life', of respectability covering crime, is still there. Even Charles Peace in his clergyman's dog-collar, seems somewhat less of a hypocrite than Raffles in his Zingari blazer.

Raffles, of course, is good at all games, but it is peculiarly fitting that his chosen game should be cricket. This allows not only of endless analogies between his cunning as a slow bowler and his cunning as a burglar, but also helps to define the exact nature of his crime. Cricket is not in reality a very popular game in England–it is nowhere so popular as football, for instance–but it gives expression to a well-marked trait in the English character, the tendency to value 'form' or 'style' more highly than success. In the eyes of any true cricket-lover it is possible for an innings of ten runs to be 'better' (i.e. more elegant) than an innings of a hundred runs: cricket is also one of the very few games in which the amateur can excel the professional. It is a game full of forlorn hopes and sudden dramatic changes of fortune, and its rules are so defined that their interpretation is partly an ethical business. When Larwood, for instance, practised bodyline bowling in Australia he was not actually breaking any rule: he was merely doing something that was 'not cricket'. Since cricket takes up a lot of time and is rather an expensive game to play, it is predominantly an upper-class game, but for the whole nation it is bound up with such concepts as 'good form', 'playing the game', etc., and it has declined in popularity just as the tradition of 'don't hit a man when he's down' has declined. It

is not a twentieth-century game, and nearly all modern-minded people dislike it. The Nazis, for instance, were at pains to discourage cricket, which had gained a certain footing in Germany before and after the last war. In making Raffles a cricketer as well as a burglar, Hornung was not merely providing him with a plausible disguise; he was also drawing the sharpest moral contrast that he was able to imagine.

RAFFLES, no less than GREAT EXPECTATIONS or LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR, is a story of snobbery, and it gains a great deal from the precariousness of Raffles's social position. A cruder writer would have made the 'gentleman burglar' a member of the peerage, or at least a baronet. Raffles, however, is of upper-middle-class origin and is only accepted by the aristocracy because of his personal charm. 'We were in Society but not of it', he says to Bunny towards the end of the book; and 'I was asked about for my cricket'. Both he and Bunny accept the values of 'Society' unquestioningly, and would settle down in it for good if only they could get away with a big enough haul. The ruin that constantly threatens them is all the blacker because they only doubtfully 'belong'. A duke who has served a prison sentence is still a duke, whereas a mere man about town, if once disgraced, ceases to be 'about town' for evermore. The closing chapters of the book, when Raffles has been exposed and is living under an assumed name, have a twilight of the gods feeling, a mental atmosphere rather similar to that of Kipling's poem, 'Gentleman Rankers':

Yes, a trooper of the forces–Who has run his own six horses! etc.

Raffles now belongs irrevocably to the 'cohorts of the damned'. He can still commit successful burglaries, but there is no way back into Paradise, which means Piccadilly and the M.C.C. According to the public-school code there is only one means of rehabilitation: death in battle. Raffles dies fighting against the Boers (a practised reader would foresee this from the start), and in the eyes of both Bunny and his creator this cancels his crimes.

Both Raffles and Bunny, of course, are devoid of religious belief, and they have no real ethical code, merely certain rules of behaviour which they observe semi-instinctively. But it is just here that the deep moral difference between RAFFLES and NO ORCHIDS

becomes apparent. Raffles and Bunny, after all, are gentlemen, and such standards as they do have are not to be violated. Certain things are 'not done', and the idea of doing them hardly arises. Raffles will not, for example, abuse hospitality. He will commit a burglary in a house where he is staying as a guest, but the victim must be a fellow-guest and not the host. He will not commit murder [Note, below], and he avoids violence wherever possible and prefers to carry out his robberies unarmed. He regards friendship as sacred, and is chivalrous though not moral in his relations with women. He will take extra risks in the name of 'sportsmanship', and sometimes even for aesthetic reasons. And above all, he is intensively patriotic. He celebrates the Diamond Jubilee ('For sixty years, Bunny, we've been ruled over by absolutely the finest sovereign the world has ever seen') by dispatching to the Queen, through the post, an antique gold cup which he has stolen from the British Museum. He steals, from partly political motives, a pearl which the German Emperor is sending to one of the enemies of Britain, and when the Boer War begins to go badly his one thought is to find his way into the fighting line. At the front he unmasks a spy at the cost of revealing his own identity, and then dies gloriously by a Boer bullet. In this combination of crime and patriotism he resembles his near-contemporary Arsène Lupin, who also scores off the German Emperor and wipes out his very dirty past by enlisting in the Foreign Legion.

[Note: Actually Raffles does kill one man and is more or less consciously responsible for the death of two others. But all three of them are foreigners and have behaved in a very reprehensible manner. He also, on one occasion, contemplates murdering a blackmailer. It is however, a fairly well-established convention in crime stories that murdering a blackmailer 'doesn't count'. (Author's footnote, 1945.)]

It is important to note that by modern standards Raffles's crimes are very petty ones. Four hundred pounds worth of jewellery seems to him an excellent haul. And though the stories are convincing in their physical detail, they contain very little sensationalism–very few corpses, hardly any blood, no sex crimes, no sadism, no perversions of any kind. It seems to be the case that the crime story, at any rate

on its higher levels, has greatly increased in blood-thirstiness during the past twenty years. Some of the early detective stories do not even contain a murder. The Sherlock Holmes stories, for instance, are not all murders, and some of them do not even deal with an indictable crime. So also with the John Thorndyke stories, while of the Max Carrados stories only a minority are murders. Since 1918, however, a detective story not containing a murder has been a great rarity, and the most disgusting details of dismemberment and exhumation are commonly exploited. Some of the Peter Wimsey stories, for instance, display an extremely morbid interest in corpses. The Raffles stories, written from the angle of the criminal, are much less anti-social than many modern stories written from the angle of the detective. The main impression that they leave behind is of boyishness. They belong to a time when people had standards, though they happened to be foolish standards. Their key-phrase is 'not done'. The line that they draw between good and evil is as senseless as a Polynesian taboo, but at least, like the taboo, it has the advantage that everyone accepts it.

So much for RAFFLES. Now for a header into the cesspool. NO ORCHIDS FOR MISS BLANDISH, by James Hadley Chase, was published in 1939, but seems to have enjoyed its greatest popularity in 1940, during the Battle of Britain and the blitz. In its main outlines its story is this:

Miss Blandish, the daughter of a millionaire, is kidnapped by some gangsters who are almost immediately surprised and killed off by a larger and better organized gang. They hold her to ransom and extract half a million dollars from her father. Their original plan had been to kill her as soon as the ransom-money was received, but a chance keeps her alive. One of the gang is a young man named Slim, whose sole pleasure in life consists in driving knives into other people's bellies. In childhood he has graduated by cutting up living animals with a pair of rusty scissors. Slim is sexually impotent, but takes a kind of fancy to Miss Blandish. Slim's mother, who is the real brains of the gang, sees in this the chance of curing Slim's impotence, and decides to keep Miss Blandish in custody till Slim shall have succeeded in raping her. After many efforts and much persuasion, including the flogging of Miss Blandish with a length of

rubber hosepipe, the rape is achieved. Meanwhile Miss Blandish's father has hired a private detective, and by means of bribery and torture the detective and the police manage to round up and exterminate the whole gang. Slim escapes with Miss Blandish and is killed after a final rape, and the detective prepares to restore Miss Blandish to her family. By this time, however, she has developed such a taste for Slim's caresses [Note, below] that she feels unable to live without him, and she jumps, out of the window of a sky-scraper.

Several other points need noticing before one can grasp the full implications of this book. To begin with, its central story bears a very marked resemblance to William Faulkner's novel, Sanctuary. Secondly, it is not, as one might expect, the product of an illiterate hack, but a brilliant piece of writing, with hardly a wasted word or a jarring note anywhere. Thirdly, the whole book, récit as well as dialogue, is written in the American language; the author, an Englishman who has (I believe) never been in the United States, seems to have made a complete mental transference to the American underworld. Fourthly, the book sold, according to its publishers, no less than half a million copies.

I have already outlined the plot, but the subject-matter is much more sordid and brutal than this suggests. The book contains eight full-dress murders, an unassessable number of casual killings and woundings, an exhumation (with a careful reminder of the stench), the flogging of Miss Blandish, the torture of another woman with red-hot cigarette-ends, a strip-tease act, a third-degree scene of unheard-of cruelty and much else of the same kind. It assumes great sexual sophistication in its readers (there is a scene, for instance, in which a gangster, presumably of masochistic tendency, has an orgasm in the moment of being knifed), and it takes for granted the most complete corruption and self-seeking as the norm of human behaviour. The detective, for instance, is almost as great a rogue as the gangsters, and actuated by nearly the same motives. Like them, he is in pursuit of 'five hundred grand'. It is necessary to the machinery of the story that Mr. Blandish should be anxious to get his daughter back, but apart from this, such things as affection, friendship, good nature or even ordinary politeness simply do not enter. Nor, to any great extent does normal sexuality. Ultimately only

one motive is at work throughout the whole story: the pursuit of power.

[Note: Another reading of the final episode is possible. It may mean merely that Miss Blandish is pregnant. But the interpretation I have given above seems more in keeping with the general brutality of the book. (Author's footnote, 1945)]

It should be noticed that the book is not in the ordinary sense pornography. Unlike most books that deal in sexual sadism, it lays the emphasis on the cruelty and not on the pleasure. Slim, the ravisher of Miss Blandish, has 'wet slobbering lips': this is disgusting, and it is meant to be disgusting. But the scenes describing cruelty to women are comparatively perfunctory. The real high-spots of the book are cruelties committed by men upon other men; above all, the third-degreeing of the gangster, Eddie Schultz, who is lashed into a chair and flogged on the windpipe with truncheons, his arms broken by fresh blows as he breaks loose. In another of Mr. Chase's books, HE WON'T NEED IT NOW, the hero, who is intended to be a sympathetic and perhaps even noble character, is described as stamping on somebody's face, and then, having crushed the man's mouth in, grinding his heel round and round in it. Even when physical incidents of this kind are not occurring, the mental atmosphere of these books is always the same. Their whole theme is the struggle for power and the triumph of the strong over the weak. The big gangsters wipe out the little ones as mercilessly as a pike gobbling up the little fish in a pond; the police kill off the criminals as cruelly as the angler kills the pike. If ultimately one sides with the police against the gangsters, it is merely because they are better organized and more powerful, because, in fact, the law is a bigger racket than crime. Might is right: vae victis.

As I have mentioned already, NO ORCHIDS enjoyed its greatest vogue in 1940, though it was successfully running as a play till some time later. It was, in fact, one of the things that helped to console people for the boredom of being bombed. Early in the war the NEW YORKER had a picture of a little man approaching a news-stall littered with paper with such headlines as 'Great Tank Battles in Northern France', 'Big Naval Battle in the North Sea', 'Huge Air Battles over the Channel', etc., etc. The little man is saying

'ACTION STORIES, please'. That little man stood for all the drugged millions to whom the world of the gangster and the prize-ring is more 'real', more 'tough', than such things as wars, revolutions, earthquakes, famines and pestilences. From the point of view of a reader of ACTION STORIES, a description of the London blitz, or of the struggles of the European underground parties, would be 'sissy stuff'. On the other hand, some puny gun-battle in Chicago, resulting in perhaps half a dozen deaths, would seem genuinely 'tough'. This habit of mind is now extremely widespread. A soldier sprawls in a muddy trench, with the machine-gun bullets crackling a foot or two overhead, and whiles away his intolerable boredom by reading an American gangster story. And what is it that makes that story so exciting? Precisely the fact that people are shooting at each other with machine-guns! Neither the soldier nor anyone else sees anything curious in this. It is taken for granted that an imaginary bullet is more thrilling than a real one.

The obvious explanation is that in real life one is usually a passive victim, whereas in the adventure story one can think of oneself as being at the centre of events. But there is more to it than that. Here it is necessary to refer again to the curious fact of NO ORCHIDS being written–with technical errors, perhaps, but certainly with considerable skill–in the American language.

There exists in America an enormous literature of more or less the same stamp as NO ORCHIDS. Quite apart from books, there is the huge array of 'pulp magazines', graded so as to cater for different kinds of fantasy, but nearly all having much the same mental atmosphere. A few of them go in for straight pornography, but the great majority are quite plainly aimed at sadists and masochists. Sold at threepence a copy under the title of Yank Mags, [Note, below] these things used to enjoy considerable popularity in England, but when the supply dried up owing to the war, no satisfactory substitute was forthcoming. English imitations of the 'pulp magazine' do now exist, but they are poor things compared with the original. English crook films, again, never approach the American crook film in brutality. And yet the career of Mr. Chase shows how deep the American influence has already gone. Not only is he himself living a continuous fantasy-life in the Chicago underworld, but he can count

on hundreds of thousands of readers who know what is meant by a 'clipshop' or the 'hotsquat', do not have to do mental arithmetic when confronted by 'fifty grand', and understand at sight a sentence like 'Johnny was a rummy and only two jumps ahead of the nut-factory'. Evidently there are great numbers of English people who are partly Americanized in language and, one ought to add, in moral outlook. For there was no popular protest against NO ORCHIDS. In the end it was withdrawn, but only retrospectively, when a later work, MISS CALLAGHAN COMES TO GRIEF, brought Mr. Chase's books to the attention of the authorities. Judging by casual conversations at the time, ordinary readers got a mild thrill out of the obscenities of NO ORCHIDS, but saw nothing undesirable in the book as a whole. Many people, incidentally, were under the impression that it was an American book reissued in England.

[Note: They are said to have been imported into this country as ballast which accounted for their low price and crumped appearance. Since the war the ships have been ballasted with something more useful, probably gravel. (Author's footnote)]

The thing that the ordinary reader OUGHT to have objected to–almost certainly would have objected to, a few decades earlier–was the equivocal attitude towards crime. It is implied throughout NO ORCHIDS that being a criminal is only reprehensible in the sense that it does not pay. Being a policeman pays better, but there is no moral difference, since the police use essentially criminal methods. In a book like HE WON'T NEED IT NOW the distinction between crime and crime-prevention practically disappears. This is a new departure for English sensational fiction, in which till recently there has always been a sharp distinction between right and wrong and a general agreement that virtue must triumph in the last chapter. English books glorifying crime (modern crime, that is–pirates and highwaymen are different) are very rare. Even a book like RAFFLES, as I have pointed out, is governed by powerful taboos, and it is clearly understood that Raffles's crimes must be expiated sooner or later. In America, both in life and fiction, the tendency to tolerate crime, even to admire the criminal so long as he is success, is very much more marked. It is, indeed, ultimately this attitude that has made it possible for crime to flourish upon so huge a scale. Books

have been written about Al Capone that are hardly different in tone from the books written about Henry Ford, Stalin, Lord Northcliffe and all the rest of the 'log cabin to White House' brigade. And switching back eighty years, one finds Mark Twain adopting much the same attitude towards the disgusting bandit Slade, hero of twenty-eight murders, and towards the Western desperadoes generally. They were successful, they 'made good', therefore he admired them.

In a book like NO ORCHIDS one is not, as in the old-style crime story, simply escaping from dull reality into an imaginary world of action. One's escape is essentially into cruelty and sexual perversion. No Orchids is aimed at the power-instinct, which RAFFLES or the Sherlock Holmes stories are not. At the same time the English attitude towards crime is not so superior to the American as I may have seemed to imply. It too is mixed up with power-worship, and has become more noticeably so in the last twenty years. A writer who is worth examining is Edgar Wallace, especially in such typical books as THE ORATOR and the Mr. J. G. Reeder stories. Wallace was one of the first crime-story writers to break away from the old tradition of the private detective and make his central figure a Scotland Yard official. Sherlock Holmes is an amateur, solving his problems without the help and even, in the earlier stories, against the opposition of the police. Moreover, like Lupin, he is essentially an intellectual, even a scientist. He reasons logically from observed fact, and his intellectuality is constantly contrasted with the routine methods of the police. Wallace objected strongly to this slur, as he considered it, on Scotland Yard, and in several newspaper articles he went out of his way to denounce Holmes byname. His own ideal was the detective-inspector who catches criminals not because he is intellectually brilliant but because he is part of an all-powerful organization. Hence the curious fact that in Wallace's most characteristic stories the 'clue' and the 'deduction' play no part. The criminal is always defeated by an incredible coincidence, or because in some unexplained manner the police know all about the crime beforehand. The tone of the stories makes it quite clear that Wallace's admiration for the police is pure bully-worship. A Scotland Yard detective is the most powerful kind of being that he

can imagine, while the criminal figures in his mind as an outlaw against whom anything is permissible, like the condemned slaves in the Roman arena. His policemen behave much more brutally than British policemen do in real life–they hit people with out provocation, fire revolvers past their ears to terrify them and so on–and some of the stories exhibit a fearful intellectual sadism. (For instance, Wallace likes to arrange things so that the villain is hanged on the same day as the heroine is married.) But it is sadism after the English fashion: that is to say, it is unconscious, there is not overtly any sex in it, and it keeps within the bounds of the law. The British public tolerates a harsh criminal law and gets a kick out of monstrously unfair murder trials: but still that is better, on any account, than tolerating or admiring crime. If one must worship a bully, it is better that he should be a policeman than a gangster. Wallace is still governed to some extent by the concept of 'not done.' In NO ORCHIDS anything is 'done' so long as it leads on to power. All the barriers are down, all the motives are out in the open. Chase is a worse symptom than Wallace, to the extent that all-in wrestling is worse than boxing, or Fascism is worse than capitalist democracy.

In borrowing from William Faulkner's SANCTUARY, Chase only took the plot; the mental atmosphere of the two books is not similar. Chase really derives from other sources, and this particular bit of borrowing is only symbolic. What it symbolizes is the vulgarization of ideas which is constantly happening, and which probably happens faster in an age of print. Chase has been described as 'Faulkner for the masses', but it would be more accurate to describe him as Carlyle for the masses. He is a popular writer–there are many such in America, but they are still rarities in England–who has caught up with what is now fashionable to call 'realism', meaning the doctrine that might is right. The growth of 'realism' has been the great feature of the intellectual history of our own age. Why this should be so is a complicated question. The interconnexion between sadism, masochism, success-worship, power-worship, nationalism, and totalitarianism is a huge subject whose edges have barely been scratched, and even to mention it is considered somewhat indelicate. To take merely the first example that comes to mind, I believe no one has ever pointed out the sadistic and

masochistic element in Bernard Shaw's work, still less suggested that this probably has some connexion with Shaw's admiration for dictators. Fascism is often loosely equated with sadism, but nearly always by people who see nothing wrong in the most slavish worship of Stalin. The truth is, of course, that the countless English intellectuals who kiss the arse of Stalin are not different from the minority who give their allegiance to Hitler or Mussolini, nor from the efficiency experts who preached 'punch', 'drive', 'personality' and 'learn to be a Tiger man' in the nineteen-twenties, nor from that older generation of intellectuals, Carlyle, Creasey and the rest of them, who bowed down before German militarism. All of them are worshipping power and successful cruelty. It is important to notice that the cult of power tends to be mixed up with a love of cruelty and wickedness FOR THEIR OWN SAKES. A tyrant is all the more admired if he happens to be a bloodstained crook as well, and 'the end justifies the means' often becomes, in effect, 'the means justify themselves provided they are dirty enough'. This idea colours the outlook of all sympathizers with totalitarianism, and accounts, for instance, for the positive delight with which many English intellectuals greeted the Nazi-Soviet pact. It was a step only doubtfully useful to the U.S.S.R., but it was entirely unmoral, and for that reason to be admired; the explanations of it, which were numerous and self-contradictory, could come afterwards.

Until recently the characteristic adventure stories of the English-speaking peoples have been stories in which the hero fights AGAINST ODDS. This is true all the way from Robin Hood to Popeye the Sailor. Perhaps the basic myth of the Western world is Jack the Giant-killer, but to be brought up to date this should be renamed Jack the Dwarf-killer, and there already exists a considerable literature which teaches, either overtly or implicitly, that one should side with the big man against the little man. Most of what is now written about foreign policy is simply an embroidery on this theme, and for several decades such phrases as 'Play the game', 'Don't hit a man when he's down' and 'It's not cricket' have never failed to draw a snigger from anyone of intellectual pretensions. What is comparatively new is to find the accepted pattern, according to which (a) right is right and wrong is wrong, whoever wins, and (b)

weakness must be respected, disappearing from popular literature as well. When I first read D. H. Lawrence's novels, at the age of about twenty, I was puzzled by the fact that there did not seem to be any classification of the characters into 'good' and 'bad'. Lawrence seemed to sympathize with all of them about equally, and this was so unusual as to give me the feeling of having lost my bearings. Today no one would think of looking for heroes and villains in a serious novel, but in lowbrow fiction one still expects to find a sharp distinction between right and wrong and between legality and illegality. The common people, on the whole, are still living in the world of absolute good and evil from which the intellectuals have long since escaped. But the popularity of NO ORCHIDS and the American books and magazines to which it is akin shows how rapidly the doctrine of 'realism' is gaining ground.

Several people, after reading NO ORCHIDS, have remarked to me, 'It's pure Fascism'. This is a correct description, although the book has not the smallest connexion with politics and very little with social or economic problems. It has merely the same relation to Fascism as, say Trollope's novels have to nineteenth-century capitalism. It is a daydream appropriate to a totalitarian age. In his imagined world of gangsters Chase is presenting, as it were, a distilled version of the modern political scene, in which such things as mass bombing of civilians, the use of hostages, torture to obtain confessions, secret prisons, execution without trial, floggings with rubber truncheons, drownings in cesspools, systematic falsification of records and statistics, treachery, bribery, and quislingism are normal and morally neutral, even admirable when they are done in a large and bold way. The average man is not directly interested in politics, and when he reads, he wants the current struggles of the world to be translated into a simple story about individuals. He can take an interest in Slim and Fenner as he could not in the G.P.U. and the Gestapo. People worship power in the form in which they are able to understand it. A twelve-year-old boy worships Jack Dempsey. An adolescent in a Glasgow slum worships Al Capone. An aspiring pupil at a business college worships Lord Nuffield. A NEW STATESMAN reader worships Stalin. There is a difference in intellectual maturity, but none in moral outlook. Thirty years ago the

heroes of popular fiction had nothing in common with Mr. Chase's gangsters and detectives, and the idols of the English liberal intelligentsia were also comparatively sympathetic figures. Between Holmes and Fenner on the one hand, and between Abraham Lincoln and Stalin on the other, there is a similar gulf.

One ought not to infer too much from the success of Mr. Chase's books. It is possible that it is an isolated phenomenon, brought about by the mingled boredom and brutality of war. But if such books should definitely acclimatize themselves in England, instead of being merely a half-understood import from America, there would be good grounds for dismay. In choosing RAFFLES as a background for NO ORCHIDS I deliberately chose a book which by the standards of its time was morally equivocal. Raffles, as I have pointed out, has no real moral code, no religion, certainly no social consciousness. All he has is a set of reflexes the nervous system, as it were, of a gentleman. Give him a sharp tap on this reflex or that (they are called 'sport', 'pal', 'woman', 'king and country' and so forth), and you get a predictable reaction. In Mr. Chase's books there are no gentlemen and no taboos. Emancipation is complete. Freud and Machiavelli have reached the outer suburbs. Comparing the schoolboy atmosphere of the one book with the cruelty and corruption of the other, one is driven to feel that snobbishness, like hypocrisy, is a check upon behaviour whose value from a social point of view has been underrated.

ANTISEMITISM IN BRITAIN (1945)

There are about 400,000 known Jews in Britain, and in addition some thousands or, at most, scores of thousands of Jewish refugees who have entered the country from 1934 onwards. The Jewish population is almost entirely concentrated in half a dozen big towns and is mostly employed in the food, clothing and furniture trades. A few of the big monopolies, such as the ICI, one or two leading newspapers and at least one big chain of department stores are Jewish-owned or partly Jewish-owned, but it would be very far from the truth to say that British business life is dominated by Jews. The Jews seem, on the contrary, to have failed to keep up with the modern tendency towards big amalgamations and to have remained fixed in those trades which are necessarily carried out on a small scale and by old-fashioned methods.

I start off with these background facts, which are already known to any well-informed person, in order to emphasise that there is no real Jewish "problem" in England. The Jews are not numerous or powerful enough, and it is only in what are loosely called "intellectual circles" that they have any noticeable influence. Yet it is generally admitted that antisemitism is on the increase, that it has been greatly exacerbated by the war, and that humane and enlightened people are not immune to it. It does not take violent forms (English people are almost invariably gentle and law-abiding), but it is ill-natured enough, and in favourable circumstances it could have political results. Here are some samples of antisemitic remarks that have been made to me during the past year or two:

Middle-aged office employee: "I generally come to work by bus. It takes longer, but I don't care about using the Underground from Golders Green nowadays. There's too many of the Chosen Race travelling on that line."

Tobacconist (woman): "No, I've got no matches for you. I should try the lady down the street. SHE'S always got matches. One of the Chosen Race, you see."

Young intellectual, Communist or near-Communist: "No, I do NOT like Jews. I've never made any secret of that. I can't stick them.

Mind you, I'm not antisemitic, of course."

Middle-class woman: "Well, no one could call me antisemitic, but I do think the way these Jews behave is too absolutely stinking. The way they push their way to the head of queues, and so on. They're so abominably selfish. I think they're responsible for a lot of what happens to them."

Milk roundsman: "A Jew don't do no work, not the same as what an Englishman does. 'E's too clever. We work with this 'ere" (flexes his biceps). "They work with that there" (taps his forehead).

Chartered accountant, intelligent, left-wing in an undirected way: "These bloody Yids are all pro-German. They'd change sides tomorrow if the Nazis got here. I see a lot of them in my business. They admire Hitler at the bottom of their hearts. They'll always suck up to anyone who kicks them."

Intelligent woman, on being offered a book dealing with antisemitism and German atrocities: "Don't show it me, PLEASE don't show it to me. It'll only make me hate the Jews more than ever."

I could fill pages with similar remarks, but these will do to go on with. Two facts emerge from them. One–which is very important and which I must return to in a moment–is that above a certain intellectual level people are ashamed of being antisemitic and are careful to draw a distinction between "antisemitism" and "disliking Jews". The other is that antisemitism is an irrational thing. The Jews are accused of specific offences (for instance, bad behaviour in food queues) which the person speaking feels strongly about, but it is obvious that these accusations merely rationalise some deep-rooted prejudice. To attempt to counter them with facts and statistics is useless, and may sometimes be worse than useless. As the last of the above-quoted remarks shows, people can remain antisemitic, or at least anti-Jewish, while being fully aware that their outlook is indefensible. If you dislike somebody, you dislike him and there is an end of it: your feelings are not made any better by a recital of his virtues.

It so happens that the war has encouraged the growth of antisemitism and even, in the eyes of many ordinary people, given some justification for it. To begin with, the Jews are one people of

whom it can be said with complete certainty that they will benefit by an Allied victory. Consequently the theory that "this is a Jewish war" has a certain plausibility, all the more so because the Jewish war effort seldom gets its fair share of recognition. The British Empire is a huge heterogeneous organisation held together largely by mutual consent, and it is often necessary to flatter the less reliable elements at the expense of the more loyal ones. To publicise the exploits of Jewish soldiers, or even to admit the existence of a considerable Jewish army in the Middle East, rouses hostility in South Africa, the Arab countries and elsewhere: it is easier to ignore the whole subject and allow the man in the street to go on thinking that Jews are exceptionally clever at dodging military service. Then again, Jews are to be found in exactly those trades which are bound to incur unpopularity with the civilian public in war-time. Jews are mostly concerned with selling food, clothes, furniture and tobacco–exactly the commodities of which there is a chronic shortage, with consequent overcharging, black-marketing and favouritism. And again, the common charge that Jews behave in an exceptionally cowardly way during air raids was given a certain amount of colour by the big raids of 1940. As it happened, the Jewish quarter of Whitechapel was one of the first areas to be heavily blitzed, with the natural result that swarms of Jewish refugees distributed themselves all over London. If one judged merely from these war-time phenomena, it would be easy to imagine that antisemitism is a quasi-rational thing, founded on mistaken premises. And naturally the antisemite thinks of himself as a reasonable being. Whenever I have touched on this subject in a newspaper article, I have always had a considerable "come-back", and invariably some of the letters are from well-balanced, middling people–doctors, for example–with no apparent economic grievance. These people always say (as Hitler says in MEIN KAMPF) that they started out with no anti-Jewish prejudice but were driven into their present position by mere observation of the facts. Yet one of the marks of antisemitism is an ability to believe stories that could not possibly be true. One could see a good example of this in the strange accident that occurred in London in 1942, when a crowd, frightened by a bomb-burst nearby, fled into the mouth of an Underground station, with the result that

something over a hundred people were crushed to death. The very same day it was repeated all over London that "the Jews were responsible". Clearly, if people will believe this kind of thing, one will not get much further by arguing with them. The only useful approach is to discover WHY they can swallow absurdities on one particular subject while remaining sane on others.

But now let me come back to that point I mentioned earlier–that there is widespread awareness of the prevalence of antisemitic feeling, and unwillingness to admit sharing it. Among educated people, antisemitism is held to be an unforgivable sin and in a quite different category from other kinds of racial prejudice. People will go to remarkable lengths to demonstrate that they are NOT antisemitic. Thus, in 1943 an intercession service on behalf of the Polish Jews was held in a synagogue in St John's Wood. The local authorities declared themselves anxious to participate in it, and the service was attended by the mayor of the borough in his robes and chain, by representatives of all the churches, and by detachments of RAF, Home Guards, nurses, Boy Scouts and what not. On the surface it was a touching demonstration of solidarity with the suffering Jews. But it was essentially a CONSCIOUS effort to behave decently by people whose subjective feelings must in many cases have been very different. That quarter of London is partly Jewish, antisemitism is rife there, and, as I well knew, some of the men sitting round me in the synagogue were tinged by it. Indeed, the commander of my own platoon of Home Guards, who had been especially keen beforehand that we should "make a good show" at the intercession service, was an ex-member of Mosley's Blackshirts. While this division of feeling exists, tolerance of mass violence against Jews, or, what is more important, antisemitic legislation, are not possible in England. It is not at present possible, indeed, that antisemitism should BECOME RESPECTABLE. But this is less of an advantage than it might appear.

One effect of the persecutions in Germany has been to prevent antisemitism from being seriously studied. In England a brief inadequate survey was made by Mass Observation a year or two ago, but if there has been any other investigation of the subject, then its findings have been kept strictly secret. At the same time there has

been conscious suppression, by all thoughtful people, of anything likely to wound Jewish susceptibilities. After 1934 the Jew joke disappeared as though by magic from postcards, periodicals and the music-hall stage, and to put an unsympathetic Jewish character into a novel or short story came to be regarded as antisemitism. On the Palestine issue, too, it was DE RIGUEUR among enlightened people to accept the Jewish case as proved and avoid examining the claims of the Arabs–a decision which might be correct on its own merits, but which was adopted primarily because the Jews were in trouble and it was felt that one must not criticise them. Thanks to Hitler, therefore, you had a situation in which the press was in effect censored in favour of the Jews while in private antisemitism was on the up-grade, even, to some extent, among sensitive and intelligent people. This was particularly noticeable in 1940 at the time of the internment of the refugees. Naturally, every thinking person felt that it was his duty to protest against the wholesale locking-up of unfortunate foreigners who for the most part were only in England because they were opponents of Hitler. Privately, however, one heard very different sentiments expressed. A minority of the refugees behaved in an exceedingly tactless way, and the feeling against them necessarily had an antisemitic undercurrent, since they were largely Jews. A very eminent figure in the Labour Party–I won't name him, but he is one of the most respected people in England–said to me quite violently: "We never asked these people to come to this country. If they choose to come here, let them take the consequences." Yet this man would as a matter of course have associated himself with any kind of petition or manifesto against the internment of aliens. This feeling that antisemitism is something sinful and disgraceful, something that a civilised person does not suffer from, is unfavourable to a scientific approach, and indeed many people will admit that they are frightened of probing too deeply into the subject. They are frightened, that is to say, of discovering not only that antisemitism is spreading, but that they themselves are infected by it.

To see this in perspective one must look back a few decades, to the days when Hitler was an out-of-work house-painter whom nobody had heard of. One would then find that though antisemitism

is sufficiently in evidence now, it is probably LESS prevalent in England than it was thirty years ago. It is true that antisemitism as a fully thought-out racial or religious doctrine has never flourished in England. There has never been much feeling against inter-marriage, or against Jews taking a prominent part in public life. Nevertheless, thirty years ago it was accepted more or less as a law of nature that a Jew was a figure of fun and–though superior in intelligence–slightly deficient in "character". In theory a Jew suffered from no legal disabilities, but in effect he was debarred from certain professions. He would probably not have been accepted as an officer in the navy, for instance, nor in what is called a "smart" regiment in the army. A Jewish boy at a public school almost invariably had a bad time. He could, of course, live down his Jewishness if he was exceptionally charming or athletic, but it was an initial disability comparable to a stammer or a birthmark. Wealthy Jews tended to disguise themselves under aristocratic English or Scottish names, and to the average person it seemed quite natural that they should do this, just as it seems natural for a criminal to change his identity if possible. About twenty years ago, in Rangoon, I was getting into a taxi with a friend when a small ragged boy of fair complexion rushed up to us and began a complicated story about having arrived from Colombo on a ship and wanting money to get back. His manner and appearance were difficult to "place", and I said to him:

"You speak very good English. What nationality are you?"

He answered eagerly in his chi-chi accent: "I am a JOO, sir!"

And I remember turning to my companion and saying, only partly in joke, "He admits it openly." All the Jews I had known till then were people who were ashamed of being Jews, or at any rate preferred not to talk about their ancestry, and if forced to do so tended to use the word "Hebrew".

The working-class attitude was no better. The Jew who grew up in Whitechapel took it for granted that he would be assaulted, or at least hooted at, if he ventured into one of the Christian slums nearby, and the "Jew joke" of the music halls and the comic papers was almost consistently ill-natured. [Note at end of paragraph] There was also literary Jew-baiting, which in the hands of Belloc, Chesterton and their followers reached an almost continental level of scurrility. Non-

Catholic writers were sometimes guilty of the same thing in a milder form. There has been a perceptible antisemitic strain in English literature from Chaucer onwards, and without even getting up from this table to consult a book I can think of passages which IF WRITTEN NOW would be stigmatised as antisemitism, in the works of Shakespeare, Smollett, Thackeray, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley and various others. Offhand, the only English writers I can think of who, before the days of Hitler, made a definite effort to stick up for Jews are Dickens and Charles Reade. And however little the average intellectual may have agreed with the opinions of Belloc and Chesterton, he did not acutely disapprove of them. Chesterton's endless tirades against Jews, which he thrust into stories and essays upon the flimsiest pretexts, never got him into trouble–indeed Chesterton was one of the most generally respected figures in English literary life. Anyone who wrote in that strain NOW would bring down a storm of abuse upon himself, or more probably would find it impossible to get his writings published.

[Note: It is interesting to compare the "Jew joke" with that other stand-by of the music halls, the "Scotch joke", which superficially it resembles. Occasionally a story is told (e.g. the Jew and the Scotsman who went into a pub together and both died of thirst) which puts both races on an equality, but in general the Jew is credited MERELY with cunning and avarice while the Scotsman is credited with physical hardihood as well. This is seen, for example, in the story of the Jew and the Scotsman who go together to a meeting which has been advertised as free. Unexpectedly there is a collection, and to avoid this the Jew faints and the Scotsman carries him out. Here the Scotsman performs the athletic feat of carrying the other. It would seem vaguely wrong if it were the other way about. (Author's footnote.)]

If, as I suggest, prejudice against Jews has always been pretty widespread in England, there is no reason to think that Hitler has genuinely diminished it. He has merely caused a sharp division between the politically conscious person who realises that this is not a time to throw stones at the Jews, and the unconscious person whose native antisemitism is increased by the nervous strain of the war. One can assume, therefore, that many people who would perish rather

than admit to antisemitic feelings are secretly prone to them. I have already indicated that I believe antisemitism to be essentially a neurosis, but of course it has its rationalisations, which are sincerely believed in and are partly true. The rationalisation put forward by the common man is that the Jew is an exploiter. The partial justification for this is that the Jew, in England, is generally a small businessman–that is to say a person whose depredations are more obvious and intelligible than those of, say, a bank or an insurance company. Higher up the intellectual scale, antisemitism is rationalised by saying that the Jew is a person who spreads disaffection and weakens national morale. Again there is some superficial justification for this. During the past twenty-five years the activities of what are called "intellectuals" have been largely mischievous. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that if the "intellectuals" had done their work a little more thoroughly, Britain would have surrendered in 1940. But the disaffected intelligentsia inevitably included a large number of Jews. With some plausibility it can be said that the Jews are the enemies of our native culture and our national morale. Carefully examined, the claim is seen to be nonsense, but there are always a few prominent individuals who can be cited in support of it. During the past few years there has been what amounts to a counter-attack against the rather shallow Leftism which was fashionable in the previous decade and which was exemplified by such organisations as the Left Book Club. This counter-attack (see for instance such books as Arnold Lutin's THE GOOD GORILLA or Evelyn Waugh's PUT OUT MORE FLAGS) has an antisemitic strain, and it would probably be more marked if the subject were not so obviously dangerous. It so happens that for some decades past Britain has had no nationalist intelligentsia worth bothering about. But British nationalism, i.e. nationalism of an intellectual kind, may revive, and probably will revive if Britain comes out of the present war greatly weakened. The young intellectuals of 1950 may be as naively patriotic as those of 1914. In that case the kind of antisemitism which flourished among the anti-Dreyfusards in France, and which Chesterton and Belloc tried to import into this country, might get a foothold.

I have no hard-and-fast theory about the origins of antisemitism.

The two current explanations, that it is due to economic causes, or on the other hand, that it is a legacy from the Middle Ages, seem to me unsatisfactory, though I admit that if one combines them they can be made to cover the facts. All I would say with confidence is that antisemitism is part of the larger problem of nationalism, which has not yet been seriously examined, and that the Jew is evidently a scapegoat, though for what he is a scapegoat we do not yet know. In this essay I have relied almost entirely on my own limited experience, and perhaps every one of my conclusions would be negatived by other observers. The fact is that there are almost no data on this subject. But for what they are worth I will summarise my opinions. Boiled down, they amount to this:

There is more antisemitism in England than we care to admit, and the war has accentuated it, but it is not certain that it is on the increase if one thinks in terms of decades rather than years.

It does not at present lead to open persecution, but it has the effect of making people callous to the sufferings of Jews in other countries.

It is at bottom quite irrational and will not yield to argument.

The persecutions in Germany have caused much concealment of antisemitic feeling and thus obscured the whole picture.

The subject needs serious investigation.

Only the last point is worth expanding. To study any subject scientifically one needs a detached attitude, which is obviously harder when one's own interests or emotions are involved. Plenty of people who are quite capable of being objective about sea urchins, say, or the square root of 2, become schizophrenic if they have to think about the sources of their own income. What vitiates nearly all that is written about antisemitism is the assumption in the writer's mind that HE HIMSELF is immune to it. "Since I know that antisemitism is irrational," he argues, "it follows that I do not share it." He thus fails to start his investigation in the one place where he could get hold of some reliable evidence–that is, in his own mind.

It seems to me a safe assumption that the disease loosely called nationalism is now almost universal. Antisemitism is only one manifestation of nationalism, and not everyone will have the disease in that particular form. A Jew, for example, would not be antisemitic: but then many Zionist Jews seem to me to be merely antisemites

turned upside-down, just as many Indians and Negroes display the normal colour prejudices in an inverted form. The point is that something, some psychological vitamin, is lacking in modern civilisation, and as a result we are all more or less subject to this lunacy of believing that whole races or nations are mysteriously good or mysteriously evil. I defy any modern intellectual to look closely and honestly into his own mind without coming upon nationalistic loyalties and hatreds of one kind or another. It is the fact that he can feel the emotional tug of such things, and yet see them dispassionately for what they are, that gives him his status as an intellectual. It will be seen, therefore, that the starting point for any investigation of antisemitism should not be "Why does this obviously irrational belief appeal to other people?" but "Why does antisemitism appeal TO ME? What is there about it that I feel to be true?" If one asks this question one at least discovers one's own rationalisations, and it may be possible to find out what lies beneath them. Antisemitism should be investigated–and I will not say by antisemites, but at any rate by people who know that they are not immune to that kind of emotion. When Hitler has disappeared a real enquiry into this subject will be possible, and it would probably be best to start not by debunking antisemitism, but by marshalling all the justifications for it that can be found, in one's own mind or anybody else's. In that way one might get some clues that would lead to its psychological roots. But that antisemitism will be definitively CURED, without curing the larger disease of nationalism, I do not believe.

FREEDOM OF THE PARK (1945)

A few weeks ago, five people who were selling papers outside Hyde Park were arrested by the police for obstruction. When taken before the magistrates, they were all found guilty, four of them being bound over for six months and the other sentenced to forty shillings fine or a month's imprisonments. He preferred to serve his term.

The papers these people were selling were PEACE NEWS, FORWARD and FREEDOM, besides other kindred literature. PEACE NEWS is the organ of the Peace Pledge Union, FREEDOM (till recently called WAR COMMENTARY) is that of the Anarchists; as for FORWARD, its politics defy definition, but at any rate it is violently Left. The magistrate, in passing sentence, stated that he was not influenced by the nature of the literature that was being sold; he was concerned merely with the fact of obstruction, and that this offence had technically been committed.

This raises several important points. To begin with, how does the law stand on the subject? As far as I can discover, selling newspapers in the street is technically an obstruction, at any rate if you fail to move when the police tell you to. So it would be legally possible for any policeman who felt like it to arrest any newsboy for selling the EVENING NEWS. Obviously this doesn't happen, so that the enforcement of the law depends on the discretion of the police.

And what makes the police decide to arrest one man rather than another? However it may be with the magistrate, I find it hard to believe that in this case the police were not influenced by political considerations. It is a bit too much of a coincidence that they should have picked on people selling just those papers.

If they had also arrested someone selling TRUTH, or the TABLET, or the SPECTATOR, or even the CHURCH TIMES, their impartiality would be easier to believe in.

The British police are not like the continental GENDARMERIE or Gestapo, but I do not think [sic] one maligns them in saying that, in the past, they have been unfriendly to Left-wing activities. They have generally shown a tendency to side with those whom they regarded as the defenders of private property. Till quite recently

"red" and "illegal" were almost synonymous, and it was always the seller of, say the DAILY WORKER, never the seller of say, the DAILY TELEGRAPH, who was moved on and generally harassed. Apparently it can be the same, at any rate at moments, under a Labour Government.

A thing I would like to know–it is a thing we hear very little about–is what changes are made in the administrative personnel when there has been a change of government.. Does a police officer who has a vague notion that "Socialism" means something against the law carry on just the same when the government itself is Socialist?

When a Labour government takes over, I wonder what happens to Scotland Yard Special Branch? To Military Intelligence? We are not told, but such symptoms as there are do not suggest that any very extensive shuffling is going on.

However, the main point of this episode is that the sellers of newspapers and pamphlets should be interfered with at all. Which particular minority is singled out–whether Pacifists, Communists, Anarchists, Jehovah's Witness of the Legion of Christian Reformers who recently declared Hitler to be Jesus Christ–is a secondary matter. It is of symptomatic importance that these people should have been arrested at that particular spot. You are not allowed to sell literature inside Hyde Park, but for many years past it has been usual for the paper-sellers to station themselves outside the gates and distribute literature connected with the open air meetings a hundred yards away. Every kind of publication has been sold there without interference.

The degree of freedom of the press existing in this country is often over-rated. Technically there is great freedom, but the fact that most of the press is owned by a few people operates in much the same way as State censorship. On the other hand, freedom of speech is real. On a platform, or in certain recognised open air spaces like Hyde Park, you can say almost anything, and, what is perhaps more significant, no one is frightened to utter his true opinions in pubs, on the tops of busses, and so forth.

The point is that the relative freedom which we enjoy depends of public opinion. The law is no protection. Governments make laws,

but whether they are carried out, and how the police behave, depends on the general temper in the country. If large numbers of people are interested in freedom of speech, there will be freedom of speech, even if the law forbids it; if public opinion is sluggish, inconvenient minorities will be persecuted, even if laws exist to protect them. The decline in the desire for individual liberty has not been so sharp as I would have predicted six years ago, when the war was starting, but still there has been a decline. The notion that certain opinions cannot safely be allowed a hearing is growing. It is given currency by intellectuals who confuse the issue by not distinguishing between democratic opposition and open rebellion, and it is reflected in our growing indifference to tyranny and injustice abroad. And even those who declare themselves to be in favour of freedom of opinion generally drop their claim when it is their own adversaries who are being prosecutued.

I am not suggesting that the arrest of five people for selling harmless newspapers is a major calamity. When you see what is happening in the world today, it hardly seems worth squealing about such a tiny incident. All the same, it is not a good symptom that such things should happen when the war is well over, and I should feel happier if this and the long series of similar episodes that have preceded it, were capable of raising a genuine popular clamour, and not merely a mild flutter in sections of the minority press.

FUTURE OF A RUINED GERMANY (1945)

As the advance into Germany continues and more and more of the devastation wrought by the Allied bombing planes is laid bare, there are three comments that almost every observer finds himself making. The first is: 'The people at home have no conception of this.' The second is, 'It's a miracle that they've gone on fighting.' And the third is, 'Just think of the work of building this all up again!'

It is quite true that the scale of the Allied blitzing of Germany is even now not realised in this country, and its share in the breaking-down of German resistance is probably much underrated. It is difficult to give actuality to reports of air warfare and the man in the street can be forgiven if he imagines that what we have done to Germany over the past four years is merely the same kind of thing they did to us in 1940.

But this error, which must be even commoner in the United States, has in it a potential danger, and the many protests against indiscriminate bombing which have been uttered by pacifists and humanitarians have merely confused the issue.

Bombing is not especially inhumane. War itself is inhumane and the bombing plane, which is used to paralyse industry and transport, is a relatively civilised weapon. 'Normal' or 'legitimate' warfare is just as destructive of inanimate objects and enormously so of human lives.

Moreover, a bomb kills a casual cross-section of the population, whereas the men killed in battle are exactly the ones that the community can least afford to lose. The people of Britain have never felt easy about the bombing of civilians and no doubt they will be ready enough to pity the Germans as soon as they have definitely defeated them; but what they still have not grasped–-thanks to their own comparative immunity–-is the frightful destructiveness of modern war and the long period of impoverishment that now lies ahead of the world as a whole.

To walk through the ruined cities of Germany is to feel an actual doubt about the continuity of civilisation. For one has to remember that it is not only Germany that has been blitzed. The same

desolation extends, at any rate in considerable patches, all the way from Brussels to Stalingrad. And where there has been ground fighting, the destruction is even more thorough. In the 300 miles or so between the Marne and the Rhine there is not such a thing as a bridge or a viaduct that has not been blown up.

Even in England we are aware that we need three million houses, and that the chances of getting them within measurable time seem rather slender. But how many houses will Germany need, or Poland or the USSR, or Italy? When one thinks of the stupendous task of rebuilding hundreds of European cities, one realises that a long period must elapse before even the standards of living of 1939 can be re-established.

We do not yet know the full extent of the damage that has been done to Germany but judging from the areas that have been overrun hitherto, it is difficult to believe in the power of the Germans to pay any kind of reparations, either in goods or in labour. Simply to re-house the German people, to set the shattered factories working, and to keep German agriculture from collapsing after the foreign workers have been liberated, will use up all the labour that the Germans are likely to dispose of.

If, as is planned, millions of them are to be deported for reconstruction work, the recovery of Germany itself will be all the slower. After the last war, the impossibility of obtaining substantial money reparations was finally grasped, but it was less generally realised that the impoverishment of any one country reacts unfavourably on the world as a whole. It would be no advantage to turn Germany into a kind of rural slum.

GOOD BAD BOOKS

Not long ago a publisher commissioned me to write an introduction for a reprint of a novel by Leonard Merrick. This publishing house, it appears, is going to reissue a long series of minor and partly-forgotten novels of the twentieth century. It is a valuable service in these bookless days, and I rather envy the person whose job it will be to scout round the threepenny boxes, hunting down copies of his boyhood favourites.

A type of book which we hardly seem to produce in these days, but which flowered with great richness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is what Chesterton called the "good bad book": that is, the kind of book that has no literary pretensions but which remains readable when more serious productions have perished. Obviously outstanding books in this line are RAFFLES and the Sherlock Holmes stories, which have kept their place when innumerable "problem novels", "human documents" and "terrible indictments" of this or that have fallen into deserved oblivion. (Who has worn better, Conan Doyle or Meredith?) Almost in the same class as these I, put R. Austin Freeman's earlier stories–"The Singing Bone" "The Eye of Osiris" and others–Ernest Bramah's MAX CARRADOS, and, dropping the standard a bit, Guy Boothby's Tibetan thriller, DR NIKOLA, a sort of schoolboy version of Hue's TRAVELS IN TARTARY, which would probably make a real visit to Central Asia seem a dismal anticlimax.

But apart from thrillers, there were the minor humorous writers of the period. For example, Pett Ridge-but I admit his full-length books no longer seem readable–E. Nesbit (THE TREASURE SEEKERS), George Birmingham, who was good so long as he kept off politics, the pornographic Binstead ("Pitcher" of the PINK 'UN), and, if American books can be included, Booth Tarkington's Penrod stories. A cut above most of these was Barry Pain. Some of Pain's humorous writings are, I suppose, still in print, but to anyone who comes across it I recommend what must now be a very rare book–THE OCTAVE OF CLAUDIUS, a brilliant exercise in the macabre. Somewhat later in time there was Peter Blundell, who wrote in the W.W. Jacobs vein

about Far Eastern seaport towns, and who seems to be rather unaccountably forgotten, in spite of having been praised in print by H.G. Wells.

However, all the books I have been speaking of are frankly "escape" literature. They form pleasant patches in one's memory, quiet corners where the mind can browse at odd moments, but they hardly pretend to have anything to do with real life. There is another kind of good bad book which is more seriously intended, and which tells us, I think, something about the nature of the novel and the reasons for its present decadence. During the last fifty years there has been a whole series of writers–some of them are still writing–whom it is quite impossible to call "good" by any strictly literary standard, but who are natural novelists and who seem to attain sincerity partly because they are not inhibited by good taste. In this class I put Leonard Merrick himself, W.L. George, J.D. Beresford, Ernest Raymond, May Sinclair, and–at a lower level than the others but still essentially similar–A.S.M. Hutchinson.

Most of these have been prolific writers, and their output has naturally varied in quality. I am thinking in each case of one or two outstanding books: for example, Merrick's CYNTHIA, J.D. Beresford's A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH, W.L. George's CALIBAN, May Sinclair's THE COMBINED MAZE and Ernest Raymond's WE, THE ACCUSED. In each of these books the author has been able to identify himself with his imagined characters, to feel with them and invite sympathy on their behalf, with a kind of abandonment that cleverer people would find it difficult to achieve. They bring out the fact that intellectual refinement can be a disadvantage to a story-teller, as it would be to a music-hall comedian.

Take, for example, Ernest Raymond's WE, THE ACCUSED–a peculiarly sordid and convincing murder story, probably based on the Crippen case. I think it gains a great deal from the fact that the author only partly grasps the pathetic vulgarity of the people he is writing about, and therefore does not despise them. Perhaps it even–like Theodore Dreiser's An AMERICAN TRAGEDY–gains something from the clumsy long-winded manner in which it is written; detail is piled on detail, with almost no attempt at selection, and in the

process an effect of terrible, grinding cruelty is slowly built up. So also with A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH. Here there is not the same clumsiness, but there is the same ability to take seriously the problems of commonplace people. So also with CYNTHIA and at any rate the earlier part of Caliban. The greater part of what W.L. George wrote was shoddy rubbish, but in this particular book, based on the career of Northcliffe, he achieved some memorable and truthful pictures of lower-middle-class London life. Parts of this book are probably autobiographical, and one of the advantages of good bad writers is their lack of shame in writing autobiography. Exhibitionism and self-pity are the bane of the novelist, and yet if he is too frightened of them his creative gift may suffer.

The existence of good bad literature–the fact that one can be amused or excited or even moved by a book that one's intellect simply refuses to take seriously–is a reminder that art is not the same thing as cerebration. I imagine that by any test that could be devised, Carlyle would be found to be a more intelligent man than Trollope. Yet Trollope has remained readable and Carlyle has not: with all his cleverness he had not even the wit to write in plain straightforward English. In novelists, almost as much as in poets, the connection between intelligence and creative power is hard to establish. A good novelist may be a prodigy of self-discipline like Flaubert, or he may be an intellectual sprawl like Dickens. Enough talent to set up dozens of ordinary writers has been poured into Wyndham Lewis's so-called novels, such as TARR or SNOOTY BARONET. Yet it would be a very heavy labour to read one of these books right through. Some indefinable quality, a sort of literary vitamin, which exists even in a book like IF WINTER COMES, is absent from them.

Perhaps the supreme example of the "good bad" book is UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. It is an unintentionally ludicrous book, full of preposterous melodramatic incidents; it is also deeply moving and essentially true; it is hard to say which quality outweighs the other. But UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, after all, is trying to be serious and to deal with the real world. How about the frankly escapist writers, the purveyors of thrills and "light" humour? How about SHERLOCK HOLMES, VICE VERSA, DRACULA, HELEN'S BABIES or KING SOLOMON'S MINES? All of these are definitely absurd

books, books which one is more inclined to laugh AT than WITH, and which were hardly taken seriously even by their authors; yet they have survived, and will probably continue to do so. All one can say is that, while civilisation remains such that one needs distraction from time to time, "light" literature has its appointed place; also that there is such a thing as sheer skill, or native grace, which may have more survival value than erudition or intellectual power. There are music-hall songs which are better poems than three-quarters of the stuff that gets into the anthologies:

Come where the booze is cheaper,
Come where the pots hold more,
Come where the boss is a bit of a sport,
Come to the pub next door!

Or again:

Two lovely black eyes
Oh, what a surprise!
Only for calling another man wrong,
Two lovely black eyes!

I would far rather have written either of those than, say, "The Blessed Damozel" or "Love in the Valley". And by the same token I would back UNCLE TOM'S CABIN to outlive the complete works of Virginia Woolf or George Moore, though I know of no strictly literary test which would show where the superiority lies.

IN DEFENCE OF P. G. WODEHOUSE (1945)

When the Germans made their rapid advance through Belgium in the early summer of 1940, they captured, among other things, Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, who had been living throughout the early part of the war in his villa at Le Touquet, and seems not to have realised until the last moment that he was in any danger. As he was led away into captivity, he is said to have remarked, "Perhaps after this I shall write a serious book." He was placed for the time being under house arrest, and from his subsequent statements it appears that he was treated in a fairly friendly way, German officers in the neighbourhood frequently "dropping in for a bath or a party".

Over a year later, on 25th June 1941, the news came that Wodehouse had been released from internment and was living at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin. On the following day the public was astonished to learn that he had agreed to do some broadcasts of a "non-political" nature over the German radio. The full texts of these broadcasts are not easy to obtain at this date, but Wodehouse seems to have done five of them between 26th June and 2nd July, when the Germans took him off the air again. The first broadcast, on 26th June, was not made on the Nazi radio but took the form of an interview with Harry Flannery, the representative of the Columbia Broadcasting System, which still had its correspondents in Berlin. Wodehouse also published in the SATURDAY EVENING POST an article which he had written while still in the internment camp.

The article and the broadcasts dealt mainly with Wodehouse's experiences in internment, but they did include a very few comments on the war. The following are fair samples:

"I never was interested in politics. I'm quite unable to work up any kind of belligerent feeling. Just as I'm about to feel belligerent about some country I meet a decent sort of chap. We go out together and lose any fighting thoughts or feelings."

"A short time ago they had a look at me on parade and got the right idea; at least they sent us to the local lunatic asylum. And I have been there forty-two weeks. There is a good deal to be said for internment. It keeps you out of the saloon and helps you to keep up

with your reading. The chief trouble is that it means you are away from home for a long time. When I join my wife I had better take along a letter of introduction to be on the safe side."

"In the days before the war I had always been modestly proud of being an Englishman, but now that I have been some months resident in this bin or repository of Englishmen I am not so sure... The only concession I want from Germany is that she gives me a loaf of bread, tells the gentlemen with muskets at the main gate to look the other way, and leaves the rest to me. In return I am prepared to hand over India, an autographed set of my books, and to reveal the secret process of cooking sliced potatoes on a radiator. This offer holds good till Wednesday week."

The first extract quoted above caused great offence. Wodehouse was also censured for using (in the interview with Flannery) the phrase "whether Britain wins the war or not," and he did not make things better by describing in another broadcast the filthy habits of some Belgian prisoners among whom he was interned. The Germans recorded this broadcast and repeated it a number of times. They seem to have supervised his talks very lightly, and they allowed him not only to be funny about the discomforts of internment but to remark that "the internees at Trost camp all fervently believe that Britain will eventually win." The general upshot of the talks, however, was that he had not been ill treated and bore no malice.

These broadcasts caused an immediate uproar in England. There were questions in Parliament, angry editorial comments in the press, and a stream of letters from fellow-authors, nearly all of them disapproving, though one or two suggested that it would be better to suspend judgment, and several pleaded that Wodehouse probably did not realise what he was doing. On 15th July, the Home Service of the B.B.C. carried an extremely violent Postscript by "Cassandra" of the DAILY MIRROR, accusing Wodehouse of "selling his country." This postscript made free use of such expressions as "Quisling" and "worshipping the Fihrer". The main charge was that Wodehouse had agreed to do German propaganda as a way of buying himself out of the internment camp.

"Cassandra's" Postscript caused a certain amount of protest, but on the whole it seems to have intensified popular feeling against

Wodehouse. One result of it was that numerous lending libraries withdrew Wodehouse's books from circulation. Here is a typical news item:

"Within twenty-four hours of listening to the broadcast of Cassandra, the DAILY MIRROR columnist, Portadown (North Ireland) Urban District Council banned P. G. Wodehouse's books from their public library. Mr. Edward McCann said that Cassandra's broadcast had clinched the matter. Wodehouse was funny no longer." (DAILY MIRROR.)

In addition the B.B.C. banned Wodehouse's lyrics from the air and was still doing so a couple of years later. As late as December 1944 there were demands in Parliament that Wodehouse should be put on trial as a traitor.

There is an old saying that if you throw enough mud some of it will stick, and the mud has stuck to Wodehouse in a rather peculiar way. An impression has been left behind that Wodehouse's talks (not that anyone remembers what he said in them) showed him up not merely as a traitor but as an ideological sympathiser with Fascism. Even at the time several letters to the press claimed that "Fascist tendencies" could be detected in his books, and the charge has been repeated since. I shall try to analyse the mental atmosphere of those books in a moment, but it is important to realise that the events of 1941 do not convict Wodehouse of anything worse than stupidity. The really interesting question is how and why he could be so stupid. When Flannery met Wodehouse (released, but still under guard) at the Adlon Hotel in June 1941, he saw at once that he was dealing with a political innocent, and when preparing him for their broadcast interview he had to warn him against making some exceedingly unfortunate remarks, one of which was by implication slightly anti-Russian. As it was, the phrase "whether England wins or not" did get through. Soon after the interview Wodehouse told him that he was also going to broadcast on the Nazi radio, apparently not realising that this action had any special significance. Flannery comments [ASSIGNMENT TO BERLIN by Harry W. Flannery.]:

"By this time the Wodehouse plot was evident. It was one of the best Nazi publicity stunts of the war, the first with a human angle...Plack (Goebbels's assistant) had gone to the camp near

Gleiwitz to see Wodehouse, found that the author was completely without political sense, and had an idea. He suggested to Wodehouse that in return for being released from the prison camp he write a series of broadcasts about his experiences; there would be no censorship and he would put them on the air himself. In making that proposal Plack showed that he knew his man. He knew that Wodehouse made fun of the English in all his stories and that he seldom wrote in any other way, that he was still living in the period about which he wrote and had no conception of Nazism and all it meant. Wodehouse was his own Bertie Wooster."

The striking of an actual bargain between Wodehouse and Plack seems to be merely Flannery's own interpretation. The arrangement may have been of a much less definite kind, and to judge from the broadcasts themselves, Wodehouse's main idea in making them was to keep in touch with his public and–the comedian's ruling passion–to get a laugh. Obviously they are not the utterances of a Quisling of the type of Ezra Pound or John Amery, nor, probably, of a person capable of understanding the nature of Quislingism. Flannery seems to have warned Wodehouse that it would be unwise to broadcast, but not very forcibly. He adds that Wodehouse (though in one broadcast he refers to himself as an Englishman) seemed to regard himself as an American citizen. He had contemplated naturalisation, but had never filled in the necessary papers. He even used, to Flannery, the phrase, "We're not at war with Germany."

I have before me a bibliography of P. G. Wodehouse's works. It names round about fifty books, but is certainly incomplete. It is as well to be honest, and I ought to start by admitting that there are many books by Wodehouse perhaps a quarter or a third of the total–which I have not read. It is not, indeed, easy to read the whole output of a popular writer who is normally published in cheap editions. But I have followed his work fairly closely since 1911, when I was eight years old, and am well acquainted with its peculiar mental atmosphere–an atmosphere which has not, of course, remained completely unchanged, but shows little alteration since about 1925. In the passage from Flannery's book which I quoted above there are two remarks which would immediately strike any attentive reader of Wodehouse. One is to the effect that Wodehouse "was still living in

the period about which he wrote," and the other that the Nazi Propaganda Ministry made use of him because he "made fun of the English." The second statement is based on a misconception to which I will return presently. But Flannery's other comment is quite true and contains in it part of the clue to Wodehouse's behaviour.

A thing that people often forget about P. G. Wodehouse's novels is how long ago the better-known of them were written. We think of him as in some sense typifying the silliness of the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties, but in fact the scenes and characters by which he is best remembered had all made their appearance before 1925. Psmith first appeared in 1909, having been foreshadowed by other characters in early school stories. Blandings Castle, with Baxter and the Earl of Emsworth both in residence, was introduced in 1915. The Jeeves-Wooster cycle began in 1919, both Jeeves and Wooster having made brief appearances earlier. Ukridge appeared in 1924. When one looks through the list of Wodehouse's books from 1902 onwards, one can observe three fairly well-marked periods. The first is the school-story period. It includes such books as THE GOLD BAT, THE POTHUNTERS, etc and has its high-spot in MIKE (1909). PSMITH IN THE CITY, published in the following year, belongs in this category, though it is not directly concerned with school life. The next is the American period. Wodehouse seems to have lived in the United States from about 1913 to 1920, and for a while showed signs of BECOMING AMERICANISED IN IDIOM AND OUTLOOK. SOME OF THE STORIES IN THE MAN WITH TWO LEFT FEET (1917) appear to have been influenced by 0. Henry, and other books written about this time contain Americanisms (e.g. "highball" for "whisky and soda") which an Englishman would not normally use IN PROPRIA PERSONA. Nevertheless, almost all the books of this period–PSMITH, JOURNALIST; THE LITTLE NUGGET; THE INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE; PICCADILLY JIM and various others-depend for their effect on the CONTRAST between English and American manners. English characters appear in an American setting, or vice versa: there is a certain number of purely English stories, but hardly any purely American ones. The third period might fitly be called the country-house period. By the early nineteen-twenties Wodehouse

must have been making a very large income, and the social status of his characters moved upwards accordingly, though the Ukridge stories form a partial exception. The typical setting is now a country mansion, a luxurious bachelor flat or an expensive golf club. The schoolboy athleticism of the earlier books fades out, cricket and football giving way to golf, and the element of farce and burlesque becomes more marked. No doubt many of the later books, such as SUMMER LIGHTNING, are light comedy rather than pure farce, but the occasional attempts at moral earnestness which can be found in PSMITH, JOURNALIST; THE LITTLE NUGGET; THE COMING OF BILL, THE MAN WITH TWO LEFT FEET and some of the school stories, no longer appear. Mike Jackson has turned into Bertie Wooster. That, however, is not a very startling metamorphosis, and one of the most noticeable things about Wodehouse is his LACK of development. Books like THE GOLD BAT and TALES OF ST AUSTIN'S, written in the opening years of this century, already have the familiar atmosphere. How much of a formula the writing of his later books had become one can see from the fact that he continued to write stories of English life although throughout the sixteen years before his internment he was living at Hollywood and Le Touquet.

MIKE, which is now a difficult book to obtain in an unabridged form, must be one of the best "light" school stories in English. But though its incidents are largely farcical, it is by no means a satire on the public school system, and THE GOLD BAT, THE POTHUNTERS, etc are even less so. Wodehouse was educated at Dulwich, and then worked in a bank and graduated into novel writing by way of very cheap journalism. It is clear that for many years he remained "fixated" on his old school and loathed the unromantic job and the lower-middle-class surroundings in which he found himself. In the early stories the "glamour" of public school life (house matches, fagging, teas round the study fire, etc) is laid on fairly thick, and the "play the game" code of morals is accepted with not many reservations. Wrykyn, Wodehouse's imaginary public school, is a school of a more fashionable type than Dulwich, and one gets the impression that between THE GOLD BAT (1904) and MIKE (1908) Wrykyn itself has become more expensive and moved farther from

London. Psychologically the most revealing book of Wodehouse's early period is PSMITH IN THE CITY. Mike Jackson's father has suddenly lost his money, and Mike, like Wodehouse himself, is thrust at the age of about eighteen into an ill-paid subordinate job in a bank. Psmith is similarly employed, though not from financial necessity. Both this book and PSMITH, JOURNALIST (1915) are unusual in that they display a certain amount of political consciousness. Psmith at this stage chooses to call himself a Socialist-in his mind, and no doubt in Wodehouse's, this means no more than ignoring class distinctions-and on one occasion the two boys attend an open-air meeting on Clapham Common and go home to tea with an elderly Socialist orator, whose shabby-genteel home is described with some accuracy. But the most striking feature of the book is Mike's inability to wean himself from the atmosphere of school. He enters upon his job without any pretence of enthusiasm, and his main desire is not, as one might expect, to find a more interesting and useful job, but simply to be playing cricket. When he has to find himself lodgings he chooses to settle at Dulwich, because there he will be near a school and will be able to hear the agreeable sound of the ball striking against the bat. The climax of the book comes when Mike gets the chance to play in a county match and simply walks out of his job in order to do so. The point is that Wodehouse here sympathises with Mike: indeed he identified himself with him, for it is clear enough that Mike bears the same relation to Wodehouse as Julien Sorel to Stendhal. But he created many other heroes essentially similar. Through the books of this and the next period there passes a whole series of young men to whom playing games and "keeping fit" are a sufficient life-work. Wodehouse is almost incapable of imagining a desirable job. The great thing is to have money of your own, or, failing that, to find a sinecure. The hero of SOMETHING FRESH (1915) escapes from low-class journalism by becoming physical-training instructor to a dyspeptic millionaire: this is regarded as a step up, morally as well as financially.

In the books of the third period there is no narcissism and no serious interludes, but the implied moral and social background has changed much less than might appear at first sight. If one compares

Bertie Wooster with Mike, or even with the rugger-playing prefects of the earliest school stories, one sees that the only real difference between them is that Bertie is richer and lazier. His ideals would be almost the same as theirs, but he fails to live up to them. Archie Moffam, in THE INDISCRETIONS OF ARCHIE (1921), is a type intermediate between Bertie and the earlier heroes: he is an ass, but he is also honest, kind-hearted, athletic and courageous. From first to last Wodehouse takes the public-school code of behaviour for granted, with the difference that in his later, more sophisticated period he prefers to show his characters violating it or living up to it against their will:

"Bertie! You wouldn't let down a pal?"

"Yes, I would."

"But we were at school together, Bertie."

"I don't care."

"The old school, Bertie, the old school!"

"Oh, well–dash it!"

Bertie, a sluggish Don Quixote, has no wish to tilt at windmills, but he would hardly think of refusing to do so when honour calls. Most of the people whom Wodehouse intends as sympathetic characters are parasites, and some of them are plain imbeciles, but very few of them could be described as immoral. Even Ukridge is a visionary rather than a plain crook. The most immoral, or rather unmoral, of Wodehouse's characters is Jeeves, who acts as a foil to Bertie Wooster's comparative high-mindedness and perhaps symbolises the widespread English belief that intelligence and unscrupulousness are much the same thing. How closely Wodehouse sticks to conventional morality can be seen from the fact that nowhere in his books is there anything in the nature of a sex joke. This is an enormous sacrifice for a farcical writer to make. Not only are there no dirty jokes, but there are hardly any compromising situations: the horns-on-the-forehead motif is almost completely avoided. Most of the full-length books, of course, contain a "love interest", but it is always at the light-comedy level: the love affair, with its complications and its idyllic scenes, goes on and on, but, as the saying goes "nothing happens". It is significant that Wodehouse, by nature a writer of farces, was able to collaborate more than once

with Ian Hay, a serio-comic writer and an exponent (VIDE PIP, etc) of the "clean-living Englishman" tradition at its silliest.

In SOMETHING FRESH Wodehouse had discovered the comic possibilities of the English aristocracy, and a succession of ridiculous but, save in a very few instances, not actually contemptible barons, earls and what-not followed accordingly. This had the rather curious effect of causing Wodehouse to be regarded, outside England, as a penetrating satirist of English society. Hence Flannery's statement that Wodehouse "made fun of the English," which is the impression he would probably make on a German or even an American reader. Some time after the broadcasts from Berlin I was discussing them with a young Indian Nationalist who defended Wodehouse warmly. He took it for granted that Wodehouse HAD gone over to the enemy, which from his own point of view was the right thing to do. But what interested me was to find that he regarded Wodehouse as an anti-British writer who had done useful work by showing up the British aristocracy in their true colours. This is a mistake that it would be very difficult for an English person to make, and is a good instance of the way in which books, especially humorous books, lose their finer nuances when they reach a foreign audience. For it is clear enough that Wodehouse is not anti-British, and not anti-upper class either. On the contrary, a harmless old-fashioned snobbishness is perceptible all through his work. Just as an intelligent Catholic is able to see that the blasphemies of Baudelaire or James Joyce are not seriously damaging to the Catholic faith, so an English reader can see that in creating such characters as Hildebrand Spencer Poyns de Burgh John Hanneyside Coombe-Crombie, 12th Earl of Dreever, Wodehouse is not really attacking the social hierarchy. Indeed, no one who genuinely despised titles would write of them so much. Wodehouse's attitude towards the English social system is the same as his attitude towards the public-school moral code–a mild facetiousness covering an unthinking acceptance. The Earl of Emsworth is funny because an earl ought to have more dignity, and Bertie Wooster's helpless dependence on Jeeves is funny partly because the servant ought not to be superior to the master. An American reader can mistake these two, and others like them, for hostile caricatures, because he is inclined to be Anglophobe already

and they correspond to his preconceived ideas about a decadent aristocracy. Bertie Wooster, with his spats and his cane, is the traditional stage Englishman. But, as any English reader would see, Wodehouse intends him as a sympathetic figure, and Wodehouse's real sin has been to present the English upper classes as much nicer people than they are. All through his books certain problems are constantly avoided. Almost without exception his moneyed young men are unassuming, good mixers, not avaricious: their tone is set for them by Psmith, who retains his own upper-class exterior but bridges the social gap by addressing everyone as "Comrade".

But there is another important point about Bertie Wooster: his out-of-dateness. Conceived in 1917 or thereabouts, Bertie really belongs to an epoch earlier than that. He is the "knut" of the pre-1914 period, celebrated in such songs as "Gilbert the Filbert" or "Reckless Reggie of the Regent's Palace". The kind of life that Wodehouse writes about by preference, the life of the "clubman" or "man about town", the elegant young man who lounges all the morning in Piccadilly with a cane under his arm and a carnation in his buttonhole, barely survived into the nineteen-twenties. It is significant that Wodehouse could publish in 1936 a book entitled YOUNG MEN IN SPATS. For who was wearing spats at that date? They had gone out of fashion quite ten years earlier. But the traditional "knut", the "Piccadilly Johnny", OUGHT to wear spats, just as the pantomime Chinese ought to wear a pigtail. A humorous writer is not obliged to keep up to date, and having struck one or two good veins, Wodehouse continued to exploit them with a regularity that was no doubt all the easier because he did not set foot in England during the sixteen years that preceded his internment. His picture of English society had been formed before 1914, and it was a naive, traditional and, at bottom, admiring picture. Nor did he ever become genuinely Americanised. As I have pointed out, spontaneous Americanisms do occur in the books of the middle period, but Wodehouse remained English enough to find American slang an amusing and slightly shocking novelty. He loves to thrust a slang phrase or a crude fact in among Wardour Street English ("With a hollow groan Ukridge borrowed five shillings from me and went out into the night"), and expressions like "a piece of cheese" or "bust

him on the noggin" lend themselves to this purpose. But the trick had been developed before he made any American contacts, and his use of garbled quotations is a common device of English writers running back to Fielding. As Mr John Hayward has pointed out, [Note, below] Wodehouse owes a good deal to his knowledge of English literature and especially of Shakespeare. His books are aimed, not, obviously, at a highbrow audience, but at an audience educated along traditional lines. When, for instance, he describes somebody as heaving "the kind of sigh that Prometheus might have heaved when the vulture dropped in for its lunch", he is assuming that his readers will know something of Greek mythology. In his early days the writers he admired were probably Barry Pain, Jerome K. Jerome, W. W. Jacobs, Kipling and F. Anstey, and he has remained closer to them than to the quick moving American comic writers such as Ring Lardner or Damon Runyon. In his radio interview with Flannery, Wodehouse wondered whether "the kind of people and the kind of England I write about will live after the war", not realising that they were ghosts already. "He was still living in the period about which he wrote," says Flannery, meaning, probably, the nineteen-twenties. But the period was really the Edwardian age, and Bertie Wooster, if he ever existed, was killed round about 1915.

[Note: "P. G. Wodehouse" by John Hayward. (The Saturday Book, 1942.) I believe this is the only full-length critical essay on Wodehouse. (Author's footnote.)]

If my analysis of Wodehouse's mentality is accepted, the idea that in 1941 he consciously aided the Nazi propaganda machine becomes untenable and even ridiculous. He MAY have been induced to broadcast by the promise of an earlier release (he was due for release a few months later, on reaching his sixtieth birthday), but he cannot have realised that what he did would be damaging to British interests. As I have tried to show, his moral outlook has remained that of a public-school boy, and according to the public-school code, treachery in time of war is the most unforgivable of all the sins. But how could he fail to grasp that what he did would be a big propaganda score for the Germans and would bring down a torrent of disapproval on his own head? To answer this one must take two things into consideration. First, Wodehouse's complete lack–so far as

one can judge from his printed works–of political awareness. It is nonsense to talk of "Fascist tendencies" in his books. There are no post-1918 tendencies at all. Throughout his work there is a certain uneasy awareness of the problem of class distinctions, and scattered through it at various dates there are ignorant though not unfriendly references to Socialism. In THE HEART OF A GOOF (1926) there is a rather silly story about a Russian novelist, which seems to have been inspired by the factional struggle then raging in the U.S.S.R. But the references in it to the Soviet system are entirely frivolous and, considering the date, not markedly hostile. That is about the extent of Wodehouse's political consciousness, so far as it is discoverable from his writings. Nowhere, so far as I know, does he so much as use the word "Fascism" or "Nazism." In left-wing circles, indeed in "enlightened" circles of any kind, to broadcast on the Nazi radio, to have any truck with the Nazis whatever, would have seemed just as shocking an action before the war as during it. But that is a habit of mind that had been developed during nearly a decade of ideological struggle against Fascism. The bulk of the British people, one ought to remember, remained anaesthetic to that struggle until late into 1940. Abyssinia, Spain, China, Austria, Czechoslovakia–the long series of crimes and aggressions had simply slid past their consciousness or were dimly noted as quarrels occurring among foreigners and "not our business." One can gauge the general ignorance from the fact that the ordinary Englishman thought of "Fascism" as an exclusively Italian thing and was bewildered when the same word was applied to Germany. And there is nothing in Wodehouse's writings to suggest that he was better informed, or more interested in politics, than the general run of his readers.

The other thing one must remember is that Wodehouse happened to be taken prisoner at just the moment when the war reached its desperate phase. We forget these things now, but until that time feelings about the war had been noticeably tepid. There was hardly any fighting, the Chamberlain Government was unpopular, eminent publicists were hinting that we should make a compromise peace as quickly as possible, trade union and Labour Party branches all over the country were passing anti-war resolutions. Afterwards, of course, things changed. The Army was with difficulty extricated from

Dunkirk, France collapsed, Britain was alone, the bombs rained on London, Goebbels announced that Britain was to be "reduced to degradation and poverty". By the middle of 1941 the British people knew what they were up against and feelings against the enemy were far fiercer than before. But Wodehouse had spent the intervening year in internment, and his captors seem to have treated him reasonably well. He had missed the turning-point of the war, and in 1941 he was still reacting in terms of 1939. He was not alone in this. On several occasions about this time the Germans brought captured British soldiers to the microphone, and some of them made remarks at least as tactless as Wodehouse's. They attracted no attention, however. And even an outright Quisling like John Amery was afterwards to arouse much less indignation than Wodehouse had done.

But why? Why should a few rather silly but harmless remarks by an elderly novelist have provoked such an outcry? One has to look for the probable answer amid the dirty requirements of propaganda warfare.

There is one point about the Wodehouse broadcasts that is almost certainly significant–the date. Wodehouse was released two or three days before the invasion of the U.S.S.R., and at a time when the higher ranks of the Nazi party must have known that the invasion was imminent. It was vitally necessary to keep America out of the war as long as possible, and in fact, about this time, the German attitude towards the U.S.A. did become more conciliatory than it had been before. The Germans could hardly hope to defeat Russia, Britain and the U.S.A. in combination, but if they could polish off Russia quickly–and presumably they expected to do so–the Americans might never intervene. The release of Wodehouse was only a minor move, but it was not a bad sop to throw to the American isolationists. He was well known in the United States, and he was–or so the Germans calculated–popular with the Anglophobe public as a caricaturist who made fun of the silly-ass Englishman with his spats and his monocle. At the microphone he could be trusted to damage British prestige in one way or another, while his release would demonstrate that the Germans were good fellows and knew how to treat their enemies chivalrously. That presumably was the

calculation, though the fact that Wodehouse was only broadcasting for about a week suggests that he did not come up to expectations.

But on the British side similar though opposite calculations were at work. For the two years following Dunkirk, British morale depended largely upon the feeling that this was not only a war for democracy but a war which the common people had to win by their own efforts. The upper classes were discredited by their appeasement policy and by the disasters of 1940, and a social levelling process appeared to be taking place. Patriotism and left-wing sentiments were associated in the popular mind, and numerous able journalists were at work to tie the association tighter. Priestley's 1940 broadcasts, and "Cassandra's" articles in the DAILY MIRROR, were good examples of the demagogic propaganda flourishing at that time. In this atmosphere, Wodehouse made an ideal whipping-boy. For it was generally felt that the rich were treacherous, and Wodehouse–as "Cassandra" vigorously pointed out in his broadcast–was a rich man. But he was the kind of rich man who could be attacked with impunity and without risking any damage to the structure of society. To denounce Wodehouse was not like denouncing, say, Beaverbrook. A mere novelist, however large his earnings may happen to be, is not OF the possessing class. Even if his income touches £50,000 a year he has only the outward semblance of a millionaire. He is a lucky outsider who has fluked into a fortune–usually a very temporary fortune–like the winner of the Calcutta Derby Sweep. Consequently, Wodehouse's indiscretion gave a good propaganda opening. It was a chance to "expose" a wealthy parasite without drawing attention to any of the parasites who really mattered.

In the desperate circumstances of the time, it was excusable to be angry at what Wodehouse did, but to go on denouncing him three or four years later–and more, to let an impression remain that he acted with conscious treachery–is not excusable. Few things in this war have been more morally disgusting than the present hunt after traitors and Quislings. At best it is largely the punishment of the guilty by the guilty. In France, all kinds of petty rats–police officials, penny-a-lining journalists, women who have slept with German soldiers–are hunted down while almost without exception the big rats escape. In

England the fiercest tirades against Quislings are uttered by Conservatives who were practising appeasement in 1938 and Communists who were advocating it in 1940. I have striven to show how the wretched Wodehouse–just because success and expatriation had allowed him to remain mentally in the Edwardian age–became the CORPUS VILE in a propaganda experiment, and I suggest that it is now time to regard the incident as closed. If Ezra Pound is caught and shot by the American authorities, it will have the effect of establishing his reputation as a poet for hundreds of years; and even in the case of Wodehouse, if we drive him to retire to the United States and renounce his British citizenship, we shall end by being horribly ashamed of ourselves. Meanwhile, if we really want to punish the people who weakened national morale at critical moments, there are other culprits who are nearer home and better worth chasing.

NONSENSE POETRY

In many languages, it is said, there is no nonsense poetry, and there is not a great deal of it even in English. The bulk of it is in nursery rhymes and scraps of folk poetry, some of which may not have been strictly nonsensical at the start, but have become so because their original application has been forgotten. For example, the rhyme about Margery Daw:

See-saw, Margery Daw,
Dobbin shall have a new master.
He shall have but a penny a day
Because he can't go any faster.

Or the other version that I learned in Oxfordshire as a little boy:

See-saw, Margery Daw,
Sold her bed and lay upon straw.
Wasn't she a silly slut
To sell her bed and lie upon dirt?

It may be that there was once a real person called Margery Daw, and perhaps there was even a Dobbin who somehow came into the story. When Shakespeare makes Edgar in KING LEAR quote "Pillicock sat on Pillicock hill", and similar fragments, he is uttering nonsense, but no doubt these fragments come from forgotten ballads in which they once had a meaning. The typical scrap of folk poetry which one quotes almost unconsciously is not exactly nonsense but a sort of musical comment on some recurring event, such as "One a penny, two a penny, Hot-Cross buns", or "Polly, put the kettle on, we'll all have tea". Some of these seemingly frivolous rhymes actually express a deeply pessimistic view of life, the churchyard wisdom of the peasant. For instance:

Solomon Grundy,
Born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Took ill on Thursday,
Worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,

Buried on Sunday,
And that was the end of Solomon Grundy.

which is a gloomy story, but remarkably similar to yours or mine.

Until Surrealism made a deliberate raid on the unconscious, poetry that aimed at being nonsense, apart from the meaningless refrains of songs, does not seem to have been common. This gives a special position to Edward Lear, whose nonsense rhymes have just been edited by Mr R.L. Megroz, who was also responsible for the Penguin edition a year or two before the war. Lear was one of the first writers to deal in pure fantasy, with imaginary countries and made-up words, without any satirical purpose. His poems are not all of them equally nonsensical; some of them get their effect by a perversion of logic, but they are all alike in that their underlying feeling is sad and not bitter. They express a kind of amiable lunacy, a natural sympathy with whatever is weak and absurd. Lear could fairly be called the originator of the limerick, though verses in almost the same metrical form are to be found in earlier writers, and what is sometimes considered a weakness in his limericks–that is, the fact that the rhyme is the same in the first and last lines–is part of their charm. The very slight change increases the impression of ineffectuality, which might be spoiled if there were some striking surprise. For example:

There was a young lady of Portugal
Whose ideas were excessively nautical;
She climbed up a tree
To examine the sea,
But declared she would never leave Portugal.

It is significant that almost no limericks since Lear's have been both printable and funny enough to seem worth quoting. But he is really seen at his best in certain longer poems, such as "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" or "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò":

On the Coast of Coromandel,
Where the early pumpkins blow,
In the middle of the woods
Lived the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
Two old chairs, and half a candle
One old jug without a handle

These were all his worldly goods:
In the middle of the woods,
These were all the worldly goods
Of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

Later there appears a lady with some white Dorking hens, and an inconclusive love affair follows. Mr Megroz thinks, plausibly enough, that this may refer to some incident in Lear's own life. He never married, and it is easy to guess that there was something seriously wrong in his sex life. A psychiatrist could no doubt find all kinds of significance in his drawings and in the recurrence of certain made-up words such as "runcible". His health was bad, and as he was the youngest of twenty-one children in a poor family, he must have known anxiety and hardship in very early life. It is clear that he was unhappy and by nature solitary, in spite of having good friends.

Aldous Huxley, in praising Lear's fantasies as a sort of assertion of freedom, has pointed out that the "They" of the limericks represent common sense, legality and the duller virtues generally. "They" are the realists, the practical men, the sober citizens in bowler hats who are always anxious to stop you doing anything worth doing. For instance:

There was an Old Man of Whitehaven,
Who danced a quadrille with a raven;
But they said, "It's absurd
To encourage this bird!"
So they smashed that Old Man of Whitehaven.

To smash somebody just for dancing a quadrille with a raven is exactly the kind of thing that "They" would do. Herbert Read has also praised Lear, and is inclined to prefer his verse to that of Lewis Carroll, as being purer fantasy. For myself, I must say that I find Lear funniest when he is least arbitrary and when a touch of burlesque or perverted logic makes its appearance. When he gives his fancy free play, as in his imaginary names, or in things like "Three Receipts for Domestic Cookery", he can be silly and tiresome. "The Pobble Who Has No Toes" is haunted by the ghost of logic, and I think it is the element of sense in it that makes it funny. The Pobble, it may be remembered, went fishing in the Bristol Channel:

And all the Sailors and Admirals cried, When they saw him nearing the further side– "He has gone to fish, for his Aunt Jobiska's Runcible Cat with crimson whiskers!"

The thing that is funny here is the burlesque touch, the Admirals. What is arbitrary–the word "runcible", and the cat's crimson whiskers–is merely rather embarrassing. While the Pobble was in the water some unidentified creatures came and ate his toes off, and when he got home his aunt remarked:

"It's a fact the whole world knows,
That Pobbles are happier without their toes,"

which once again is funny because it has a meaning, and one might even say a political significance. For the whole theory of authoritarian governments is summed up in the statement that Pobbles were happier without their toes. So also with the well-known limerick:

There was an Old Person of Basing,
Whose presence of mind was amazing;
He purchased a steed,
Which he rode at full speed,
And escaped from the people of Basing.

It is not quite arbitrary. The funniness is in the gentle implied criticism of the people of Basing, who once again are "They", the respectable ones, the right-thinking, art-hating majority.

The writer closest to Lear among his contemporaries was Lewis Carroll, who, however, was less essentially fantastic–and, in my opinion, funnier. Since then, as Mr Megroz points out in his Introduction, Lear's influence has been considerable, but it is hard to believe that it has been altogether good. The silly whimsiness of present-day children's books could perhaps be partly traced back to him. At any rate, the idea of deliberately setting out to write nonsense, though it came off in Lear's case, is a doubtful one. Probably the best nonsense poetry is produced gradually and accidentally, by communities rather than by individuals. As a comic draughtsman, on the other hand, Lear's influence must have been beneficial. James Thurber, for instance, must surely owe something to Lear, directly or indirectly.

NOTES ON NATIONALISM (1945)

Somewhere or other Byron makes use of the French word LONGEUR, and remarks in passing that though in England we happen not to have the WORD, we have the THING in considerable profusion. In the same way, there is a habit of mind which is now so widespread that it affects our thinking on nearly every subject, but which has not yet been given a name. As the nearest existing equivalent I have chosen the word 'nationalism', but it will be seen in a moment that I am not using it in quite the ordinary sense, if only because the emotion I am speaking about does not always attach itself to what is called a nation–that is, a single race or a geographical area. It can attach itself to a church or a class, or it may work in a merely negative sense, AGAINST something or other and without the need for any positive object of loyalty.

By 'nationalism' I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad'.[See note, below] But secondly–and this is much more important–I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests. Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved. By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, NOT for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality.

[Note: Nations, and even vaguer entities such as Catholic Church or the proleteriat, are commonly thought of as individuals and often referred to as 'she'. Patently absurd remarks such as 'Germany is

naturally treacherous' are to be found in any newspaper one opens and reckless generalization about national character ('The Spaniard is a natural aristocrat' or 'Every Englishman is a hypocrite') are uttered by almost everyone. Intermittently these generalizations are seen to be unfounded, but the habit of making them persists, and people of professedly international outlook, e.g., Tolstoy or Bernard Shaw, are often guilty of them. (Author's footnote)]

So long as it is applied merely to the more notorious and identifiable nationalist movements in Germany, Japan, and other countries, all this is obvious enough. Confronted with a phenomenon like Nazism, which we can observe from the outside, nearly all of us would say much the same things about it. But here I must repeat what I said above, that I am only using the word 'nationalism' for lack of a better. Nationalism, in the extended sense in which I am using the word, includes such movements and tendencies as Communism, political Catholicism, Zionism, Antisemitism, Trotskyism and Pacifism. It does not necessarily mean loyalty to a government or a country, still less to ONE'S OWN country, and it is not even strictly necessary that the units in which it deals should actually exist. To name a few obvious examples, Jewry, Islam, Christendom, the Proletariat and the White Race are all of them objects of passionate nationalistic feeling: but their existence can be seriously questioned, and there is no definition of any one of them that would be universally accepted.

It is also worth emphasising once again that nationalist feeling can be purely negative. There are, for example, Trotskyists who have become simply enemies of the U.S.S.R. without developing a corresponding loyalty to any other unit. When one grasps the implications of this, the nature of what I mean by nationalism becomes a good deal clearer. A nationalist is one who thinks solely, or mainly, in terms of competitive prestige. He may be a positive or a negative nationalist–that is, he may use his mental energy either in boosting or in denigrating–but at any rate his thoughts always turn on victories, defeats, triumphs and humiliations. He sees history, especially contemporary history, as the endless rise and decline of great power units, and every event that happens seems to him a demonstration that his own side is on the upgrade and some hated

rival is on the downgrade. But finally, it is important not to confuse nationalism with mere worship of success. The nationalist does not go on the principle of simply ganging up with the strongest side. On the contrary, having picked his side, he persuades himself that it IS the strongest, and is able to stick to his belief even when the facts are overwhelmingly against him. Nationalism is power-hunger tempered by self-deception. Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also–since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself–unshakeably certain of being in the right.

Now that I have given this lengthy definition, I think it will be admitted that the habit of mind I am talking about is widespread among the English intelligentsia, and more widespread there than among the mass of the people. For those who feel deeply about contemporary politics, certain topics have become so infected by considerations of prestige that a genuinely rational approach to them is almost impossible. Out of the hundreds of examples that one might choose, take this question: Which of the three great allies, the U.S.S.R., Britain and the USA, has contributed most to the defeat of Germany? In theory, it should be possible to give a reasoned and perhaps even a conclusive answer to this question. In practice, however, the necessary calculations cannot be made, because anyone likely to bother his head about such a question would inevitably see it in terms of competitive prestige. He would therefore START by deciding in favour of Russia, Britain or America as the case might be, and only AFTER this would begin searching for arguments that seemed to support his case. And there are whole strings of kindred questions to which you can only get an honest answer from someone who is indifferent to the whole subject involved, and whose opinion on it is probably worthless in any case. Hence, partly, the remarkable failure in our time of political and military prediction. It is curious to reflect that out of al the ‘experts’ of all the schools, there was not a single one who was able to foresee so likely an event as the Russo-German Pact of 1939.[Note 1, below] And when news of the Pact broke, the most wildly divergent explanations were of it were given, and predictions were made which were falsified almost immediately, being based in nearly every case not on a study of probabilities but on a desire to make the U.S.S.R. seem good or bad, strong or weak.

Political or military commentators, like astrologers, can survive almost any mistake, because their more devoted followers do not look to them for an appraisal of the facts but for the stimulation of nationalistic loyalties.[Note 2, below] And aesthetic judgements, especially literary judgements, are often corrupted in the same way as political ones. It would be difficult for an Indian Nationalist to enjoy reading Kipling or for a Conservative to see merit in Mayakovsky, and there is always a temptation to claim that any book whose tendency one disagrees with must be a bad book from a LITERARY point of view. People of strongly nationalistic outlook often perform this sleight of hand without being conscious of dishonesty.

[Note 1: A few writers of conservative tendency, such as Peter Drucker, foretold an agreement between Germany and Russia, but they expected an actual alliance or amalgamation which would be permanent. No Marxist or other left-wing writer, of whatever colour, came anywhere near foretelling the Pact.(Author's footnote)]

[Note 2: The military commentators of the popular press can mostly be classified as pro-Russian or anti-Russian pro-blimp or anti-blimp. Such errors as believing the Maginot Line impregnable, or predicting that Russia would conquer Germany in three months, have failed to shake their reputation, because they were always saying what their own particular audience wanted to hear. The two military critics most favoured by the intelligentsia are Captain Liddell Hart and Major-General Fuller, the first of whom teaches that the defence is stronger that the attack, and the second that the attack is stronger that the defence. This contradiction has not prevented both of them from being accepted as authorities by the same public. The secret reason for their vogue in left-wing circles is that both of them are at odds with the War Office. (Author's footnote)]

In England, if one simply considers the number of people involved, it is probable that the dominant form of nationalism is old-fashioned British jingoism. It is certain that this is still widespread, and much more so than most observers would have believed a dozen years ago. However, in this essay I am concerned chiefly with the reactions of the intelligentsia, among whom jingoism and even patriotism of the old kind are almost dead, though they now seem to

be reviving among a minority. Among the intelligentsia, it hardly needs saying that the dominant form of nationalism is Communism–using this word in a very loose sense, to include not merely Communist Party members, but 'fellow travellers' and russophiles generally. A Communist, for my purpose here, is one who looks upon the U.S.S.R. as his Fatherland and feels it his duty t justify Russian policy and advance Russian interests at all costs. Obviously such people abound in England today, and their direct and indirect influence is very great. But many other forms of nationalism also flourish, and it is by noticing the points of resemblance between different and even seemingly opposed currents of thought that one can best get the matter into perspective.

Ten or twenty years ago, the form of nationalism most closely corresponding to Communism today was political Catholicism. Its most outstanding exponent–though he was perhaps an extreme case rather than a typical one–was G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton was a writer of considerable talent who whose to suppress both his sensibilities and his intellectual honesty in the cause of Roman Catholic propaganda. During the last twenty years or so of his life, his entire output was in reality an endless repetition of the same thing, under its laboured cleverness as simple and boring as 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' Every book that he wrote, every scrap of dialogue, had to demonstrate beyond the possibility of mistake the superiority of the Catholic over the Protestant or the pagan. But Chesterton was not content to think of this superiority as merely intellectual or spiritual: it had to be translated into terms of national prestige and military power, which entailed an ignorant idealisation of the Latin countries, especially France. Chesterton had not lived long in France, and his picture of it–as a land of Catholic peasants incessantly singing the MARSEILLAISE over glasses of red wine–had about as much relation to reality as CHU CHIN CHOW has to everyday life in Baghdad. And with this went not only an enormous overestimation of French military power (both before and after 1914-18 he maintained that France, by itself, was stronger than Germany), but a silly and vulgar glorification of the actual process of war. Chesterton's battle poems, such as Lepanto or The Ballad of Saint Barbara, make The Charge of the Light Brigade read like a

pacifist tract: they are perhaps the most tawdry bits of bombast to be found in our language. The interesting thing is that had the romantic rubbish which he habitually wrote about France and the French army been written by somebody else about Britain and the British army, he would have been the first to jeer. In home politics he was a Little Englander, a true hater of jingoism and imperialism, and according to his lights a true friend of democracy. Yet when he looked outwards into the international field, he could forsake his principles without even noticing he was doing so. Thus, his almost mystical belief in the virtues of democracy did not prevent him from admiring Mussolini. Mussolini had destroyed the representative government and the freedom of the press for which Chesterton had struggled so hard at home, but Mussolini was an Italian and had made Italy strong, and that settled the matter. Nor did Chesterton ever find a word to say about imperialism and the conquest of coloured races when they were practised by Italians or Frenchmen. His hold on reality, his literary taste, and even to some extent his moral sense, were dislocated as soon as his nationalistic loyalties were involved.

Obviously there are considerable resemblances between political Catholicism, as exemplified by Chesterton, and Communism. So there are between either of these and for instance Scottish nationalism, Zionism, Antisemitism or Trotskyism. It would be an oversimplification to say that all forms of nationalism are the same, even in their mental atmosphere, but there are certain rules that hold good in all cases. The following are the principal characteristics of nationalist thought:

OBSESSION. As nearly as possible, no nationalist ever thinks, talks, or writes about anything except the superiority of his own power unit. It is difficult if not impossible for any nationalist to conceal his allegiance. The smallest slur upon his own unit, or any implied praise of a rival organization, fills him with uneasiness which he can relieve only by making some sharp retort. If the chosen unit is an actual country, such as Ireland or India, he will generally claim superiority for it not only in military power and political virtue, but in art, literature, sport, structure of the language, the physical beauty of the inhabitants, and perhaps even in climate, scenery and cooking. He will show great sensitiveness about such things as the

correct display of flags, relative size of headlines and the order in which different countries are named.[Note, below] Nomenclature plays a very important part in nationalist thought. Countries which have won their independence or gone through a nationalist revolution usually change their names, and any country or other unit round which strong feelings revolve is likely to have several names, each of them carrying a different implication. The two sides of the Spanish Civil War had between them nine or ten names expressing different degrees of love and hatred. Some of these names (e.g. 'Patriots' for Franco-supporters, or 'Loyalists' for Government-supporters) were frankly question-begging, and there was no single one of the which the two rival factions could have agreed to use. All nationalists consider it a duty to spread their own language to the detriment of rival languages, and among English-speakers this struggle reappears in subtler forms as a struggle between dialects. Anglophobe-Americans will refuse to use a slang phrase if they know it to be of British origin, and the conflict between Latinizers and Germanizers often has nationalists motives behind it. Scottish nationalists insist on the superiority of Lowland Scots, and socialists whose nationalism takes the form of class hatred tirade against the B.B.C. accent and even the often gives the impression of being tinged by belief in sympathetic magic–a belief which probably comes out in the widespread custom of burning political enemies in effigy, or using pictures of them as targets in shooting galleries.

[Note: Certain Americans have expressed dissatisfaction because 'Anglo-American' is the form of combination for these two words. It has been proposed to submit 'Americo-British'.(Author's footnote)]

INSTABILITY. The intensity with which they are held does not prevent nationalist loyalties from being transferable. To begin with, as I have pointed out already, they can be and often are fastened up on some foreign country. One quite commonly finds that great national leaders, or the founders of nationalist movements, do not even belong to the country they have glorified. Sometimes they are outright foreigners, or more often they come from peripheral areas where nationality is doubtful. Examples are Stalin, Hitler, Napoleon, de Valera, Disraeli, Poincare, Beaverbrook. The Pan-German movement was in part the creation of an Englishman, Houston

Chamberlain. For the past fifty or a hundred years, transferred nationalism has been a common phenomenon among literary intellectuals. With Lafcadio Hearne the transference was to Japan, with Carlyle and many others of his time to Germany, and in our own age it is usually to Russia. But the peculiarly interesting fact is that re-transference is also possible. A country or other unit which has been worshipped for years may suddenly become detestable, and some other object of affection may take its place with almost no interval. In the first version of H. G. Wells's OUTLINE OF HISTORY, and others of his writings about that time, one finds the United States praised almost as extravagantly as Russia is praised by Communists today: yet within a few years this uncritical admiration had turned into hostility. The bigoted Communist who changes in a space of weeks, or even days, into an equally bigoted Trotskyist is a common spectacle. In continental Europe Fascist movements were largely recruited from among Communists, and the opposite process may well happen within the next few years. What remains constant in the nationalist is his state of mind: the object of his feelings is changeable, and may be imaginary.

But for an intellectual, transference has an important function which I have already mentioned shortly in connection with Chesterton. It makes it possible for him to be much MORE nationalistic–more vulgar, more silly, more malignant, more dishonest–that he could ever be on behalf of his native country, or any unit of which he had real knowledge. When one sees the slavish or boastful rubbish that is written about Stalin, the Red Army, etc. by fairly intelligent and sensitive people, one realises that this is only possible because some kind of dislocation has taken place. In societies such as ours, it is unusual for anyone describable as an intellectual to feel a very deep attachment to his own country. Public opinion–that is, the section of public opinion of which he as an intellectual is aware–will not allow him to do so. Most of the people surrounding him are sceptical and disaffected, and he may adopt the same attitude from imitativeness or sheer cowardice: in that case he will have abandoned the form of nationalism that lies nearest to hand without getting any closer to a genuinely internationalist outlook. He still feels the need for a Fatherland, and it is natural to look for one

somewhere abroad. Having found it, he can wallow unrestrainedly in exactly those emotions from which he believes that he has emancipated himself. God, the King, the Empire, the Union Jack–all the overthrown idols can reappear under different names, and because they are not recognised for what they are they can be worshipped with a good conscience. Transferred nationalism, like the use of scapegoats, is a way of attaining salvation without altering one's conduct.

INDIFFERENCE TO REALITY. All nationalists have the power of not seeing resemblances between similar sets of facts. A British Tory will defend self-determination in Europe and oppose it in India with no feeling of inconsistency. Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage–torture, the use of hostages, forced labour, mass deportations, imprisonment without trial, forgery, assassination, the bombing of civilians–which does not change its moral colour when it is committed by 'our' side. The Liberal NEWS CHRONICLE published, as an example of shocking barbarity, photographs of Russians hanged by the Germans, and then a year or two later published with warm approval almost exactly similar photographs of Germans hanged by the Russians.[Note, below] It is the same with historical events. History is thought of largely in nationalist terms, and such things as the Inquisition, the tortures of the Star Chamber, the exploits of the English buccaneers (Sir Francis Drake, for instance, who was given to sinking Spanish prisoners alive), the Reign of Terror, the heroes of the Mutiny blowing hundreds of Indians from the guns, or Cromwell's soldiers slashing Irishwomen's faces with razors, become morally neutral or even meritorious when it is felt that they were done in the 'right' cause. If one looks back over the past quarter of a century, one finds that there was hardly a single year when atrocity stories were not being reported from some part of the world; and yet in not one single case were these atrocities–in Spain, Russia, China, Hungary, Mexico, Amritsar, Smyrna–believed in and disapproved of by the English intelligentsia as a whole. Whether such deeds were reprehensible, or even whether they happened, was always decided according to political predilection.

[Note: The NEWS CHRONICLE advised its readers to visit the news film at which the entire execution could be witnessed, with close-ups. The STAR published with seeming approval photographs of nearly naked female collaborationists being baited by the Paris mob. These photographs had a marked resemblance to the Nazi photographs of Jews being baited by the Berlin mob.(Author's footnote)]

The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them. For quite six years the English admirers of Hitler contrived not to learn of the existence of Dachau and Buchenwald. And those who are loudest in denouncing the German concentration camps are often quite unaware, or only very dimly aware, that there are also concentration camps in Russia. Huge events like the Ukraine famine of 1933, involving the deaths of millions of people, have actually escaped the attention of the majority of English russophiles. Many English people have heard almost nothing about the extermination of German and Polish Jews during the present war. Their own antisemitism has caused this vast crime to bounce off their consciousness. In nationalist thought there are facts which are both true and untrue, known and unknown. A known fact may be so unbearable that it is habitually pushed aside and not allowed to enter into logical processes, or on the other hand it may enter into every calculation and yet never be admitted as a fact, even in one's own mind.

Every nationalist is haunted by the belief that the past can be altered. He spends part of his time in a fantasy world in which things happen as they should–in which, for example, the Spanish Armada was a success or the Russian Revolution was crushed in 1918–and he will transfer fragments of this world to the history books whenever possible. Much of the propagandist writing of our time amounts to plain forgery. Material facts are suppressed, dates altered, quotations removed from their context and doctored so as to change their meaning. Events which it is felt ought not to have happened are left unmentioned and ultimately denied [Note, below]. In 1927 Chiang Kai Shek boiled hundreds of Communists alive, and yet within ten years he had become one of the heroes of the Left. The re-alignment

of world politics had brought him into the anti-Fascist camp, and so it was felt that the boiling of the Communists 'didn't count', or perhaps had not happened. The primary aim of propaganda is, of course, to influence contemporary opinion, but those who rewrite history do probably believe with part of their minds that they are actually thrusting facts into the past. When one considers the elaborate forgeries that have been committed in order to show that Trotsky did not play a valuable part in the Russian civil war, it is difficult to feel that the people responsible are merely lying. More probably they feel that their own version was what happened in the sight of God, and that one is justified in rearranging the records accordingly.

[Note: En example is the Russo-German Pact, which is being effaced as quickly as possible from public memory. A Russian correspondent informs me that mention of the Pact is already being omitted from Russian year-books which table recent political events. (Author's note)]

Indifference to objective truth is encouraged by the sealing-off of one part of the world from another, which makes it harder and harder to discover what is actually happening. There can often be a genuine doubt about the most enormous events. For example, it is impossible to calculate within millions, perhaps even tens of millions, the number of deaths caused by the present war. The calamities that are constantly being reported–battles, massacres, famines, revolutions–tend to inspire in the average person a feeling of unreality. One has no way of verifying the facts, one is not even fully certain that they have happened, and one is always presented with totally different interpretations from different sources. What were the rights and wrongs of the Warsaw rising of August 1944? Is it true about the German gas ovens in Poland? Who was really to blame for the Bengal famine? Probably the truth is discoverable, but the facts will be so dishonestly set forth in almost any newspaper that the ordinary reader can be forgiven either for swallowing lies or failing to form an opinion. The general uncertainty as to what is really happening makes it easier to cling to lunatic beliefs. Since nothing is ever quite proved or disproved, the most unmistakable fact can be impudently denied. Moreover, although endlessly brooding on power, victory,

defeat, revenge, the nationalist is often somewhat uninterested in what happens in the real world. What he wants is to FEEL that his own unit is getting the better of some other unit, and he can more easily do this by scoring off an adversary than by examining the facts to see whether they support him. All nationalist controversy is at the debating-society level. It is always entirely inconclusive, since each contestant invariably believes himself to have won the victory. Some nationalists are not far from schizophrenia, living quite happily amid dreams of power and conquest which have no connection with the physical world.

I have examined as best as I can the mental habits which are common to all forms of nationalism. The next thing is to classify those forms, but obviously this cannot be done comprehensively. Nationalism is an enormous subject. The world is tormented by innumerable delusions and hatreds which cut across one another in an extremely complex way, and some of the most sinister of them have not yet impinged on the European consciousness. In this essay I am concerned with nationalism as it occurs among the English intelligentsia. In them, much more than in ordinary English people, it is unmixed with patriotism and therefore can be studied pure. Below are listed the varieties of nationalism now flourishing among English intellectuals, with such comments as seem to be needed. It is convenient to use three headings, Positive, Transferred, and Negative, though some varieties will fit into more than one category:

POSITIVE NATIONALISM

(i) NEO-TORYISM. Exemplified by such people as Lord Elton, A.P. Herbert, G.M. Young, Professor Pickthorn, by the literature of the Tory Reform Committee, and by such magazines as the NEW ENGLISH REVIEW and THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER. The real motive force of neo-Toryism, giving it its nationalistic character and differentiating it from ordinary Conservatism, is the desire not to recognise that British power and influence have declined. Even those who are realistic enough to see that Britain's military position is not what it was, tend to claim that 'English ideas' (usually left undefined) must dominate the world. All neo-Tories are anti-Russian, but sometimes the main emphasis is anti-American. The significant thing is that this school of thought

seems to be gaining ground among youngish intellectuals, sometimes ex-Communists, who have passed through the usual process of disillusionment and become disillusioned with that. The anglophobe who suddenly becomes violently pro-British is a fairly common figure. Writers who illustrate this tendency are F. A. Voigt, Malcolm Muggeridge, Evelyn Waugh, Hugh Kingsmill, and a psychologically similar development can be observed in T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and various of their followers.

(ii) CELTIC NATIONALISM. Welsh, Irish and Scottish nationalism have points of difference but are alike in their anti-English orientation. Members of all three movements have opposed the war while continuing to describe themselves as pro-Russian, and the lunatic fringe has even contrived to be simultaneously pro-Russian and pro-Nazi. But Celtic nationalism is not the same thing as anglophobia. Its motive force is a belief in the past and future greatness of the Celtic peoples, and it has a strong tinge of racialism. The Celt is supposed to be spiritually superior to the Saxon–simpler, more creative, less vulgar, less snobbish, etc.–but the usual power hunger is there under the surface. One symptom of it is the delusion that Eire, Scotland or even Wales could preserve its independence unaided and owes nothing to British protection. Among writers, good examples of this school of thought are Hugh McDiarmid and Sean O'Casey. No modern Irish writer, even of the stature of Yeats or Joyce, is completely free from traces of nationalism.

(iii) ZIONISM. This the unusual characteristics of a nationalist movement, but the American variant of it seems to be more violent and malignant than the British. I classify it under Direct and not Transferred nationalism because it flourishes almost exclusively among the Jews themselves. In England, for several rather incongruous reasons, the intelligentsia are mostly pro-Jew on the Palestine issue, but they do not feel strongly about it. All English people of goodwill are also pro-Jew in the sense of disapproving of Nazi persecution. But any actual nationalistic loyalty, or belief in the innate superiority of Jews, is hardly to be found among Gentiles.

TRANSFERRED NATIONALISM

(i) COMMUNISM.

(ii) POLITICAL CATHOLICISM.

(iii) COLOUR FEELING. The old-style contemptuous attitude towards 'natives' has been much weakened in England, and various pseudo-scientific theories emphasising the superiority of the white race have been abandoned.[Note, below] Among the intelligentsia, colour feeling only occurs in the transposed form, that is, as a belief in the innate superiority of the coloured races. This is now increasingly common among English intellectuals, probably resulting more often from masochism and sexual frustration than from contact with the Oriental and Negro nationalist movements. Even among those who do not feel strongly on the colour question, snobbery and imitation have a powerful influence. Almost any English intellectual would be scandalised by the claim that the white races are superior to the coloured, whereas the opposite claim would seem to him unexceptionable even if he disagreed with it. Nationalistic attachment to the coloured races is usually mixed up with the belief that their sex lives are superior, and there is a large underground mythology about the sexual prowess of Negroes.

[Note: A good example is the sunstroke superstition. Until recently it was believed that the white races were much more liable to sunstroke that the coloured, and that a white man could not safely walk about in tropical sunshine without a pith helmet. There was no evidence whatever for this theory, but it served the purpose of accentuating the difference between 'natives' and Europeans. During the war the theory was quietly dropped and whole armies manoeuvred in the tropics without pith helmets. So long as the sunstroke superstition survived, English doctors in India appear to have believed in it as firmly as laymen.(Author's footnote)]

(iv) CLASS FEELING. Among upper-class and middle-class intellectuals, only in the transposed form–i.e. as a belief in the superiority of the proletariat. Here again, inside the intelligentsia, the pressure of public opinion is overwhelming. Nationalistic loyalty towards the proletariat, and most vicious theoretical hatred of the bourgeoisie, can and often do co-exist with ordinary snobbishness in everyday life.

(v) PACIFISM. The majority of pacifists either belong to obscure religious sects or are simply humanitarians who object to the taking of life and prefer not to follow their thoughts beyond that point. But

there is a minority of intellectual pacifists whose real though unadmitted motive appears to be hatred of western democracy and admiration of totalitarianism. Pacifist propaganda usually boils down to saying that one side is as bad as the other, but if one looks closely at the writings of younger intellectual pacifists, one finds that they do not by any means express impartial disapproval but are directed almost entirely against Britain and the United States. Moreover they do not as a rule condemn violence as such, but only violence used in defence of western countries. The Russians, unlike the British, are not blamed for defending themselves by warlike means, and indeed all pacifist propaganda of this type avoids mention of Russia or China. It is not claimed, again, that the Indians should abjure violence in their struggle against the British. Pacifist literature abounds with equivocal remarks which, if they mean anything, appear to mean that statesmen of the type of Hitler are preferable to those of the type of Churchill, and that violence is perhaps excusable if it is violent enough. After the fall of France, the French pacifists, faced by a real choice which their English colleagues have not had to make, mostly went over to the Nazis, and in England there appears to have been some small overlap of membership between the Peace Pledge Union and the Blackshirts. Pacifist writers have written in praise of Carlyle, one of the intellectual fathers of Fascism. All in all it is difficult not to feel that pacifism, as it appears among a section of the intelligentsia, is secretly inspired by an admiration for power and successful cruelty. The mistake was made of pinning this emotion to Hitler, but it could easily be retransferred.

NEGATIVE NATIONALISM

(i) ANGLOPHOBIA. Within the intelligentsia, a derisive and mildly hostile attitude towards Britain is more or less compulsory, but it is an unfaked emotion in many cases. During the war it was manifested in the defeatism of the intelligentsia, which persisted long after it had become clear that the Axis powers could not win. Many people were undisguisedly pleased when Singapore fell ore when the British were driven out of Greece, and there was a remarkable unwillingness to believe in good news, e.g. el Alamein, or the number of German planes shot down in the Battle of Britain. English left-wing intellectuals did not, of course, actually want the Germans

or Japanese to win the war, but many of them could not help getting a certain kick out of seeing their own country humiliated, and wanted to feel that the final victory would be due to Russia, or perhaps America, and not to Britain. In foreign politics many intellectuals follow the principle that any faction backed by Britain must be in the wrong. As a result, 'enlightened' opinion is quite largely a mirror-image of Conservative policy. Anglophobia is always liable to reversal, hence that fairly common spectacle, the pacifist of one war who is a bellicist in the next.

(ii) ANTI-SEMITISM. There is little evidence about this at present, because the Nazi persecutions have made it necessary for any thinking person to side with the Jews against their oppressors. Anyone educated enough to have heard the word 'antisemitism' claims as a matter of course to be free of it, and anti-Jewish remarks are carefully eliminated from all classes of literature. Actually antisemitism appears to be widespread, even among intellectuals, and the general conspiracy of silence probably helps exacerbate it. People of Left opinions are not immune to it, and their attitude is sometimes affected by the fact that Trotskyists and Anarchists tend to be Jews. But antisemitism comes more naturally to people of Conservative tendency, who suspect Jews of weakening national morale and diluting the national culture. Neo-Tories and political Catholics are always liable to succumb to antisemitism, at least intermittently.

(iii) TROTSKYISM. This word is used so loosely as to include Anarchists, democratic Socialists and even Liberals. I use it here to mean a doctrinaire Marxist whose main motive is hostility to the Stalin régime. Trotskyism can be better studied in obscure pamphlets or in papers like the SOCIALIST APPEAL than in the works of Trotsky himself, who was by no means a man of one idea. Although in some places, for instance in the United States, Trotskyism is able to attract a fairly large number of adherents and develop into an organised movement with a petty fuerher of its own, its inspiration is essentially negative. The Trotskyist is AGAINST Stalin just as the Communist is FOR him, and, like the majority of Communists, he wants not so much to alter the external world as to feel that the battle for prestige is going in his own favour. In each case there is the same obsessive fixation on a single subject, the same inability to form a

genuinely rational opinion based on probabilities. The fact that Trotskyists are everywhere a persecuted minority, and that the accusation usually made against them, i.e. of collaborating with the Fascists, is obviously false, creates an impression that Trotskyism is intellectually and morally superior to Communism; but it is doubtful whether there is much difference. The most typical Trotskyists, in any case, are ex-Communists, and no one arrives at Trotskyism except via one of the left-wing movements. No Communist, unless tethered to his party by years of habit, is secure against a sudden lapse into Trotskyism. The opposite process does not seem to happen equally often, though there is no clear reason why it should not.

In the classification I have attempted above, it will seem that I have often exaggerated, oversimplified, made unwarranted assumptions and have left out of account the existence of ordinarily decent motives. This was inevitable, because in this essay I am trying to isolate and identify tendencies which exist in all our minds and pervert our thinking, without necessarily occurring in a pure state or operating continuously. It is important at this point to correct the over-simplified picture which I have been obliged to make. To begin with, one has no right to assume that EVERYONE, or even every intellectual, is infected by nationalism. Secondly, nationalism can be intermittent and limited. An intelligent man may half-succumb to a belief which he knows to be absurd, and he may keep it out of his mind for long periods, only reverting to it in moments of anger or sentimentality, or when he is certain that no important issues are involved. Thirdly, a nationalistic creed may be adopted in good faith from non-nationalistic motives. Fourthly, several kinds of nationalism, even kinds that cancel out, can co-exist in the same person.

All the way through I have said, ‘the nationalist does this’ or ‘the nationalist does that’, using for purposes of illustration the extreme, barely sane type of nationalist who has no neutral areas in his mind and no interest in anything except the struggle for power. Actually such people are fairly common, but they are not worth the powder and shot. In real life Lord Elton, D. N. Pritt, Lady Houston, Ezra Pound, Lord Vanisttart, Father Coughlin and all the rest of their dreary tribe have to be fought against, but their intellectual

deficiencies hardly need pointing out. Monomania is not interesting, and the fact that no nationalist of the more bigoted kind can write a book which still seems worth reading after a lapse of years has a certain deodorising effect. But when one has admitted that nationalism has not triumphed everywhere, that there are still peoples whose judgements are not at the mercy of their desires, the fact does remain that the pressing problems–India, Poland, Palestine, the Spanish civil war, the Moscow trials, the American Negroes, the Russo-German Pact or what have you–cannot be, or at least never are, discussed upon a reasonable level. The Eltons and Pritts and Coughlins, each of them simply an enormous mouth bellowing the same lie over and over again, are obviously extreme cases, but we deceive ourselves if we do not realise that we can all resemble them in unguarded moments. Let a certain note be struck, let this or that corn be trodden on–and it may be corn whose very existence has been unsuspected hitherto–and the most fair-minded and sweet-tempered person may suddenly be transformed into a vicious partisan, anxious only to 'score' over his adversary and indifferent as to how many lies he tells or how many logical errors he commits in doing so. When Lloyd George, who was an opponent of the Boer War, announced in the House of Commons that the British communiques, if one added them together, claimed the killing of more Boers than the whole Boer nation contained, it is recorded that Arthur Balfour rose to his feet and shouted 'Cad!' Very few people are proof against lapses of this type. The Negro snubbed by a white woman, the Englishman who hears England ignorantly criticised by an American, the Catholic apologist reminded of the Spanish Armada, will all react in much the same way. One prod to the nerve of nationalism, and the intellectual decencies can vanish, the past can be altered, and the plainest facts can be denied.

If one harbours anywhere in one's mind a nationalistic loyalty or hatred, certain facts, although in a sense known to be true, are inadmissible. Here are just a few examples. I list below five types of nationalist, and against each I append a fact which it is impossible for that type of nationalist to accept, even in his secret thoughts:

BRITISH TORY: Britain will come out of this war with reduced power and prestige.

COMMUNIST: If she had not been aided by Britain and America, Russia would have been defeated by Germany.

IRISH NATIONALIST: Eire can only remain independent because of British protection.

TROTSKYIST: The Stalin régime is accepted by the Russian masses.

PACIFIST: Those who 'abjure' violence can only do so because others are committing violence on their behalf.

All of these facts are grossly obvious if one's emotions do not happen to be involved: but to the kind of person named in each case they are also INTOLERABLE, and so they have to be denied, and false theories constructed upon their denial. I come back to the astonishing failure of military prediction in the present war. It is, I think, true to say that the intelligentsia have been more wrong about the progress of the war than the common people, and that they were more swayed by partisan feelings. The average intellectual of the Left believed, for instance, that the war was lost in 1940, that the Germans were bound to overrun Egypt in 1942, that the Japanese would never be driven out of the lands they had conquered, and that the Anglo-American bombing offensive was making no impression on Germany. He could believe these things because his hatred for the British ruling class forbade him to admit that British plans could succeed. There is no limit to the follies that can be swallowed if one is under the influence of feelings of this kind. I have heard it confidently stated, for instance, that the American troops had been brought to Europe not to fight the Germans but to crush an English revolution. One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool. When Hitler invaded Russia, the officials of the MOI issued 'as background' a warning that Russia might be expected to collapse in six weeks. On the other hand the Communists regarded every phase of the war as a Russian victory, even when the Russians were driven back almost to the Caspian Sea and had lost several million prisoners. There is no need to multiply instances. The point is that as soon as fear, hatred, jealousy and power worship are involved, the sense of reality becomes unhinged. And, as I have pointed out already, the sense of right and wrong becomes unhinged also. There is no crime,

absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when 'our' side commits it. Even if one does not deny that the crime has happened, even if one knows that it is exactly the same crime as one has condemned in some other case, even if one admits in an intellectual sense that it is unjustified–still one cannot FEEL that it is wrong. Loyalty is involved, and so pity ceases to function.

The reason for the rise and spread of nationalism is far too big a question to be raised here. It is enough to say that, in the forms in which it appears among English intellectuals, it is a distorted reflection of the frightful battles actually happening in the external world, and that its worst follies have been made possible by the breakdown of patriotism and religious belief. If one follows up this train of thought, one is in danger of being led into a species of Conservatism, or into political quietism. It can be plausibly argued, for instance–it is even possibly true–that patriotism is an inoculation against nationalism, that monarchy is a guard against dictatorship, and that organised religion is a guard against superstition. Or again, it can be argued that NO unbiased outlook is possible, that ALL creeds and causes involve the same lies, follies, and barbarities; and this is often advanced as a reason for keeping out of politics altogether. I do not accept this argument, if only because in the modern world no one describable as an intellectual CAN keep out of politics in the sense of not caring about them. I think one must engage in politics–using the word in a wide sense–and that one must have preferences: that is, one must recognise that some causes are objectively better than others, even if they are advanced by equally bad means. As for the nationalistic loves and hatreds that I have spoken of, they are part of the make-up of most of us, whether we like it or not. Whether it is possible to get rid of them I do not know, but I do believe that it is possible to struggle against them, and that this is essentially a MORAL effort. It is a question first of all of discovering what one really is, what one's own feelings really are, and then of making allowance for the inevitable bias. If you hate and fear Russia, if you are jealous of the wealth and power of America, if you despise Jews, if you have a sentiment of inferiority towards the British ruling class, you cannot get rid of those feelings simply by

taking thought. But you can at least recognise that you have them, and prevent them from contaminating your mental processes. The emotional urges which are inescapable, and are perhaps even necessary to political action, should be able to exist side by side with an acceptance of reality. But this, I repeat, needs a MORAL effort, and contemporary English literature, so far as it is alive at all to the major issues of our time, shows how few of us are prepared to make it.

REVENGE IS SOUR (1945)

Whenever I read phrases like ‘war guilt trials’, ‘punishment of war criminals’ and so forth, there comes back into my mind the memory of something I saw in a prisoner-of-war camp in South Germany, earlier this year.

Another correspondent and myself were being show round the camp by a little Viennese Jew who had been enlisted in the branch of the American army which deals with the interrogation of prisoners. He was an alert, fair-haired, rather good-looking youth of about twenty-five, and politically so much more knowledgeable than the average American officer that it was a pleasure to be with him. The camp was on an airfield, and, after we had been round the cages, our guide led us to a hangar where various prisoners who were in a different category from the others were being ‘screened’.

Up at one end of the hangar about a dozen men were lying in a row on the concrete floor. These, it was explained, were S.S. officers who had been segregated from the other prisoners. Among them was a man in dingy civilian clothes who was lying with his arm across his face and apparently asleep. He had strange and horribly deformed feet. The two of them were quite symmetrical, but they were clubbed out into an extraordinary globular shape which made them more like a horse’s hoof than anything human. As we approached the group, the little Jew seemed to be working himself up into a state of excitement.

‘That’s the real swine!’ he said, and suddenly he lashed out with his heavy army boot and caught the prostrate man a fearful kick right on the bulge of one of his deformed feet.

‘Get up, you swine!’ he shouted as the man started out of sleep, and then repeated something of the kind in German. The prisoner scrambled to his feet and stood clumsily to attention. With the same air of working himself up into a fury–indeed he was almost dancing up and down as he spoke–the Jew told us the prisoner’s history. He was a ‘real’ Nazi: his party number indicated that he had been a member since the very early days, and he had held a post corresponding to a General in the political branch of the S.S. It could

be taken as quite certain that he had had charge of concentration camps and had presided over tortures and hangings. In short, he represented everything that we had been fighting against during the past five years.

Meanwhile, I was studying his appearance. Quite apart from the scrubby, unfed, unshaven look that a newly captured man generally has, he was a disgusting specimen. But he did not look brutal or in any way frightening: merely neurotic and, in a low way, intellectual. His pale, shifty eyes were deformed by powerful spectacles. He could have been an unfrocked clergyman, an actor ruined by drink, or a spiritualist medium. I have seen very similar people in London common lodging houses, and also in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Quite obviously he was mentally unbalanced–indeed, only doubtfully sane, though at this moment sufficiently in his right mind to be frightened of getting another kick. And yet everything that the Jew was telling me of his history could have been true, and probably was true! So the Nazi torturer of one's imagination, the monstrous figure against whom one had struggled for so many years, dwindled to this pitiful wretch, whose obvious need was not for punishment, but for some kind of psychological treatment.

Later, there were further humiliations. Another S.S. officer, a large brawny man, was ordered to strip to the waist and show the blood group number tattooed on his under-arm; another was forced to explain to us how he had lied about being a member of the S.S. and attempted to pass himself off as an ordinary soldier of the Wehrmacht. I wondered whether the Jew was getting any real kick out of this new-found power that he was exercising. I concluded that he wasn't really enjoying it, and that he was merely–like a man in a brothel, or a boy smoking his first cigar, or a tourist traipsing round a picture gallery–TELLING himself that he was enjoying it, and behaving as he had planned to behave in the days he was helpless.

It is absurd to blame any German or Austrian Jew for getting his own back on the Nazis. Heaven knows what scores this particular man may have had to wipe out; very likely his whole family had been murdered; and after all, even a wanton kick to a prisoner is a very tiny thing compared with the outrages committed by the Hitler

régime. But what this scene, and much else that I saw in Germany, brought home to me was that the whole idea of revenge and punishment is a childish daydream. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as revenge. Revenge is an act which you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless: as soon as the sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also.

Who would not have jumped for joy, in 1940, at the thought of seeing S.S. officers kicked and humiliated? But when the thing becomes possible, it is merely pathetic and disgusting. It is said that when Mussolini's corpse was exhibited in public, an old woman drew a revolver and fired five shots into it, exclaiming, 'Those are for my five sons!' It is the kind of story that the newspapers make up, but it might be true. I wonder how much satisfaction she got out of those five shots, which, doubtless, she had dreamed years earlier of firing. The condition of her being able to get close enough to Mussolini to shoot at him was that he should be a corpse.

In so far as the big public in this country is responsible for the monstrous peace settlement now being forced on Germany, it is because of a failure to see in advance that punishing an enemy brings no satisfaction. We acquiesce in crimes like the expulsion of all Germans from East Prussia–crimes which in some cases we could not prevent but might at least have protested against–because the Germans had angered and frightened us, and therefore we were certain that when they were down we should feel no pity for them. We persist in these policies, or let others persist in them on our behalf, because of a vague feeling that, having set out to punish Germany, we ought to go ahead and do it. Actually there is little acute hatred of Germany left in this country, and even less, I should expect to find, in the army of occupation. Only the minority of sadists, who must have their 'atrocities' from one source or another, take a keen interest in the hunting-down of war criminals and quislings. If you asked the average man what crime Goering, Ribbentrop, and the rest are to be charged with at their trial, he cannot tell you. Somehow the punishment of these monsters ceases to seem attractive when it becomes possible: indeed, once under lock and key, they almost cease to be monsters.

Unfortunately, there is often a need of some concrete incident

before one can discover the real state of one's feelings. Here is another memory from Germany. A few hours after Stuttgart was captured by the French army, a Belgian journalist and myself entered the town, which was still in some disorder. The Belgian had been broadcasting throughout the war for the European Service of the BBC, and, like nearly all Frenchmen or Belgians, he had a very much tougher attitude towards 'the Boche' than an Englishman or an American would have. All the main bridges into town had been blown up, and we had to enter by a small footbridge which the Germans had evidently mad efforts to defend. A dead German soldier was lying supine at the foot of the steps. His face was a waxy yellow. On his breast someone had laid a bunch of the lilac which was blooming everywhere.

The Belgian averted his face as we went past. When we were well over the bridge he confided to me that this was the first time he had seen a dead man. I suppose he was thirty five years old, and for four years he had been doing war propaganda over the radio. For several days after this, his attitude was quite different from what it had been earlier. He looked with disgust at the bomb-wrecked town and the humiliation the Germans were undergoing, and even on one occasion intervened to prevent a particularly bad bit of looting. When he left, he gave the residue of the coffee we had brought with us to the Germans on whom we were billeted. A week earlier he would probably have been scandalized at the idea of giving coffee to a 'Boche'. But his feelings, he told me, had undergone a change at the sight of ce pauvre mort beside the bridge: it had suddenly brought home to him the meaning of war. And yet, if we had happened to enter the town by another route, he might have been spared the experience of seeing one corpse out of the–perhaps–twenty million that the war has produced.

THE SPORTING SPIRIT

Now that the brief visit of the Dynamo football team has come to an end, it is possible to say publicly what many thinking people were saying privately before the Dynamos ever arrived. That is, that sport is an unfailing cause of ill-will, and that if such a visit as this had any effect at all on Anglo-Soviet relations, it could only be to make them slightly worse than before.

Even the newspapers have been unable to conceal the fact that at least two of the four matches played led to much bad feeling. At the Arsenal match, I am told by someone who was there, a British and a Russian player came to blows and the crowd booed the referee. The Glasgow match, someone else informs me, was simply a free-for-all from the start. And then there was the controversy, typical of our nationalistic age, about the composition of the Arsenal team. Was it really an all-England team, as claimed by the Russians, or merely a league team, as claimed by the British? And did the Dynamos end their tour abruptly in order to avoid playing an all-England team? As usual, everyone answers these questions according to his political predilections. Not quite everyone, however. I noted with interest, as an instance of the vicious passions that football provokes, that the sporting correspondent of the russophile NEWS CHRONICLE took the anti-Russian line and maintained that Arsenal was NOT an all-England team. No doubt the controversy will continue to echo for years in the footnotes of history books. Meanwhile the result of the Dynamos' tour, in so far as it has had any result, will have been to create fresh animosity on both sides.

And how could it be otherwise? I am always amazed when I hear people saying that sport creates goodwill between the nations, and that if only the common peoples of the world could meet one another at football or cricket, they would have no inclination to meet on the battlefield. Even if one didn't know from concrete examples (the 1936 Olympic Games, for instance) that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from general principles.

Nearly all the sports practised nowadays are competitive. You

play to win, and the game has little meaning unless you do your utmost to win. On the village green, where you pick up sides and no feeling of local patriotism is involved, it is possible to play simply for the fun and exercise: but as soon as the question of prestige arises, as soon as you feel that you and some larger unit will be disgraced if you lose, the most savage combative instincts are aroused. Anyone who has played even in a school football match knows this. At the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare. But the significant thing is not the behaviour of the players but the attitude of the spectators: and, behind the spectators, of the nations who work themselves into furies over these absurd contests, and seriously believe–at any rate for short periods–that running, jumping and kicking a ball are tests of national virtue.

Even a leisurely game like cricket, demanding grace rather than strength, can cause much ill-will, as we saw in the controversy over body-line bowling and over the rough tactics of the Australian team that visited England in 1921. Football, a game in which everyone gets hurt and every nation has its own style of play which seems unfair to foreigners, is far worse. Worst of all is boxing. One of the most horrible sights in the world is a fight between white and coloured boxers before a mixed audience. But a boxing audience is always disgusting, and the behaviour of the women, in particular, is such that the army, I believe, does not allow them to attend its contests. At any rate, two or three years ago, when Home Guards and regular troops were holding a boxing tournament, I was placed on guard at the door of the hall, with orders to keep the women out.

In England, the obsession with sport is bad enough, but even fiercer passions are aroused in young countries where games playing and nationalism are both recent developments. In countries like India or Burma, it is necessary at football matches to have strong cordons of police to keep the crowd from invading the field. In Burma, I have seen the supporters of one side break through the police and disable the goalkeeper of the opposing side at a critical moment. The first big football match that was played in Spain about fifteen years ago led to an uncontrollable riot. As soon as strong feelings of rivalry are aroused, the notion of playing the game according to the rules always vanishes. People want to see one side on top and the other side

humiliated, and they forget that victory gained through cheating or through the intervention of the crowd is meaningless. Even when the spectators don't intervene physically they try to influence the game by cheering their own side and "rattling" opposing players with boos and insults. Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting.

Instead of blah-blahing about the clean, healthy rivalry of the football field and the great part played by the Olympic Games in bringing the nations together, it is more useful to inquire how and why this modern cult of sport arose. Most of the games we now play are of ancient origin, but sport does not seem to have been taken very seriously between Roman times and the nineteenth century. Even in the English public schools the games cult did not start till the later part of the last century. Dr Arnold, generally regarded as the founder of the modern public school, looked on games as simply a waste of time. Then, chiefly in England and the United States, games were built up into a heavily-financed activity, capable of attracting vast crowds and rousing savage passions, and the infection spread from country to country. It is the most violently combative sports, football and boxing, that have spread the widest. There cannot be much doubt that the whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism–that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige. Also, organised games are more likely to flourish in urban communities where the average human being lives a sedentary or at least a confined life, and does not get much opportunity for creative labour. In a rustic community a boy or young man works off a good deal of his surplus energy by walking, swimming, snowballing, climbing trees, riding horses, and by various sports involving cruelty to animals, such as fishing, cock-fighting and ferreting for rats. In a big town one must indulge in group activities if one wants an outlet for one's physical strength or for one's sadistic impulses. Games are taken seriously in London and New York, and they were taken seriously in Rome and Byzantium: in the Middle Ages they were played, and probably played with much physical brutality, but they

were not mixed up with politics nor a cause of group hatreds.

If you wanted to add to the vast fund of ill-will existing in the world at this moment, you could hardly do it better than by a series of football matches between Jews and Arabs, Germans and Czechs, Indians and British, Russians and Poles, and Italians and Jugoslavs, each match to be watched by a mixed audience of 100,000 spectators. I do not, of course, suggest that sport is one of the main causes of international rivalry; big-scale sport is itself, I think, merely another effect of the causes that have produced nationalism. Still, you do make things worse by sending forth a team of eleven men, labelled as national champions, to do battle against some rival team, and allowing it to be felt on all sides that whichever nation is defeated will "lose face".

I hope, therefore, that we shan't follow up the visit of the Dynamos by sending a British team to the USSR. If we must do so, then let us send a second-rate team which is sure to be beaten and cannot be claimed to represent Britain as a whole. There are quite enough real causes of trouble already, and we need not add to them by encouraging young men to kick each other on the shins amid the roars of infuriated spectators.

YOU AND THE ATOMIC BOMB (1945)

Considering how likely we all are to be blown to pieces by it within the next five years, the atomic bomb has not roused so much discussion as might have been expected. The newspapers have published numerous diagrams, not very helpful to the average man, of protons and neutrons doing their stuff, and there has been much reiteration of the useless statement that the bomb 'ought to be put under international control.' But curiously little has been said, at any rate in print, about the question that is of most urgent interest to all of us, namely: 'How difficult are these things to manufacture?'

Such information as we–that is, the big public–possess on this subject has come to us in a rather indirect way, apropos of President Truman's decision not to hand over certain secrets to the USSR. Some months ago, when the bomb was still only a rumour, there was a widespread belief that splitting the atom was merely a problem for the physicists, and that when they had solved it a new and devastating weapon would be within reach of almost everybody. (At any moment, so the rumour went, some lonely lunatic in a laboratory might blow civilisation to smithereens, as easily as touching off a firework.)

Had that been true, the whole trend of history would have been abruptly altered. The distinction between great states and small states would have been wiped out, and the power of the State over the individual would have been greatly weakened. However, it appears from President Truman's remarks, and various comments that have been made on them, that the bomb is fantastically expensive and that its manufacture demands an enormous industrial effort, such as only three or four countries in the world are capable of making. This point is of cardinal importance, because it may mean that the discovery of the atomic bomb, so far from reversing history, will simply intensify the trends which have been apparent for a dozen years past.

It is a commonplace that the history of civilisation is largely the history of weapons. In particular, the connection between the discovery of gunpowder and the overthrow of feudalism by the bourgeoisie has been pointed out over and over again. And though I

have no doubt exceptions can be brought forward, I think the following rule would be found generally true: that ages in which the dominant weapon is expensive or difficult to make will tend to be ages of despotism, whereas when the dominant weapon is cheap and simple, the common people have a chance. Thus, for example, thanks, battleships and bombing planes are inherently tyrannical weapons, while rifles, muskets, long-bows and hand-grenades are inherently democratic weapons. A complex weapon makes the strong stronger, while a simple weapon–so long as there is no answer to it–gives claws to the weak.

The great age of democracy and of national self-determination was the age of the musket and the rifle. After the invention of the flintlock, and before the invention of the percussion cap, the musket was a fairly efficient weapon, and at the same time so simple that it could be produced almost anywhere. Its combination of qualities made possible the success of the American and French revolutions, and made a popular insurrection a more serious business than it could be in our own day. After the musket came the breech-loading rifle. This was a comparatively complex thing, but it could still be produced in scores of countries, and it was cheap, easily smuggled and economical of ammunition. Even the most backward nation could always get hold of rifles from one source or another, so that Boers, Bulgars, Abyssinians, Moroccans–even Tibetans–could put up a fight for their independence, sometimes with success. But thereafter every development in military technique has favoured the State as against the individual, and the industrialised country as against the backward one. There are fewer and fewer foci of power. Already, in 1939, there were only five states capable of waging war on the grand scale, and now there are only three–ultimately, perhaps, only two. This trend has been obvious for years, and was pointed out by a few observers even before 1914. The one thing that might reverse it is the discovery of a weapon–or, to put it more broadly, of a method of fighting–not dependent on huge concentrations of industrial plant.

From various symptoms one can infer that the Russians do not yet possess the secret of making the atomic bomb; on the other hand, the consensus of opinion seems to be that they will possess it within a

few years. So we have before us the prospect of two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds, dividing the world between them. It has been rather hastily assumed that this means bigger and bloodier wars, and perhaps an actual end to the machine civilisation. But suppose–and really this the likeliest development–that the surviving great nations make a tacit agreement never to use the atomic bomb against one another? Suppose they only use it, or the threat of it, against people who are unable to retaliate? In that case we are back where we were before, the only difference being that power is concentrated in still fewer hands and that the outlook for subject peoples and oppressed classes is still more hopeless.

When James Burnham wrote THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION it seemed probable to many Americans that the Germans would win the European end of the war, and it was therefore natural to assume that Germany and not Russia would dominate the Eurasian land mass, while Japan would remain master of East Asia. This was a miscalculation, but it does not affect the main argument. For Burnham's geographical picture of the new world has turned out to be correct. More and more obviously the surface of the earth is being parceled off into three great empires, each self-contained and cut off from contact with the outer world, and each ruled, under one disguise or another, by a self-elected oligarchy. The haggling as to where the frontiers are to be drawn is still going on, and will continue for some years, and the third of the three super-states–East Asia, dominated by China–is still potential rather than actual. But the general drift is unmistakable, and every scientific discovery of recent years has accelerated it.

We were once told that the aeroplane had 'abolished frontiers'; actually it is only since the aeroplane became a serious weapon that frontiers have become definitely impassable. The radio was once expected to promote international understanding and co-operation; it has turned out to be a means of insulating one nation from another. The atomic bomb may complete the process by robbing the exploited classes and peoples of all power to revolt, and at the same time putting the possessors of the bomb on a basis of military equality.

Unable to conquer one another, they are likely to continue ruling the world between them, and it is difficult to see how the balance can be upset except by slow and unpredictable demographic changes.

For forty or fifty years past, Mr. H. G. Wells and others have been warning us that man is in danger of destroying himself with his own weapons, leaving the ants or some other gregarious species to take over. Anyone who has seen the ruined cities of Germany will find this notion at least thinkable. Nevertheless, looking at the world as a whole, the drift for many decades has been not towards anarchy but towards the reimposition of slavery. We may be heading not for general breakdown but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity. James Burnham's theory has been much discussed, but few people have yet considered its ideological implications–that is, the kind of world-view, the kind of beliefs, and the social structure that would probably prevail in a state which was at once UNCONQUERABLE and in a permanent state of 'cold war' with its neighbors.

Had the atomic bomb turned out to be something as cheap and easily manufactured as a bicycle or an alarm clock, it might well have plunged us back into barbarism, but it might, on the other hand, have meant the end of national sovereignty and of the highly-centralised police state. If, as seems to be the case, it is a rare and costly object as difficult to produce as a battleship, it is likelier to put an end to large-scale wars at the cost of prolonging indefinitely a 'peace that is no peace'.

A GOOD WORD FOR THE VICAR OF BRAY

Some years ago a friend took me to the little Berkshire church of which the celebrated Vicar of Bray was once the incumbent. (Actually it is a few miles from Bray, but perhaps at that time the two livings were one.) In the churchyard there stands a magnificent yew tree which, according to a notice at its foot, was planted by no less a person than the Vicar of Bray himself. And it struck me at the time as curious that such a man should have left such a relic behind him.

The Vicar of Bray, though he was well equipped to be a leader-writer on THE TIMES, could hardly be described as an admirable character. Yet, after this lapse of time, all that is left of him is a comic song and a beautiful tree, which has rested the eyes of generation after generation and must surely have outweighed any bad effects which he produced by his political quislingism.

Thibaw, the last King of Burma, was also far from being a good man. He was a drunkard, he had five hundred wives–he seems to have kept them chiefly for show, however–and when he came to the throne his first act was to decapitate seventy or eighty of his brothers. Yet he did posterity a good turn by planting the dusty streets of Mandalay with tamarind trees which cast a pleasant shade until the Japanese incendiary bombs burned them down in 1942.

The poet, James Shirley, seems to have generalised too freely when he said that "Only the actions of the just Smell sweet and blossom in their dust". Sometimes the actions of the unjust make quite a good showing after the appropriate lapse of time. When I saw the Vicar of Bray's yew tree it reminded me of something, and afterwards I got hold of a book of selections from the writings of John Aubrey and reread a pastoral poem which must have been written some time in the first half of the seventeenth century, and which was inspired by a certain Mrs Overall.

Mrs Overall was the wife of a Dean and was extensively unfaithful to him. According to Aubrey she "could scarcely denie any one", and she had "the loveliest Eies that were ever seen, but wondrous wanton". The poem (the "shepherd swaine" seems to have

been somebody called Sir John Selby) starts off:

Downe lay the Shepherd Swaine
So sober and demure
Wishing for his wench againe
So bonny and so pure
With his head on hillock lowe
And his arms akimboe
And all was for the losse of his
Hye nonny nonny noe...
Sweet she was, as kind a love
As ever fetter'd Swaine;
Never such a daynty one
Shall man enjoy again.
Sett a thousand on a rowe
I forbid that any showe
Ever the like of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

As the poem proceeds through another six verses, the refrain "Hye nonny nonny noe" takes on an unmistakably obscene meaning, but it ends with the exquisite stanza:

But gone she is the prettiest lasse
That ever trod on plaine.
What ever hath betide of her
Blame not the Shepherd Swaine.
For why? She was her owne Foe,
And gave herself the overthrowe
By being so franke of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

Mrs Overall was no more an exemplary character than the Vicar of Bray, though a more attractive one. Yet in the end all that remains of her is a poem which still gives pleasure to many people, though for some reason it never gets into the anthologies. The suffering which she presumably caused, and the misery and futility in which her own life must have ended, have been transformed into a sort of lingering fragrance like the smell of tobacco-plants on a summer evening.

But to come back to trees. The planting of a tree, especially one of

the long-living hardwood trees, is a gift which you can make to posterity at almost no cost and with almost no trouble, and if the tree takes root it will far outlive the visible effect of any of your other actions, good or evil. A year or two ago I wrote a few paragraphs in TRIBUNE about some sixpenny rambler roses from Woolworth's which I had planted before the war. This brought me an indignant letter from a reader who said that roses are bourgeois, but I still think that my sixpence was better spent than if it had gone on cigarettes or even on one of the excellent Fabian Research Pamphlets.

Recently, I spent a day at the cottage where I used to live, and noted with a pleased surprise–to be exact, it was a feeling of having done good unconsciously–the progress of the things I had planted nearly ten years ago. I think it is worth recording what some of them cost, just to show what you can do with a few shillings if you invest them in something that grows.

First of all there were the two ramblers from Woolworth's, and three polyantha roses, all at sixpence each. Then there were two bush roses which were part of a job lot from a nursery garden. This job lot consisted of six fruit trees, three rose bushes and two gooseberry bushes, all for ten shillings. One of the fruit trees and one of the rose bushes died, but the rest are all flourishing. The sum total is five fruit trees, seven roses and two gooseberry bushes, all for twelve and sixpence. These plants have not entailed much work, and have had nothing spent on them beyond the original amount. They never even received any manure, except what I occasionally collected in a bucket when one of the farm horses happened to have halted outside the gate.

Between them, in nine years, those seven rose bushes will have given what would add up to a hundred or a hundred and fifty months of bloom. The fruit trees, which were mere saplings when I put them in, are now just about getting in their stride. Last week one them, a plum, was a mass of blossom, and the apples looked as if they were going to do fairly well. What had originally been the weakling of the family, a Cox's Orange Pippin–it would hardly have been included in the job lot if it had been a good plant–had grown into a sturdy tree with plenty of fruit spurs on it. I maintain that it was a public-spirited action to plant that Cox, for these trees do not fruit quickly and I did

not expect to stay there long. I never had an apple off it myself, but it looks as if someone else will have quite a lot. By their fruits ye shall know them, and the Cox's Orange Pippin is a good fruit to be known by. Yet I did not plant it with the conscious intention of doing anybody a good turn. I just saw the job lot going cheap and stuck the things into the ground without much preparation.

A thing which I regret, and which I will try to remedy some time, is that I have never in my life planted a walnut. Nobody does plant them nowadays–when you see a walnut it is almost invariably an old tree. If you plant a walnut you are planting it for your grandchildren, and who cares a damn for his grandchildren? Nor does anybody plant a quince, a mulberry or a medlar. But these are garden trees which you can only be expected to plant if you have a patch of ground of your own. On the other hand, in any hedge or in any piece of waste ground you happen to be walking through, you can do something to remedy the appalling massacre of trees, especially oaks, ashes, elms and beeches, which has happened during the war years.

Even an apple tree is liable to live for about 100 years, so that the Cox I planted in 1936 may still be bearing fruit well into the twenty-first century. An oak or a beech may live for hundreds of years and be a pleasure to thousands or tens of thousands of people before it is finally sawn up into timber. I am not suggesting that one can discharge all one's obligations towards society by means of a private re-afforestation scheme. Still, it might not be a bad idea, every time you commit an antisocial act, to make a note of it in your diary, and then, at the appropriate season, push an acorn into the ground.

And, if even one in twenty of them came to maturity, you might do quite a lot of harm in your lifetime, and still, like the Vicar of Bray, end up as a public benefactor after all.

A NICE CUP OF TEA (1946)

If you look up 'tea' in the first cookery book that comes to hand you will probably find that it is unmentioned; or at most you will find a few lines of sketchy instructions which give no ruling on several of the most important points.

This is curious, not only because tea is one of the main stays of civilization in this country, as well as in Eire, Australia and New Zealand, but because the best manner of making it is the subject of violent disputes.

When I look through my own recipe for the perfect cup of tea, I find no fewer than eleven outstanding points. On perhaps two of them there would be pretty general agreement, but at least four others are acutely controversial. Here are my own eleven rules, every one of which I regard as golden:

First of all, one should use Indian or Ceylonese tea. China tea has virtues which are not to be despised nowadays–it is economical, and one can drink it without milk–but there is not much stimulation in it. One does not feel wiser, braver or more optimistic after drinking it. Anyone who has used that comforting phrase 'a nice cup of tea' invariably means Indian tea. Secondly, tea should be made in small quantities–that is, in a teapot. Tea out of an urn is always tasteless, while army tea, made in a cauldron, tastes of grease and whitewash. The teapot should be made of china or earthenware. Silver or Britanniaware teapots produce inferior tea and enamel pots are worse; though curiously enough a pewter teapot (a rarity nowadays) is not so bad. Thirdly, the pot should be warmed beforehand. This is better done by placing it on the hob than by the usual method of swilling it out with hot water. Fourthly, the tea should be strong. For a pot holding a quart, if you are going to fill it nearly to the brim, six heaped teaspoons would be about right. In a time of rationing, this is not an idea that can be realized on every day of the week, but I maintain that one strong cup of tea is better than twenty weak ones. All true tea lovers not only like their tea strong, but like it a little stronger with each year that passes–a fact which is recognized in the extra ration issued to old-age pensioners. Fifthly, the tea should be

put straight into the pot. No strainers, muslin bags or other devices to imprison the tea. In some countries teapots are fitted with little dangling baskets under the spout to catch the stray leaves, which are supposed to be harmful. Actually one can swallow tea-leaves in considerable quantities without ill effect, and if the tea is not loose in the pot it never infuses properly. Sixthly, one should take the teapot to the kettle and not the other way about. The water should be actually boiling at the moment of impact, which means that one should keep it on the flame while one pours. Some people add that one should only use water that has been freshly brought to the boil, but I have never noticed that it makes any difference. Seventhly, after making the tea, one should stir it, or better, give the pot a good shake, afterwards allowing the leaves to settle. Eighthly, one should drink out of a good breakfast cup–that is, the cylindrical type of cup, not the flat, shallow type. The breakfast cup holds more, and with the other kind one's tea is always half cold–before one has well started on it. Ninthly, one should pour the cream off the milk before using it for tea. Milk that is too creamy always gives tea a sickly taste. Tenthly, one should pour tea into the cup first. This is one of the most controversial points of all; indeed in every family in Britain there are probably two schools of thought on the subject. The milk-first school can bring forward some fairly strong arguments, but I maintain that my own argument is unanswerable. This is that, by putting the tea in first and stirring as one pours, one can exactly regulate the amount of milk whereas one is liable to put in too much milk if one does it the other way round.

Lastly, tea–unless one is drinking it in the Russian style–should be drunk WITHOUT SUGAR. I know very well that I am in a minority here. But still, how can you call yourself a true tea-lover if you destroy the flavour of your tea by putting sugar in it? It would be equally reasonable to put in pepper or salt. Tea is meant to be bitter, just as beer is meant to be bitter. If you sweeten it, you are no longer tasting the tea, you are merely tasting the sugar; you could make a very similar drink by dissolving sugar in plain hot water.

Some people would answer that they don't like tea in itself, that they only drink it in order to be warmed and stimulated, and they need sugar to take the taste away. To those misguided people I would

say: Try drinking tea without sugar for, say, a fortnight and it is very unlikely that you will ever want to ruin your tea by sweetening it again.

These are not the only controversial points to arise in connexion with tea drinking, but they are sufficient to show how subtilized the whole business has become. There is also the mysterious social etiquette surrounding the teapot (why is it considered vulgar to drink out of your saucer, for instance?) and much might be written about the subsidiary uses of tea leaves, such as telling fortunes, predicting the arrival of visitors, feeding rabbits, healing burns and sweeping the carpet. It is worth paying attention to such details as warming the pot and using water that is really boiling, so as to make quite sure of wringing out of one's ration the twenty good, strong cups of that two ounces, properly handled, ought to represent.

BOOKS VS. CIGARETTES

A couple of years ago a friend of mine, a newspaper editor, was fire watching with some factory workers. They fell to talking about his newspaper, which most of them read and approved of, but when he asked them what they thought of the literary section, the answer he got was: "You don't suppose we read that stuff, do you? Why, half the time you're talking about books that cost twelve and sixpence! Chaps like us couldn't spend twelve and sixpence on a book." These, he said, were men who thought nothing of spending several pounds on a day trip to Blackpool.

This idea that the buying, or even the reading, of books is an expensive hobby and beyond the reach of the average person is so widespread that it deserves some detailed examination. Exactly what reading costs, reckoned in terms of pence per hour, is difficult to estimate, but I have made a start by inventorying my own books and adding up their total price. After allowing for various other expenses, I can make a fairly good guess at my expenditure over the last fifteen years.

The books that I have counted and priced are the ones I have here, in my flat. I have about an equal number stored in another place, so that I shall double the final figure in order to arrive at the complete amount. I have not counted oddments such as proof copies, defaced volumes, cheap paper-covered editions, pamphlets, or magazines, unless bound up into book form. Nor have I counted the kind of junky books-old school text-books and so forth–that accumulate in the bottoms of cupboards. I have counted only those books which I have acquired voluntarily, or else would have acquired voluntarily, and which I intend to keep. In this category I find that I have 442 books, acquired in the following ways:

Bought (mostly second-hand)	251
Given to me or bought with book tokens	33
Review copies and complimentary copies	143
Borrowed and not returned	10
Temporarily on loan	5
Total	442

Now as to the method of pricing. Those books that I have bought I have listed at their full price, as closely as I can determine it. I have also listed at their full price the books that have been given to me, and those that I have temporarily borrowed, or borrowed and kept. This is because book-giving, book-borrowing and book stealing more or less even out. I possess books that do not strictly speaking belong to me, but many other people also have books of mine: so that the books I have not paid for can be taken as balancing others which I have paid for but no longer possess. On the other hand I have listed the review and complimentary copies at half-price. That is about what I would have paid for them second-hand, and they are mostly books that I would only have bought second-hand, if at all. For the prices I have sometimes had to rely on guesswork, but my figures will not be far out. The costs were as follows:

	£	s.	d.
Bought	36	9	0
Gifts	10	10	0
Review copies, etc	25	11	9
Borrowed and not returned	4	16	9
On loan	3	10	0
Shelves	2	0	0
Total	82	17	6

Adding the other batch of books that I have elsewhere, it seems that I possess altogether nearly 900 books, at a cost of £165 15s. This is the accumulation of about fifteen years–actually more, since some of these books date from my childhood: but call it fifteen years. This works out at £11 1s. a year, but there are other charges that must be added in order to estimate my full reading expenses. The biggest will be for newspapers and periodicals, and for this I think £8 a year would be a reasonable figure. Eight pounds a year covers the cost of two daily papers, one evening paper, two Sunday papers, one weekly review and one or two monthly magazines. This brings the figure up to £19 1s., but to arrive at the grand total one has to make a guess. Obviously one often spends money on books without afterwards having anything to show for it. There are library subscriptions, and there are also the books, chiefly Penguins and other cheap editions, which one buys and then loses or throws away. However, on the

basis of my other figures, it looks as though £6 a year would be quite enough to add for expenditure of this kind. So my total reading expenses over the past fifteen years have been in the neighbourhood of £25 a year.

Twenty-five pounds a year sounds quite a lot until you begin to measure it against other kinds of expenditure. It is nearly 9s. 9d. a week, and at present 9s. 9d. is the equivalent of about 83 cigarettes (Players): even before the war it would have bought you less than 200 cigarettes. With prices as they now are, I am spending far more on tobacco than I do on books. I smoke six ounces a week, at half-a-crown an ounce, making nearly £40 a year. Even before the war when the same tobacco cost 8d. an ounce, I was spending over £10 a year on it: and if I also averaged a pint of beer a day, at sixpence, these two items together will have cost me close on £20 a year. This was probably not much above the national average. In 1938 the people of this country spent nearly £10 per head per annum on alcohol and tobacco: however, 20 per cent of the population were children under fifteen and another 40 per cent were women, so that the average smoker and drinker must have been spending much more than £10. In 1944, the annual expenditure per head on these items was no less than £23. Allow for the women and children as before, and £40 is a reasonable individual figure. Forty pounds a year would just about pay for a packet of Woodbines every day and half a pint of mild six days a week–not a magnificent allowance. Of course, all prices are now inflated, including the price of books: still, it looks as though the cost of reading, even if you buy books instead of borrowing them and take in a fairly large number of periodicals, does not amount to more than the combined cost of smoking and drinking.

It is difficult to establish any relationship between the price of books and the value one gets out of them. "Books" includes novels, poetry, text books, works of reference, sociological treatises and much else, and length and price do not correspond to one another, especially if one habitually buys books second-hand. You may spend ten shillings on a poem of 500 lines, and you may spend sixpence on a dictionary which you consult at odd moments over a period of twenty years. There are books that one reads over and over again, books that become part of the furniture of one's mind and alter one's

whole attitude to life, books that one dips into but never reads through, books that one reads at a single sitting and forgets a week later: and the cost, in terms of money, may be the same in each case. But if one regards reading simply as a recreation, like going to the pictures, then it is possible to make a rough estimate of what it costs. If you read nothing but novels and "light" literature, and bought every book that you read, you would be spending-allowing eight shillings as the price of a book, and four hours as the time spent in reading it-two shillings an hour. This is about what it costs to sit in one of the more expensive seats in the cinema. If you concentrated on more serious books, and still bought everything that you read, your expenses would be about the same. The books would cost more but they would take longer to read. In either case you would still possess the books after you had read them, and they would be saleable at about a third of their purchase price. If you bought only second-hand books, your reading expenses would, of course, be much less: perhaps sixpence an hour would be a fair estimate. And on the other hand if you don't buy books, but merely borrow them from the lending library, reading costs you round about a halfpenny an hour: if you borrow them from the public library, it costs you next door to nothing.

I have said enough to show that reading is one of the cheaper recreations: after listening to the radio probably THE cheapest. Meanwhile, what is the actual amount that the British public spends on books? I cannot discover any figures, though no doubt they exist. But I do know that before the war this country was publishing annually about 15,000 books, which included reprints and school books. If as many as 10,000 copies of each book were sold–and even allowing for the school books, this is probably a high estimate-the average person was only buying, directly or indirectly, about three books a year. These three books taken together might cost £1, or probably less.

These figures are guesswork, and I should be interested if someone would correct them for me. But if my estimate is anywhere near right, it is not a proud record for a country which is nearly 100 per cent literate and where the ordinary man spends more on cigarettes than an Indian peasant has for his whole livelihood. And if

our book consumption remains as low as it has been, at least let us admit that it is because reading is a less exciting pastime than going to the dogs, the pictures or the pub, and not because books, whether bought or borrowed, are too expensive.

CONFESSIONS OF A BOOK REVIEWER

In a cold but stuffy bed-sitting room littered with cigarette ends and half-empty cups of tea, a man in a moth-eaten dressing-gown sits at a rickety table, trying to find room for his typewriter among the piles of dusty papers that surround it. He cannot throw the papers away because the wastepaper basket is already overflowing, and besides, somewhere among the unanswered letters and unpaid bills it is possible that there is a cheque for two guineas which he is nearly certain he forgot to pay into the bank. There are also letters with addresses which ought to be entered in his address book. He has lost his address book, and the thought of looking for it, or indeed of looking for anything, afflicts him with acute suicidal impulses.

He is a man of 35, but looks 50. He is bald, has varicose veins and wears spectacles, or would wear them if his only pair were not chronically lost. If things are normal with him he will be suffering from malnutrition, but if he has recently had a lucky streak he will be suffering from a hangover. At present it is half-past eleven in the morning, and according to his schedule he should have started work two hours ago; but even if he had made any serious effort to start he would have been frustrated by the almost continuous ringing of the telephone bell, the yells of the baby, the rattle of an electric drill out in the street, and the heavy boots of his creditors clumping up and down the stairs. The most recent interruption was the arrival of the second post, which brought him two circulars and an income tax demand printed in red.

Needless to say this person is a writer. He might be a poet, a novelist, or a writer of film scripts or radio features, for all literary people are very much alike, but let us say that he is a book reviewer. Half hidden among the pile of papers is a bulky parcel containing five volumes which his editor has sent with a note suggesting that they "ought to go well together". They arrived four days ago, but for 48 hours the reviewer was prevented by moral paralysis from opening the parcel. Yesterday in a resolute moment he ripped the string off it and found the five volumes to be PALESTINE AT THE CROSS ROADS, SCIENTIFIC DAIRY FARMING, A SHORT

HISTORY OF EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY (this one is 680 pages and weighs four pounds), TRIBAL CUSTOMS IN PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA, and a novel, IT'S NICER LYING DOWN, probably included by mistake. His review–800 words, say–has got to be "in" by midday tomorrow.

Three of these books deal with subjects of which he is so ignorant that he will have to read at least 50 pages if he is to avoid making some howler which will betray him not merely to the author (who of course knows all about the habits of book reviewers), but even to the general reader. By four in the afternoon he will have taken the books out of their wrapping paper but will still be suffering from a nervous inability to open them. The prospect of having to read them, and even the smell of the paper, affects him like the prospect of eating cold ground-rice pudding flavoured with castor oil. And yet curiously enough his copy will get to the office in time. Somehow it always does get there in time. At about nine p.m. his mind will grow relatively clear, and until the small hours he will sit in a room which grows colder and colder, while the cigarette smoke grows thicker and thicker, skipping expertly through one book after another and laying each down with the final comment, "God, what tripe!" In the morning, blear-eyed, surly and unshaven, he will gaze for an hour or two at a blank sheet of paper until the menacing finger of the clock frightens him into action. Then suddenly he will snap into it. All the stale old phrases–"a book that no one should miss", "something memorable on every page", "of special value are the chapters dealing with, etc etc"–will jump into their places like iron filings obeying the magnet, and the review will end up at exactly the right length and with just about three minutes to go. Meanwhile another wad of ill-assorted, unappetising books will have arrived by post. So it goes on. And yet with what high hopes this down-trodden, nerve-racked creature started his career, only a few years ago.

Do I seem to exaggerate? I ask any regular reviewer–anyone who reviews, say, a minimum of 100 books a year–whether he can deny in honesty that his habits and character are such as I have described. Every writer, in any case, is rather that kind of person, but the prolonged, indiscriminate reviewing of books is a quite exceptionally thankless, irritating and exhausting job. It not only involves praising

trash–though it does involve that, as I will show in a moment–but constantly INVENTING reactions towards books about which one has no spontaneous feelings whatever. The reviewer, jaded though he may be, is professionally interested in books, and out of the thousands that appear annually, there are probably fifty or a hundred that he would enjoy writing about. If he is a top-notcher in his profession he may get hold of ten or twenty of them: more probably he gets hold of two or three. The rest of his work, however conscientious he may be in praising or damning, is in essence humbug. He is pouring his immortal spirit down the drain, half a pint at a time.

The great majority of reviews give an inadequate or misleading account of the book that is dealt with. Since the war publishers have been less able than before to twist the tails of literary editors and evoke a paean of praise for every book that they produce, but on the other hand the standard of reviewing has gone down owing to lack of space and other inconveniences. Seeing the results, people sometimes suggest that the solution lies in getting book reviewing out of the hands of hacks. Books on specialised subjects ought to be dealt with by experts, and on the other hand a good deal of reviewing, especially of novels, might well be done by amateurs. Nearly every book is capable of arousing passionate feeling, if it is only a passionate dislike, in some or other reader, whose ideas about it would surely be worth more than those of a bored professional. But, unfortunately, as every editor knows, that kind of thing is very difficult to organise. In practice the editor always finds himself reverting to his team of hacks–his "regulars", as he calls them.

None of this is remediable so long as it is taken for granted that every book deserves to be reviewed. It is almost impossible to mention books in bulk without grossly overpraising the great majority of them. Until one has some kind of professional relationship with books one does not discover how bad the majority of them are. In much more than nine cases out of ten the only objectively truthful criticism would be "This book is worthless", while the truth about the reviewer's own reaction would probably be "This book does not interest me in any way, and I would not write about it unless I were paid to." But the public will not pay to read

that kind of thing. Why should they? They want some kind of guide to the books they are asked to read, and they want some kind of evaluation. But as soon as values are mentioned, standards collapse. For if one says–and nearly every reviewer says this kind of thing at least once a week–that KING LEAR is a good play and THE FOUR JUST MEN is a good thriller, what meaning is there in the word "good"?

The best practice, it has always seemed to me, would be simply to ignore the great majority of books and to give very long reviews–1,000 words is a bare minimum–to the few that seem to matter. Short notes of a line or two on forthcoming books can be useful, but the usual middle-length review of about 600 words is bound to be worthless even if the reviewer genuinely wants to write it. Normally he doesn't want to write it, and the week-in, week-out production of snippets soon reduces him to the crushed figure in a dressing-gown whom I described at the beginning of this article. However, everyone in this world has someone else whom he can look down on, and I must say, from experience of both trades, that the book reviewer is better off than the film critic, who cannot even do his work at home, but has to attend trade shows at eleven in the morning and, with one or two notable exceptions, is expected to sell his honour for a glass of inferior sherry.

DECLINE OF THE ENGLISH MURDER

It is Sunday afternoon, preferably before the war. The wife is already asleep in the armchair, and the children have been sent out for a nice long walk. You put your feet up on the sofa, settle your spectacles on your nose, and open the NEWS OF THE WORLD. Roast beef and Yorkshire, or roast pork and apple sauce, followed up by suet pudding and driven home, as it were, by a cup of mahogany-brown tea, have put you in just the right mood. Your pipe is drawing sweetly, the sofa cushions are soft underneath you, the fire is well alight, the air is warm and stagnant. In these blissful circumstances, what is it that you want to read about?

Naturally, about a murder. But what kind of murder? If one examines the murders which have given the greatest amount of pleasure to the British public, the murders whose story is known in its general outline to almost everyone and which have been made into novels and re-hashed over and over again by the Sunday papers, one finds a fairly strong family resemblance running through the greater number of them. Our great period in murder, our Elizabethan period, so to speak, seems to have been between roughly 1850 and 1925, and the murderers whose reputation has stood the test of time are the following: Dr. Palmer of Rugely, Jack the Ripper, Neill Cream, Mrs. Maybrick, Dr. Crippen, Seddon, Joseph Smith, Armstrong, and Bywaters and Thompson. In addition, in 1919 or thereabouts, there was another very celebrated case which fits into the general pattern but which I had better not mention by name, because the accused man was acquitted.

Of the above-mentioned nine cases, at least four have had successful novels based on them, one has been made into a popular melodrama, and the amount of literature surrounding them, in the form of newspaper write-ups, criminological treatises and reminiscences by lawyers and police officers, would make a considerable library. It is difficult to believe that any recent English crime will be remembered so long and so intimately, and not only because the violence of external events has made murder seem unimportant, but because the prevalent type of crime seems to be

changing. The principal CAUSE CÉLÈBRE of the war years was the so-called Cleft Chin Murder, which has now been written up in a popular booklet; the verbatim account of the trial was published some time last year by Messrs. Jarrolds with an introduction by Mr. Bechhofer Roberts. Before returning to this pitiful and sordid case, which is only interesting from a sociological and perhaps a legal point of view, let me try to define what it is that the readers of Sunday papers mean when they say fretfully that "you never seem to get a good murder nowadays".

In considering the nine murders I named above, one can start by excluding the Jack the Ripper case, which is in a class by itself. Of the other eight, six were poisoning cases, and eight of the ten criminals belonged to the middle class. In one way or another, sex was a powerful motive in all but two cases, and in at least four cases respectability–the desire to gain a secure position in life, or not to forfeit one's social position by some scandal such as a divorce–was one of the main reasons for committing murder. In more than half the cases, the object was to get hold of a certain known sum of money such as a legacy or an insurance policy, but the amount involved was nearly always small. In most of the cases the crime only came to light slowly, as the result of careful investigations which started off with the suspicions of neighbours or relatives; and in nearly every case there was some dramatic coincidence, in which the finger of Providence could be clearly seen, or one of those episodes that no novelist would dare to make up, such as Crippen's flight across the Atlantic with his mistress dressed as a boy, or Joseph Smith playing "Nearer, my God, to Thee" on the harmonium while one of his wives was drowning in the next room. The background of all these crimes, except Neill Cream's, was essentially domestic; of twelve victims, seven were either wife or husband of the murderer.

With all this in mind one can construct what would be, from a NEWS OF THE WORLD reader's point of view, the "perfect" murder. The murderer should be a little man of the professional class–a dentist or a solicitor, say–living an intensely respectable life somewhere in the suburbs, and preferably in a semi-detached house, which will allow the neighbours to hear suspicious sounds through the wall. He should be either chairman of the local Conservative

Party branch, or a leading Nonconformist and strong Temperance advocate. He should go astray through cherishing a guilty passion for his secretary or the wife of a rival professional man, and should only bring himself to the point of murder after long and terrible wrestles with his conscience. Having decided on murder, he should plan it all with the utmost cunning, and only slip up over some tiny unforeseeable detail. The means chosen should, of course, be poison. In the last analysis he should commit murder because this seems to him less disgraceful, and less damaging to his career, than being detected in adultery. With this kind of background, a crime can have dramatic and even tragic qualities which make it memorable and excite pity for both victim and murderer. Most of the crimes mentioned above have a touch of this atmosphere, and in three cases, including the one I referred to but did not name, the story approximates to the one I have outlined.

Now compare the Cleft Chin Murder. There is no depth of feeling in it. It was almost chance that the two people concerned committed that particular murder, and it was only by good luck that they did not commit several others. The background was not domesticity, but the anonymous life of the dance-halls and the false values of the American film. The two culprits were an eighteen-year-old ex-waitress named Elizabeth Jones, and an American army deserter, posing as an officer, named Karl Hulten. They were only together for six days, and it seems doubtful whether, until they were arrested, they even learned one another's true names. They met casually in a teashop, and that night went out for a ride in a stolen army truck. Jones described herself as a strip-tease artist, which was not strictly true (she had given one unsuccessful performance in this line); and declared that she wanted to do something dangerous, "like being a gun-moll." Hulten described himself as a big-time Chicago gangster, which was also untrue. They met a girl bicycling along the road, and to show how tough he was Hulten ran over her with his truck, after which the pair robbed her of the few shillings that were on her. On another occasion they knocked out a girl to whom they had offered a lift, took her coat and handbag and threw her into a river. Finally, in the most wanton way, they murdered a taxi-driver who happened to have £8 in his pocket. Soon afterwards they parted. Hulten was

caught because he had foolishly kept the dead man's car, and Jones made spontaneous confessions to the police. In court each prisoner incriminated the other. In between crimes, both of them seem to have behaved with the utmost callousness: they spent the dead taxi-driver's £8 at the dog races.

Judging from her letters, the girl's case has a certain amount of psychological interest, but this murder probably captured the headlines because it provided distraction amid the doodle-bugs and the anxieties of the Battle of France. Jones and Hulten committed their murder to the tune of V1, and were convicted to the tune of V2. There was also considerable excitement because–as has become usual in England–the man was sentenced to death and the girl to imprisonment. According to Mr. Raymond, the reprieving of Jones caused widespread indignation and streams of telegrams to the Home Secretary: in her native town, "SHE SHOULD HANG" was chalked on the walls beside pictures of a figure dangling from a gallows. Considering that only ten women have been hanged in Britain this century, and that the practice has gone out largely because of popular feeling against it, it is difficult not to feel that this clamour to hang an eighteen-year-old girl was due partly to the brutalizing effects of war. Indeed, the whole meaningless story, with its atmosphere of dance-halls, movie-palaces, cheap perfume, false names and stolen cars, belongs essentially to a war period.

Perhaps it is significant that the most talked-of English murder of recent years should have been committed by an American and an English girl who had become partly Americanized. But it is difficult to believe that this case will be so long remembered as the old domestic poisoning dramas, product of a stable society where the all-prevailing hypocrisy did at least ensure that crimes as serious as murder should have strong emotions behind them.

HOW THE POOR DIE

In the year 1929 I spent several weeks in the Hôpital X, in the fifteenth ARRONDISSEMENT of Paris. The clerks put me through the usual third-degree at the reception desk, and indeed I was kept answering questions for some twenty minutes before they would let me in. If you have ever had to fill up forms in a Latin country you will know the kind of questions I mean. For some days past I had been unequal to translating Reaumur into Fahrenheit, but I know that my temperature was round about 103, and by the end of the interview I had some difficulty in standing on my feet. At my back a resigned little knot of patients, carrying bundles done up in coloured handkerchiefs, waited their turn to be questioned.

After the questioning came the bath–a compulsory routine for all newcomers, apparently, just as in prison or the workhouse. My clothes were taken away from me, and after I had sat shivering for some minutes in five inches of warm water I was given a linen nightshirt and a short blue flannel dressing-gown–no slippers, they had none big enough for me, they said–and led out into the open air. This was a night in February and I was suffering from pneumonia. The ward we were going to was 200 yards away and it seemed that to get to it you had to cross the hospital grounds. Someone stumbled in front of me with a lantern. The gravel path was frosty underfoot, and the wind whipped the nightshirt round my bare calves. When we got into the ward I was aware of a strange feeling of familiarity whose origin I did not succeed in pinning down till later in the night. It was a long, rather low, ill-lit room, full of murmuring voices and with three rows of beds surprisingly close together. There was a foul smell, faecal and yet sweetish. As I lay down I saw on a bed nearly opposite me a small, round-shouldered, sandy-haired man sitting half naked while a doctor and a student performed some strange operation on him. First the doctor produced from his black bag a dozen small glasses like wine glasses, then the student burned a match inside each glass to exhaust the air, then the glass was popped on to the man's back or chest and the vacuum drew up a huge yellow blister. Only after some moments did I realize what they were doing to him. It was

something called cupping, a treatment which you can read about in old medical text-books but which till then I had vaguely thought of as one of those things they do to horses.

The cold air outside had probably lowered my temperature, and I watched this barbarous remedy with detachment and even a certain amount of amusement. The next moment, however, the doctor and the student came across to my bed, hoisted me upright and without a word began applying the same set of glasses, which had not been sterilized in any way. A few feeble protests that I uttered got no more response than if I had been an animal. I was very much impressed by the impersonal way in which the two men started on me. I had never been in the public ward of a hospital before, and it was my first experience of doctors who handle you without speaking to you or, in a human sense, taking any notice of you. They only put on six glasses in my case, but after doing so they scarified the blisters and applied the glasses again. Each glass now drew about a dessert-spoonful of dark-coloured blood. As I lay down again, humiliated, disgusted and frightened by the thing that had been done to me, I reflected that now at least they would leave me alone. But no, not a bit of it. There was another treatment coming, the mustard poultice, seemingly a matter of routine like the hot bath. Two slatternly nurses had already got the poultice ready, and they lashed it round my chest as tight as a strait-jacket while some men who were wandering about the ward in shirt and trousers began to collect round my bed with half-sympathetic grins. I learned later that watching a patient have a mustard poultice was a favourite pastime in the ward. These things are normally applied for a quarter of an hour and certainly they are funny enough if you don't happen to be the person inside. For the first five minutes the pain is severe, but you believe you can bear it. During the second five minutes this belief evaporates, but the poultice is buckled at the back and you can't get it off. This is the period the onlookers enjoy most. During the last five minutes, I noted, a sort of numbness supervenes. After the poultice had been removed a waterproof pillow packed with ice was thrust beneath my head and I was left alone. I did not sleep, and to the best of my knowledge this was the only night of my life–I mean the only night spent in bed–in which I have not slept at all, not even a minute.

During my first hour in the Hôpital X I had had a whole series of different and contradictory treatments, but this was misleading, for in general you got very little treatment at all, either good or bad, unless you were ill in some interesting and instructive way. At five in the morning the nurses came round, woke the patients and took their temperatures, but did not wash them. If you were well enough you washed yourself, otherwise you depended on the kindness of some walking patient. It was generally patients, too, who carried the bed bottles and die grim bedpan, nicknamed LA CASSEROLE. At eight breakfast arrived, called army-fashion LA SOUPE. It was soup, too, a thin vegetable soup with slimy hunks of bread floating about in it. Later in the day the tall, solemn, black-bearded doctor made his rounds, with an INTERNE and a troop of students following at his heels, but there were about sixty of us in the ward and it was evident that he had other wards to attend to as well. There were many beds past which he walked day after day, sometimes followed by imploring cries. On the other hand if you had some disease with which the students wanted to familiarize themselves you got plenty of attention of a kind. I myself, with an exceptionally fine specimen of a bronchial rattle, sometimes had as many as a dozen students queuing up to listen to my chest. It was a very queer feeling–queer, I mean, because of their intense interest in learning their job, together with a seeming lack of any perception that the patients were human beings. It is strange to relate, but sometimes as some young student stepped forward to take his turn at manipulating you he would be actually tremulous with excitement, like a boy who has at last got his hands on some expensive piece of machinery. And then ear after ear–ears of young men, of girls, of negroes–pressed against your back, relays of fingers solemnly but clumsily tapping, and not from any one of them did you get a word of conversation or a look direct in your face. As a non-paying patient, in the uniform nightshirt, you were primarily A SPECIMEN, a thing I did not resent but could never quite get used to.

After some days I grew well enough to sit up and study the surrounding patients. The stuffy room, with its narrow beds so close together that you could easily touch your neighbour's hand, had every sort of disease in it except, I suppose, acutely infectious cases.

My right-hand neighbour was a little red-haired cobbler with one leg shorter than the other, who used to announce the death of any other patient (this happened a number of times, and my neighbour was always the first to hear of it) by whistling to me, exclaiming "NUMÉRO 43!" (or whatever it was) and flinging his arms above his head. This man had not much wrong with him, but in most of the other beds within my angle of vision some squalid tragedy or some plain horror was being enacted. In the bed that was foot to foot with mine there lay, until he died (I didn't see him die–they moved him to another bed), a little weazened man who was suffering from I do not know what disease, but something that made his whole body so intensely sensitive that any movement from side to side, sometimes even the weight of the bedclothes, would make him shout out with pain. His worst suffering was when he urinated, which he did with the greatest difficulty. A nurse would bring him the bed bottle and then for a long time stand beside his bed, whistling, as grooms are said to do with horses, until at last with an agonized shriek of "Je fissel" he would get started. In the bed next to him the sandy-haired man whom I had seen being cupped used to cough up blood-streaked mucus at all hours. My left-hand neighbour was a tall, flaccid-looking young man who used periodically to have a tube inserted into his back and astonishing quantities of frothy liquid drawn off from some part of his body. In the bed beyond that a veteran of the war of 1870 was dying, a handsome old man with a white imperial, round whose bed, at all hours when visiting was allowed, four elderly female relatives dressed all in black sat exactly like crows, obviously scheming for some pitiful legacy. In the bed opposite me in the farther row was an old bald-headed man with drooping moustaches and greatly swollen face and body, who was suffering from some disease that made him urinate almost incessantly. A huge glass receptacle stood always beside his bed. One day his wife and daughter came to visit him. At sight of them the old man's bloated face lit up with a smile of surprising sweetness, and as his daughter, a pretty girl of about twenty, approached the bed I saw that his hand was slowly working its way from under the bedclothes. I seemed to see in advance the gesture that was coming–the girl kneeling beside the bed, the old man's hand laid on her head in his dying blessing.

But no, he merely handed her the bed bottle, which she promptly took from him and emptied into the receptacle.

About a dozen beds away from me was Numéro 57–I think that was his number–a cirrhosis-of-the-liver case. Everyone in the ward knew him by sight because he was sometimes the subject of a medical lecture. On two afternoons a week the tall, grave doctor would lecture in the ward to a party of students, and on more than one occasion old NUMÉRO 57 was wheeled in on a sort of trolley into the middle of the ward, where the doctor would roll back his nightshirt, dilate with his fingers a huge flabby protruberance on the man's belly–the diseased liver, I suppose–and explain solemnly that this was a disease attributable to alcoholism, commoner in the wine-drinking countries. As usual he neither spoke to his patient nor gave him a smile, a nod or any kind of recognition. While he talked, very grave and upright, he would hold the wasted body beneath his two hands, sometimes giving it a gentle roll to and fro, in just the attitude of a woman handling a rolling-pin. Not that NUMÉRO 57 minded this kind of thing. Obviously he was an old hospital inmate, a regular exhibit at lectures, his liver long since marked down for a bottle in some pathological museum. Utterly uninterested in what was said about him, he would lie with his colourless eyes gazing at nothing, while the doctor showed him off like a piece of antique china. He was a man of about sixty, astonishingly shrunken. His face, pale as vellum, had shrunken away till it seemed no bigger than a doll's.

One morning my cobbler neighbour woke me up plucking at my pillow before the nurses arrived. "NUMÉRO 57!"–he flung his arms above his head. There was a light in the ward, enough to see by. I could see old NUMÉRO 57 lying crumpled up on his side, his face sticking out over the side of the bed, and towards me. He had died some rime during the night, nobody knew when. When the nurses came they received the news of his death indifferently and went about their work. After a long time, an hour or more, two other nurses marched in abreast like soldiers, with a great clumping of sabots, and knotted the corpse up in the sheets, but it was not removed till some time later. Meanwhile, in the better light, I had had time for a good look at NUMÉRO 57. Indeed I lay on my side to look at him. Curiously enough he was the first dead European I had

seen. I had seen dead men before, but always Asiatics and usually people who had died violent deaths. NUMÉRO 57's eyes were still open, his mouth also open, his small face contorted into an expression of agony. What most impressed me, however, was the whiteness of his face. It had been pale before, but now it was little darker than die sheets. As I gazed at the tiny, screwed-up face it struck me that this disgusting piece of refuse, waiting to be carted away and dumped on a slab in the dissecting room, was an example of "natural" death, one of the things you pray for in the Litany. There you are, then, I thought, that's what is waiting for you, twenty, thirty, forty years hence: that is how the lucky ones die, the ones who live to be old. One wants to live, of course, indeed one only stays alive by virtue of the fear of death, but I think now, as I thought then, that it's better to die violently and not too old. People talk about the horrors of war, but what weapon has man invented that even approaches in cruelty some of the commoner diseases? "Natural" death, almost by definition, means something slow, smelly and painful. Even at that, it makes a difference if you can achieve it in your own home and not in a public institution. This poor old wretch who had just flickered out like a candle-end was not even important enough to have anyone watching by his deathbed. He was merely a number, then a "subject" for the students' scalpels. And the sordid publicity of dying in such a place! In the Hôpital X the beds were very close together and there were no screens. Fancy, for instance, dying like the little man whose bed was for a while foot to foot with mine, the one who cried out when the bedclothes touched him! I dare say "JE PISSE!" were his last recorded words. Perhaps the dying don't bother about such things–that at least would be the standard answer: nevertheless dying people are often more or less normal in their minds till within a day or so of the end.

In the public wards of a hospital you see horrors that you don't seem to meet with among people who manage to die in their own homes, as though certain diseases only attacked people at the lower income levels. But it is a fact that you would not in any English hospitals see some of the things I saw in the Hôpital X. This business of people just dying like animals, for instance, with nobody standing by, nobody interested, the death not even noticed till the morning–

this happened more than once. You certainly would not see that in England, and still less would you see a corpse left exposed to the view of the other patients. I remember that once in a cottage hospital in England a man died while we were at tea, and though there were only six of us in the ward the nurses managed things so adroitly that the man was dead and his body removed without our even hearing about it till tea was over. A thing we perhaps underrate in England is the advantage we enjoy in having large numbers of well-trained and rigidly-disciplined nurses. No doubt English nurses are dumb enough, they may tell fortunes with tea-leaves, wear Union Jack badges and keep photographs of the Queen on their mantelpieces, but at least they don't let you lie unwashed and constipated on an unmade bed, out of sheer laziness. The nurses at the Hôpital X still had a tinge of Mrs Gamp about them, and later, in the military hospitals of Republican Spain, I was to see nurses almost too ignorant to take a temperature. You wouldn't, either, see in England such dirt as existed in the Hôpital X. Later on, when I was well enough to wash myself in the bathroom, I found that there was kept there a huge packing case into which the scraps of food and dirty dressings from the ward were flung, and the wainscotings were infested by crickets. When I had got back my clothes and grown strong on my legs I fled from the Hôpital X, before my time was up and without waiting for a medical discharge. It was not the only hospital I have fled from, but its gloom and bareness, its sickly smell and, above all, something in its mental atmosphere stand out in my memory as exceptional. I had been taken there because it was the hospital belonging to my ARRONDISSEMENT, and I did not learn till after I was in it that it bore a bad reputation. A year or two later the celebrated swindler, Madame Hanaud, who was ill while on remand, was taken to the Hôpital X, and after a few days of it she managed to elude her guards, took a taxi and drove back to the prison, explaining that she was more comfortable there. I have no doubt that the Hôpital X was quite untypical of French hospitals even at that date. But the patients, nearly all of them working men, were surprisingly resigned. Some of them seemed to find the conditions almost comfortable, for at least two were destitute malingerers who found this a good way of getting through the winter. The nurses

connived because the malingerers made themselves useful by doing odd jobs. But the attitude of the majority was: of course this is a lousy place, but what else do you expect? It did not seem strange to them that you should be woken at five and then wait three hours before starting the day on watery soup, or that people should die with no one at their bedside, or even that your chance of getting medical attention should depend on catching the doctor's eye as he went past. According to their traditions that was what hospitals were like. If you are seriously ill and if you are too poor to be treated in your own home, then you must go into hospital, and once there you must put up with harshness and discomfort, just as you would in the army. But on top of this I was interested to find a lingering belief in the old stories that have now almost faded from memory in England–stories, for instance, about doctors cutting you open out of sheer curiosity or thinking it funny to start operating before you were properly "under". There were dark tales about a little operating-room said to be situated just beyond the bathroom. Dreadful screams were said to issue from this room. I saw nothing to confirm these stories and no doubt they were all nonsense, though I did see two students kill a sixteen-year-old boy, or nearly kill him (he appeared to be dying when I left the hospital, but he may have recovered later) by a mischievous experiment which they probably could not have tried on a paying patient. Well within living memory it used to be believed in London that in some of the big hospitals patients were killed off to get dissection subjects. I didn't hear this tale repeated at the Hôpital X, but I should think some of the men there would have found it credible. For it was a hospital in which not the methods, perhaps, but something of the atmosphere of the nineteenth century had managed to survive, and therein lay its peculiar interest.

During the past fifty years or so there has been a great change in the relationship between doctor and patient. If you look at almost any literature before the later part of the nineteenth century, you find that a hospital is popularly regarded as much the same thing as a prison, and an old-fashioned, dungeon-like prison at that. A hospital is a place of filth, torture and death, a sort of antechamber to the tomb. No one who was not more or less destitute would have thought of going into such a place for treatment. And especially in the early part

of the last century, when medical science had grown bolder than before without being any more successful, the whole business of doctoring was looked on with horror and dread by ordinary people. Surgery, in particular, was believed to be no more than a peculiarly gruesome form of sadism, and dissection, possible only with the aid of body snatchers, was even confused with necromancy. From the nineteenth century you could collect a large horror-literature connected with doctors and hospitals. Think of poor old George III, in his dotage, shrieking for mercy as he sees his surgeons approaching to "bleed him till he faints"! Think of the conversations of Bob Sawyer and Benjamin Alien, which no doubt are hardly parodies, or the field hospitals in LA DÉBÂCLE and WAR AND PEACE, or that shocking description of an amputation in Melville's WHITEJACKET! Even the names given to doctors in nineteenth-century English fiction, Slasher, Carver, Sawyer, Fillgrave and so on, and the generic nickname "sawbones", are about as grim as they are comic. The anti-surgery tradition is perhaps best expressed in Tennyson's poem, The Children's Hospital, which is essentially a pre-chloroform document though it seems to have been written as late as 1880. Moreover, the outlook which Tennyson records in this poem had a lot to be said for it. When you consider what an operation without anaesthetics must have been like, what it notoriously WAS like, it is difficult not to suspect the motives of people who would undertake such things. For these bloody horrors which the students so eagerly looked forward to ("A magnificent sight if Slasher does it!") were admittedly more or less useless: the patient who did not die of shock usually died of gangrene, a result which was taken for granted. Even now doctors can be found whose motives are questionable. Anyone who has had much illness, or who has listened to medical students talking, will know what I mean. But anaesthetics were a turning point, and disinfectants were another. Nowhere in the world, probably would you now see the kind of scene described by Axel Munthe in THE STORY OF SAN MICHELE, when the sinister surgeon in top hat and frock coat, his starched shirtfront spattered with blood and pus, carves up patient after patient with the same knife and flings the severed limbs into a pile beside the table. Moreover, the national health insurance has partly done away

with the idea that a working-class patient is a pauper who deserves little consideration. Well into this century it was usual for "free" patients at the big hospitals to have their teeth extracted with no anaesthetic. They didn't pay, so why should they have an anaesthetic–that was the attitude. That too has changed.

And yet every institution will always bear upon it some lingering memory of its past. A barrack-room is still haunted by the ghost of Kipling, and it is difficult to enter a workhouse without being reminded of OLIVER TWIST. Hospitals began as a kind of casual ward for lepers and the like to die in, and they continued as places where medical students learned their art on the bodies of the poor. You can still catch a faint suggestion of their history in their characteristically gloomy architecture. I would be far from complaining about the treatment I have received in any English hospital, but I do know that it is a sound instinct that warns people to keep out of hospitals if possible, and especially out of the public wards. Whatever the legal position may be, it is unquestionable that you have far less control over your own treatment, far less certainty that frivolous experiments will not be tried on you, when it is a case of "accept the discipline or get out". And it is a great thing to die in your own bed, though it is better still to die in your boots. However great the kindness and the efficiency, in every hospital death there will be some cruel, squalid detail, something perhaps too small to be told but leaving terribly painful memories behind, arising out of the haste, the crowding, the impersonality of a place where every day people are dying among strangers.

The dread of hospitals probably still survives among the very poor, and in all of us it has only recently disappeared. It is a dark patch not far beneath the surface of our minds. I have said earlier that when I entered the ward at the Hôpital X I was conscious of a strange feeling of familiarity. What the scene reminded me of, of course, was the reeking, pain-filled hospitals of the nineteenth century, which I had never seen but of which I had a traditional knowledge. And something, perhaps the black-clad doctor with his frowsy black bag, or perhaps only the sickly smell, played the queer trick of unearthing from my memory that poem of Tennyson's, The Children's Hospital, which I had not thought of for twenty years. It happened that as a

child I had had it read aloud to me by a sick-nurse whose own working life might have stretched back to the time when Tennyson wrote the poem. The horrors and sufferings of the old-style hospitals were a vivid memory to her. We had shuddered over the poem together, and then seemingly I had forgotten it. Even its name would probably have recalled nothing to me. But the first glimpse of the ill-lit murmurous room, with the beds so close together, suddenly roused the train of thought to which it belonged, and in the night that followed I found myself remembering the whole story and atmosphere of the poem, with many of its lines complete.

JAMES BURNHAM AND THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION

[Note: This essay was originally printed in POLEMIC under the title "Second Thoughts on James Burnham", and later reprinted as a pamphlet with the present title.]

James Burnham's book, THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION, made a considerable stir both in the United States and in this country at the time when it was published, and its main thesis has been so much discussed that a detailed exposition of it is hardly necessary. As shortly as I can summarise it, the thesis is this:

Capitalism is disappearing, but Socialism is not replacing it. What is now arising is a new kind of planned, centralised society which will be neither capitalist nor, in any accepted sense of the word, democratic. The rulers of this new society will be the people who effectively control the means of production: that is, business executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers, lumped together by Burnham, under the name of "managers". These people will eliminate the old capitalist class, crush the working class, and so organise society that all power and economic privilege remain in their own hands. Private property rights will be abolished, but common ownership will not be established. The new "managerial" societies will not consist of a patchwork of small, independent states, but of great super-states grouped round the main industrial centres in Europe, Asia, and America. These super-states will fight among themselves for possession of the remaining uncaptured portions of the earth, but will probably be unable to conquer one another completely. Internally, each society will be hierarchical, with an aristocracy of talent at the top and a mass of semi-slaves at the bottom.

In his next published book, THE MACHIAVELLIANS, Burnham elaborates and also modifies his original statement. The greater part of the book is an exposition of the theories of Machiavelli and of his modern disciples, Mosca, Michels, and Pareto: with doubtful justification, Burnham adds to these the syndicalist writer, Georges Sorel. What Burnham is mainly concerned to show is that a

democratic society has never existed and, so far as we can see, never will exist. Society is of its nature oligarchical, and the power of the oligarchy always rests upon force and fraud. Burnham does not deny that "good" motives may operate in private life, but he maintains that politics consists of the struggle for power, and nothing else. All historical changes finally boil down to the replacement of one ruling class by another. All talk about democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, all revolutionary movements, all visions of Utopia, or "the classless society", or "the Kingdom of Heaven on earth", are humbug (not necessarily conscious humbug) covering the ambitions of some new class which is elbowing its way into power. The English Puritans, the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks, were in each case simply power seekers using the hopes of the masses in order to win a privileged position for themselves. Power can sometimes be won or maintained without violence, but never without fraud, because it is necessary to make use of the masses, and the masses would not co-operate if they knew that they were simply serving the purposes of a minority. In each great revolutionary struggle the masses are led on by vague dreams of human brotherhood, and then, when the new ruling class is well established in power, they are thrust back into servitude. This is practically the whole of political history, as Burnham sees it.

Where the second book departs from the earlier one is in asserting that the whole process could be somewhat moralised if the facts were faced more honestly. THE MACHIAVELLIANS is sub-titled DEFENDERS OF FREEDOM. Machiavelli and his followers taught that in politics decency simply does not exist, and, by doing so, Burnham claims, made it possible to conduct political affairs more intelligently and less oppressively. A ruling class which recognised that its real aim was to stay in power would also recognise that it would be more likely to succeed if it served the common good, and might avoid stiffening into a hereditary aristocracy. Burnham lays much stress on Pareto's theory of the "circulation of the élites". If it is to stay in power a ruling class must constantly admit suitable recruits from below, so that the ablest men may always be at the top and a new class of power-hungry malcontents cannot come into being. This is likeliest to happen, Burnham considers, in a society

which retains democratic habits–that is, where opposition is permitted and certain bodies such as the press and the trade unions can keep their autonomy. Here Burnham undoubtedly contradicts his earlier opinion. In THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION, which was written in 1940, it is taken as a matter of course that "managerial" Germany is in all ways more efficient than a capitalist democracy such as France or Britain. In the second book, written in 1942, Burnham admits that the Germans might have avoided some of their more serious strategic errors if they had permitted freedom of speech. However, the main thesis is not abandoned. Capitalism is doomed, and Socialism is a dream. If we grasp what is at issue we may guide the course of the managerial revolution to some extent, but that revolution IS HAPPENING, whether we like it or not. In both books, but especially the earlier one, there is a note of unmistakable relish over the cruelty and wickedness of the processes that are being discussed. Although he reiterates that he is merely setting forth the facts and not stating his own preferences, it is clear that Burnham is fascinated by the spectacle of power, and that his sympathies were with Germany so long as Germany appeared to be winning the war. A more recent essay, "Lenin's Heir", published in the PARTISAN REVIEW about the beginning of 1945, suggests that this sympathy has since been transferred to the USSR. "Lenin's Heir", which provoked violent controversy in the American left-wing press, has not yet been reprinted in England, and I must return to it later.

It will be seen that Burnham's theory is not, strictly speaking, a new one. Many earlier writers have foreseen the emergence of a new kind of society, neither capitalist nor Socialist, and probably based upon slavery: though most of them have differed from Burnham in not assuming this development to be INEVITABLE. A good example is Hilaire Belloc's book, THE SERVILE STATE, published in 1911. THE SERVILE STATE is written in a tiresome style, and the remedy it suggests (a return to small-scale peasant ownership) is for many reasons impossible: still, it does foretell with remarkable insight the kind of things that have been happening from about 1930 onwards. Chesterton, in a less methodical way, predicted the disappearance of democracy and private property, and the rise of a slave society which might be called either capitalist or Communist.

Jack London, in THE IRON HEEL (1909), foretold some of the essential features of Fascism, and such books as Wells's THE SLEEPER AWAKES (1900), ZAMYATIN'S WE (1923), and Aldous Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD (1930), all described imaginary worlds in which the special problems of capitalism had been solved without bringing liberty, equality, or true happiness any nearer. More recently, writers like Peter Drucker and F.A. Voigt have argued that Fascism and Communism are substantially the same thing. And indeed, it has always been obvious that a planned and centralised society is liable to develop into an oligarchy or a dictatorship. Orthodox Conservatives were unable to see this, because it comforted them to assume that Socialism "wouldn't work", and that the disappearance of capitalism would mean chaos and anarchy. Orthodox Socialists could not see it, because they wished to think that they themselves would soon be in power, and therefore assumed that when capitalism disappears, Socialism takes its place. As a result they were unable to foresee the rise of Fascism, or to make correct predictions about it after it had appeared. Later, the need to justify the Russian dictatorship and to explain away the obvious resemblances between Communism and Nazism clouded the issue still more. But the notion that industrialism must end in monopoly, and that monopoly must imply tyranny, is not a startling one.

Where Burnham differs from most other thinkers is in trying to plot the course of the "managerial revolution" accurately on a world scale, and in assuming that the drift towards totalitarianism is irresistible and must not be fought against, though it may be guided. According to Burnham, writing in 1940, "managerialism" has reached its fullest development in the USSR, but is almost equally well developed in Germany, and has made its appearance in the United States. He describes the New Deal as "primitive managerialism". But the trend is the same everywhere, or almost everywhere. Always LAISSEZ-FAIRE capitalism gives way to planning and state interference, the mere owner loses power as against the technician and the bureaucrat, but Socialism–that is to say, what used to be called Socialism–shows no sign of emerging:

Some apologists try to excuse Marxism by saying that it has

"never had a chance". This is far from the truth. Marxism and the Marxist parties have had dozens of chances. In Russia, a Marxist party took power. Within a short time it abandoned Socialism; if not in words, at any rate in the effect of its actions. In most European nations there were during the last months of the first world war and the years immediately thereafter, social crises which left a wide-open door for the Marxist parties: without exception they proved unable to take and hold power. In a large number of countries–Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, England, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France–the reformist Marxist parties have administered the governments, and have uniformly failed to introduce Socialism or make any genuine step towards Socialism.... These parties have, in practice, at every historical test–and there have been many–either failed Socialism or abandoned it. This is the fact which neither the bitterest foe nor the most ardent friend of Socialism can erase. This fact does not, as some think, prove anything about the moral quality of the Socialist ideal. But it does constitute unblinkable evidence that, whatever its moral quality, Socialism is not going to come.

Burnham does not, of course, deny that the new "managerial" régimes, like the régimes of Russia and Nazi Germany, may be CALLED Socialist. He means merely that they will not be Socialist in any sense of the word which would have been accepted by Marx, or Lenin, or Keir Hardie, or William Morris, or indeed, by any representative Socialist prior to about 1930. Socialism, until recently, was supposed to connote political democracy, social equality and internationalism. There is not the smallest sign that any of these things is in a way to being established anywhere, and the one great country in which something described as a proletarian revolution once happened, i.e. the USSR, has moved steadily away from the old concept of a free and equal society aiming at universal human brotherhood. In an almost unbroken progress since the early days of the Revolution, liberty has been chipped away and representative institutions smothered, while inequalities have increased and nationalism and militarism have grown stronger. But at the same time, Burnham insists, there has been no tendency to return to capitalism. What is happening is simply the growth of

"managerialism", which, according to Burnham, is in progress everywhere, though the manner in which it comes about may vary from country to country.

Now, as an interpretation of what is HAPPENING, Burnham's theory is extremely plausible, to put it at the lowest. The events of, at any rate, the last fifteen years in the USSR can be far more easily explained by this theory than by any other. Evidently the USSR is not Socialist, and can only be called Socialist if one gives the word a meaning different from what it would have in any other context. On the other hand, prophecies that the Russian régime would revert to capitalism have always been falsified, and now seem further than ever from being fulfilled. In claiming that the process had gone almost equally far in Nazi Germany, Burnham probably exaggerates, but it seems certain that the drift was away from old-style capitalism and towards a planned economy with an adoptive oligarchy in control. In Russia the capitalists were destroyed first and the workers were crushed later. In Germany the workers were crushed first, but the elimination of the capitalists had at any rate begun, and calculations based on the assumption that Nazism was "simply capitalism" were always contradicted by events. Where Burnham seems to go most astray is in believing "managerialism" to be on the up-grade in the United States, the one great country where free capitalism is still vigorous. But if one considers the world movement as a whole, his conclusions are difficult to resist; and even in the United States the all-prevailing faith in LAISSEZ-FAIRE may not survive the next great economic crisis. It has been urged against Burnham that he assigns far too much importance to the "managers", in the narrow sense of the word-that is, factory bosses, planners and technicians–and seems to assume that even in Soviet Russia it is these people, and not the Communist Party chiefs, who are the real holders of power. However, this is a secondary error, and it is partially corrected in THE MACHIAVELLIANS. The real question is not whether the people who wipe their boots on us during the next fifty years are to be called managers, bureaucrats, or politicians: the question is whether capitalism, now obviously doomed, is to give way to oligarchy or to true democracy.

But curiously enough, when one examines the predictions which

Burnham has based on his general theory, one finds that in so far as they are verifiable, they have been falsified. Numbers of people have pointed this out already. However, it is worth following up Burnham's predictions in detail, because they form a sort of pattern which is related to contemporary events, and which reveals, I believe, a very important weakness in present-day political thought.

To begin with, writing in 1940, Burnham takes a German victory more or less for granted. Britain is described as "dissolving", and as displaying "all the characteristics which have distinguished decadent cultures in past historical transitions", while the conquest and integration of Europe which Germany achieved in 1940 is described as "irreversible". "England," writes Burnham, "no matter with what non-European allies, cannot conceivably hope to conquer the European continent." Even if Germany should somehow manage to lose the war, she could not be dismembered or reduced to the status of the Weimar Republic, but is bound to remain as the nucleus of a unified Europe. The future map of the world, with its three great super-states is, in any case, already settled in its main outlines: and "the nuclei of these three super-states are, whatever may be their future names, the previously existing nations, Japan, Germany, and the United States."

Burnham also commits himself to the opinion that Germany will not attack the USSR until after Britain has been defeated. In a condensation of his book published in the PARTISAN REVIEW of May-June 1941, and presumably written later than the book itself, he says:

As in the case of Russia, so with Germany, the third part of the managerial problem–the contest for dominance with other sections of managerial society–remains for the future. First had to come the death-blow that assured the toppling of the capitalist world order, which meant above all the destruction of the foundations of the British Empire (the keystone of the capitalist world order) both directly and through the smashing of the European political structure, which was a necessary prop of the Empire. This is the basic explanation of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which is not intelligible on other grounds. The future conflict between Germany and Russia will be a managerial conflict proper; prior to the great world-managerial

battles, the end of the capitalist order must be assured. The belief that Nazism is "decadent capitalism"...makes it impossible to explain reasonably the Nazi-Soviet Pact. From this belief followed the always expected war between Germany and Russia, not the actual war to the death between Germany and the British Empire. The war between Germany and Russia is one of the managerial wars of the future, not of the anti-capitalist wars of yesterday and today.

However, the attack on Russia will come later, and Russia is certain, or almost certain, to be defeated. "There is every reason to believe... that Russia will split apart, with the western half gravitating towards the European base and the eastern towards the Asiatic." This quotation comes from THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION. In the above quoted article, written probably about six months later, it is put more forcibly: "the Russian weaknesses indicate that Russia will not be able to endure, that it will crack apart, and fall towards east and west." And in a supplementary note which was added to the English (Pelican) edition, and which appears to have been written at the end of 1941, Burnham speaks as though the "cracking apart" process were already happening. The war, he says, "is part of the means whereby the western half of Russia is being integrated into the European super-state".

Sorting these various statements out, we have the following prophecies:

1. Germany is bound to win the war.

2. Germany and Japan are bound to survive as great states, and to remain the nuclei of power in their respective areas.

3. Germany will not attack the USSR until after the defeat of Britain.

4. The USSR is bound to be defeated.

However, Burnham has made other predictions besides these. In a short article in the PARTISAN REVIEW, in the summer of 1944, he gives his opinion that the USSR will gang up with Japan in order to prevent the total defeat of the latter, while the American Communists will be set to work to sabotage the eastern end of the war. And finally, in an article in the same magazine in the winter of 1944-5, he claims that Russia, destined so short a while ago to "crack apart", is within sight of conquering the whole of Eurasia. This article, which

was the cause of violent controversies among the American intelligentsia, has not been reprinted in England. I must give some account of it here, because its manner of approach and its emotional tone are of a peculiar kind, and by studying them one can get nearer to the real roots of Burnham's theory.

The article is entitled "Lenin's Heir", and it sets out to show that Stalin is the true and legitimate guardian of the Russian Revolution, which he has not in any sense "betrayed" but has merely carried forward on lines that were implicit in it from the start. In itself, this is an easier opinion to swallow than the usual Trotskyist claim that Stalin is a mere crook who has perverted the Revolution to his own ends, and that things would somehow have been different if Lenin had lived or Trotsky had remained in power. Actually there is no strong reason for thinking that the main lines of development would have been very different. Well before 1923 the seeds of a totalitarian society were quite plainly there. Lenin, indeed, is one of those politicians who win an undeserved reputation by dying prematurely. [See Note at end of paragraph] Had he lived, it is probable that he would either have been thrown out, like Trotsky, or would have kept himself in power by methods as barbarous, or nearly as barbarous, as those of Stalin. The TITLE of Burnham's essay, therefore, sets forth a reasonable thesis, and one would expect him to support it by an appeal to the facts.

[Note: It is difficult to think of any politician who has lived to be eighty and still been regarded as a success. What we call a "great" statesman normally means one who dies before his policy has had time to take effect. If Cromwell had lived a few years longer he would probably have fallen from power, in which case we should now regard him as a failure. If Pétain had died in 1930, France would have venerated him as a hero and patriot. Napoleon remarked once that if only a cannon-ball had happened to hit him when he was riding into Moscow, he would have gone down to history as the greatest man who ever lived. [Author's footnote.]]

However, the essay barely touches upon its ostensible subject matter. It is obvious that anyone genuinely concerned to show that there has been continuity of policy as between Lenin and Stalin would start by outlining Lenin's policy and then explain in what way

Stalin's has resembled it. Burnham does not do this. Except for one or two cursory sentences he says nothing about Lenin's policy, and Lenin's name only occurs five times in an essay of twelve pages: in the first seven pages, apart from the title, it does not occur at all. The real aim of the essay is to present Stalin as a towering, super-human figure, indeed a species of demigod, and Bolshevism as an irresistible force which is flowing over the earth and cannot be halted until it reaches the outermost borders of Eurasia. In so far as he makes any attempt to prove his case, Burnham does so by repeating over and over again that Stalin is "a great man"–which is probably true, but is almost completely irrelevant. Moreover, though he does advance some solid arguments for believing in Stalin's genius, it is clear that in his mind the idea of "greatness" is inextricably mixed up with the idea of cruelty and dishonesty. There are curious passages in which it seems to be suggested that Stalin is to be admired BECAUSE OF the limitless suffering that he has caused:

Stalin proves himself a "great man", in the grand style. The accounts of the banquets, staged in Moscow for the visiting dignitaries, set the symbolic tone. With their enormous menus of sturgeon, and roasts, and fowl, and sweets; their streams of liquor; the scores of toasts with which they end; the silent, unmoving secret police behind each guest; all against the winter background of the starving multitudes of besieged Leningrad; the dying millions at the front; the jammed concentration camps; the city crowds kept by their minute rations just at the edge of life; there is little trace of dull mediocrity or the hand of Babbitt. We recognise, rather, the tradition of the most spectacular of the Tsars, of the Great Kings of the Medes and Persians, of the Khanate of the Golden Horde, of the banquet we assign to the gods of the Heroic Ages in tribute to the insight that insolence, and indifference, and brutality on such a scale remove beings from the human level...Stalin's political techniques shows a freedom from conventional restrictions that is incompatible with mediocrity: the mediocre man is custom-bound. Often it is the scale of their operations that sets them apart. It is usual, for example, for men active in practical life to engineer an occasional frame-up. But to carry out a frame-up against tens of thousands of persons, important percentages of whole strata of society, including most of

one's own comrades, is so far out of the ordinary that the long-run mass conclusion is either that the frame-up must be true–at least "have some truth in it"–or that power so immense must be submitted to is a "historical necessity", as intellectuals put it...There is nothing unexpected in letting a few individuals starve for reasons of state; but to starve by deliberate decision, several millions, is a type of action attributed ordinarily only to gods.

In these and other similar passages there may be a tinge of irony, but it is difficult not to feel that there is also a sort of fascinated admiration. Towards the end of the essay Burnham compares Stalin with those semi-mythical heroes, like Moses or Asoka, who embody in themselves a whole epoch, and can justly be credited with feats that they did not actually perform. In writing of Soviet foreign policy and its supposed objectives, he touches an even more mystical note:

Starting from the magnetic core of the Eurasian heartland, the Soviet power, like the reality of the One of Neo-Platonism overflowing in the descending series of the emanative progression, flows outward, west into Europe, south into the Near East, east into China, already lapping the shores of the Atlantic, the Yellow and China Seas, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf. As the undifferentiated One, in its progression, descends through the stages of Mind, Soul, and Matter, and then through its fatal Return back to itself; so does the Soviet power, emanating from the integrally totalitarian centre, proceed outwards by Absorption (the Baltics, Bessarabia, Bukovina, East Poland), Domination (Finland, the Balkans, Mongolia, North China and, tomorrow, Germany), Orienting Influence (Italy, France, Turkey, Iran, Central and south China...), until it is dissipated in MH ON, the outer material sphere, beyond the Eurasian boundaries, of momentary Appeasement and Infiltration (England, the United States).

I do not think it is fanciful to suggest that the unnecessary capital letters with which this passage is loaded are intended to have a hypnotic effect on the reader. Burnham is trying to build up a picture of terrifying, irresistible power, and to turn a normal political manoeuvre like infiltration into Infiltration adds to the general portentousness. The essay should be read in full. Although it is not the kind of tribute that the average russophile would consider

acceptable, and although Burnham himself would probably claim that he is being strictly objective, he is in effect performing an act of homage, and even of self-abasement. Meanwhile, this essay gives us another prophecy to add to the list: i.e. that the USSR will conquer the whole of Eurasia, and probably a great deal more. And one must remember that Burnham's basic theory contains, in itself, a prediction which still has to be tested–that is, that whatever else happens, the "managerial" form of society is bound to prevail.

Burnham's earlier prophecy, of a Germany victory in the war and the integration of Europe round the German nucleus, was falsified, not only in its main outlines, but in some important details. Burnham insists all the way through that "managerialism" is not only more efficient than capitalist democracy or Marxian Socialism, but also more acceptable to the masses. The slogans of democracy and national self-determination, he says, no longer have any mass appeal: "managerialism", on the other hand, can rouse enthusiasm, produce intelligible war aims, establish fifth columns everywhere, and inspire its soldiers with a fanatical morale. The "fanaticism" of the Germans, as against the "apathy" or "indifference" of the British, French, etc, is much emphasised, and Nazism is represented as a revolutionary force sweeping across Europe and spreading its philosophy "by contagion". The Nazi fifth columns "cannot be wiped out", and the democratic nations are quite incapable of projecting any settlement which the German or other European masses would prefer to the New Order. In any case, the democracies can only defeat Germany if they go "still further along the managerial road than Germany has yet gone".

The germ of truth in all this is that the smaller European states, demoralised by the chaos and stagnation of the pre-war years, collapsed rather more quickly than they need have done, and might conceivably have accepted the New Order if the Germans had kept some of their promises. But the actual experience of German rule aroused almost at once such a fury of hatred and vindictiveness as the world has seldom seen. After about the beginning of 1941 there was hardly any need of a positive war aim, since getting rid of the Germans was a sufficient objective. The question of morale, and its relation to national solidarity, is a nebulous one, and the evidence

can be so manipulated as to prove almost anything. But if one goes by the proportion of prisoners to other casualties, and the amount of quislingism, the totalitarian states come out of the comparison worse than the democracies. Hundreds of thousands of Russians appear to have gone over to the Germans during the course of the war, while comparable numbers of Germans and Italians had gone over to the Allies before the war started: the corresponding number of American or British renegades would have amounted to a few scores. As an example of the inability of "capitalist ideologies" to enlist support, Burnham cites "the complete failure of voluntary military recruiting in England (as well as the entire British Empire) and in the United States". One would gather from this that the armies of the totalitarian states were manned by volunteers. Actually, no totalitarian state has ever so much as considered voluntary recruitment for any purpose, nor, throughout history, has a large army ever been raised by voluntary means. [Note at end of paragraph] It is not worth listing the many similar arguments that Burnham puts forward. The point is that he assumes that the Germans must win the propaganda war as well as the military one, and that, at any rate in Europe, this estimate was not borne out by events.

[Note: Great Britain raised a million volunteers in the earlier part of the 1914-18 war. This must be a world's record, but the pressures applied were such that it is doubtful whether the recruitment ought to be described as voluntary. Even the most "ideological" wars have been fought largely by pressed men. In the English civil war, the Napoleonic wars, the American civil war, the Spanish civil war, etc, both sides resorted to conscription or the press gang. (Author's footnote.)]

It will be seen that Burnham's predictions have not merely, when they were verifiable, turned out to be wrong, but that they have sometimes contradicted one another in a sensational way. It is this last fact that is significant. Political predictions are usually wrong, because they are usually based on wish-thinking, but they can have symptomatic value, especially when they change abruptly. Often the revealing factor is the date at which they are made. Dating Burnham's various writings as accurately as can be done from internal evidence, and then noting what events they coincided with,

we find the following relationships:

In THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION Burnham prophesies a German victory, postponement of the Russo-German war until after Britain is defeated, and, subsequently, the defeat of Russia. The book, or much of it, was written in the second half of 1940–i.e. at a time when the Germans had overrun western Europe and were bombing Britain, and the Russians were collaborating with them fairly closely, and in what appeared, at any rate, to be a spirit of appeasement.

In the supplementary note added to the English edition of the book, Burnham appears to assume that the USSR is already beaten and the splitting-up process is about to begin. This was published in the spring of 1942 and presumably written at the end of 1941; i.e. when the Germans were in the suburbs of Moscow.

The prediction that Russia would gang up with Japan against the USA was written early in 1944, soon after the conclusion of a new Russo-Japanese treaty.

The prophecy of Russian world conquest was written in the winter of 1944, when the Russians were advancing rapidly in eastern Europe while the Western Allies were still held up in Italy and northern France.

It will be seen that at each point Burnham is predicting A CONTINUATION OF THE THING THAT IS HAPPENING. Now the tendency to do this is not simply a bad habit, like inaccuracy or exaggeration, which one can correct by taking thought. It is a major mental disease, and its roots lie partly in cowardice and partly in the worship of power, which is not fully separable from cowardice.

Suppose in 1940 you had taken a Gallup poll, in England, on the question "Will Germany win the war?" You would have found, curiously enough, that the group answering "Yes" contained a far higher percentage of intelligent people–people with IQ of over 120, shall we say–than the group answering "No". The same would have held good in the middle of 1942. In this case the figures would not have been so striking, but if you had made the question "Will the Germans capture Alexandria?" or "Will the Japanese be able to hold on to the territories they have captured ?", then once again there would have been a very marked tendency for intelligence to

concentrate in the "Yes" group. In every case the less-gifted person would have been likelier to give a right answer.

If one went simply by these instances, one might assume that high intelligence and bad military judgement always go together. However, it is not so simple as that. The English intelligentsia, on the whole, were more defeatist than the mass of the people–and some of them went on being defeatist at a time when the war was quite plainly won–partly because they were better able to visualise the dreary years of warfare that lay ahead. Their morale was worse because their imaginations were stronger. The quickest way of ending a war is to lose it, and if one finds the prospect of a long war intolerable, it is natural to disbelieve in the possibility of victory. But there was more to it than that. There was also the disaffection of large numbers of intellectuals, which made it difficult for them not to side with any country hostile to Britain. And deepest of all, there was admiration–though only in a very few cases conscious admiration–for the power, energy, and cruelty of the Nazi régime. It would be a useful though tedious labour to go through the left-wing press and enumerate all the hostile references to Nazism during the years 1935-45. One would find, I have little doubt, that they reached their high-water mark in 1937-8 and 1944-5, and dropped off noticeably in the years 1939-42–that is, during the period when Germany seemed to be winning. One would find, also, the same people advocating a compromise peace in 1940 and approving the dismemberment of Germany in 1945. And if one studied the reactions of the English intelligentsia towards the USSR, there, too, one would find genuinely progressive impulses mixed up with admiration for power and cruelty. It would be grossly unfair to suggest that power worship is the only motive for russophile feeling, but it is one motive, and among intellectuals it is probably the strongest one.

Power worship blurs political judgement because it leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue. Whoever is winning at the moment will always seem to be invincible. If the Japanese have conquered south Asia, then they will keep south Asia for ever, if the Germans have captured Tobruk, they will infallibly capture Cairo; if the Russians are in Berlin, it will not be long before they are in London: and so on. This habit of mind leads also to the

belief that things will happen more quickly, completely, and catastrophically than they ever do in practice. The rise and fall of empires, the disappearance of cultures and religions, are expected to happen with earthquake suddenness, and processes which have barely started are talked about as though they were already at an end. Burnham's writings are full of apocalyptic visions. Nations, governments, classes and social systems are constantly described as expanding, contracting, decaying, dissolving, toppling, crashing, crumbling, crystallising, and, in general, behaving in an unstable and melodramatic way. The slowness of historical change, the fact that any epoch always contains a great deal of the last epoch, is never sufficiently allowed for. Such a manner of thinking is bound to lead to mistaken prophecies, because, even when it gauges the direction of events rightly, it will miscalculate their tempo. Within the space of five years Burnham foretold the domination of Russia by Germany and of Germany by Russia. In each case he was obeying the same instinct: the instinct to bow down before the conqueror of the moment, to accept the existing trend as irreversible. With this in mind one can criticise his theory in a broader way.

The mistakes I have pointed out do not disprove Burnham's theory, but they do cast light on his probable reasons for holding it. In this connection one cannot leave out of account the fact that Burnham is an American. Every political theory has a certain regional tinge about it, and every nation, every culture, has its own characteristic prejudices and patches of ignorance. There are certain problems that must almost inevitably be seen in a different perspective according to the geographical situation from which one is looking at them. Now, the attitude that Burnham adopts, of classifying Communism and Fascism as much the same thing, and at the same time accepting both of them–or, at any rate, not assuming that either must be violently struggled against–is essentially an American attitude, and would be almost impossible for an Englishman or any other western European. English writers who consider Communism and Fascism to be THE SAME THING invariably hold that both are monstrous evils which must be fought to the death: on the other hand, any Englishman who believes Communism and Fascism to be opposites will feel that he ought to

side with one or the other. [Note 1 at end of paragraph] The reason for this difference of outlook is simple enough and, as usual, is bound up with wish-thinking. If totalitarianism triumphs and the dreams of the geopoliticians come true, Britain will disappear as a world power and the whole of western Europe will be swallowed by some single great state. This is not a prospect that it is easy for an Englishman to contemplate with detachment. Either he does not want Britain to disappear–in which case he will tend to construct theories proving the thing that he wants-or, like a minority of intellectuals, he will decide that his country is finished and transfer his allegiance to some foreign power. An American does not have to make the same choice. Whatever happens, the United States will survive as a great power, and from the American point of view it does not make much difference whether Europe is dominated by Russia or by Germany. Most Americans who think of the matter at all would prefer to see the world divided between two or three monster states which had reached their natural boundaries and could bargain with one another on economic issues without being troubled by ideological differences. Such a world-picture fits in with the American tendency to admire size for its own sake and to feel that success constitutes justification, and it fits in with the all-prevailing anti-British sentiment. In practice, Britain and the United States have twice been forced into alliance against Germany, and will probably, before long, be forced into alliance against Russia: but, subjectively, a majority of Americans would prefer either Russia or Germany to Britain, and, as between Russia and Germany, would prefer whichever seemed stronger at the moment. [Note 2 at end of paragraph] It is, therefore, not surprising that Burnham's world-view should often be noticeably close to that of the American imperialists on the one side, or to that of the isolationists on the other. It is a "tough" or "realistic" world view which fits in with the American form of wish-thinking. The almost open admiration for Nazi methods which Burnham shows in the earlier of his two books, and which would seem shocking to almost any English reader, depends ultimately on the fact that the Atlantic is wider than the Channel.

[Note 1: The only exception I am able to think of is Bernard Shaw, who, for some years at any rate, declared Communism and

Fascism to be much the same thing, and was in favour of both of them. But Shaw, after all, is not an Englishman, and probably does not feel his fate to be bound up with that of Britain. (Author's footnote.)]

[Note 2 As late as the autumn of 1945, a Gallup poll taken among the American troops in Germany showed that 51 percent "thought Hitler did much good before 1939". This was after five years of anti-Hitler propaganda. The verdict, as quoted, is not very strongly favourable to Germany, but it is hard to believe that a verdict equally favourable to Britain would be given by anywhere near 51 per cent of the American army. (Author's footnote.)]

As I have said earlier, Burnham has probably been more right than wrong about the present and the immediate past. For quite fifty years past the general drift has almost certainly been towards oligarchy. The ever-increasing concentration of industrial and financial power; the diminishing importance of the individual capitalist or shareholder, and the growth of the new "managerial" class of scientists, technicians, and bureaucrats; the weakness of the proletariat against the centralised state; the increasing helplessness of small countries against big ones; the decay of representative institutions and the appearance of one-party régimes based on police terrorism, faked plebiscites, etc: all these things seem to point in the same direction. Burnham sees the trend and assumes that it is irresistible, rather as a rabbit fascinated by a boa constrictor might assume that a boa constrictor is the strongest thing in the world. When one looks a little deeper, one sees that all his ideas rest upon two axioms which are taken for granted in the earlier book and made partly explicit in the second one. They are:

1. Politics is essentially the same in all ages.
2. Political behaviour is different from other kinds of behaviour.

To take the second point first. In THE MACHIAVELLIANS, Burnham insists that politics is simply the struggle for power. Every great social movement, every war, every revolution, every political programme, however edifying and Utopian, really has behind it the ambitions of some sectional group which is out to grab power for itself. Power can never be restrained by any ethical or religious code, but only by other power. The nearest possible approach to altruistic

behaviour is the perception by a ruling group that it will probably stay in power longer if it behaves decently. But curiously enough, these generalisations only apply to political behaviour, not to any other kind of behaviour. In everyday life, as Burnham sees and admits, one cannot explain every human action by applying the principle of CUI BONO? Obviously, human beings have impulses which are not selfish. Man, therefore, is an animal that can act morally when he acts as an individual, but becomes immoral when he acts collectively. But even this generalisation only holds good for the higher groups. The masses, it seems, have vague aspirations towards liberty and human brotherhood, which are easily played upon by power-hungry individuals or minorities. So that history consists of a series of swindles, in which the masses are first lured into revolt by the promise of Utopia, and then, when they have done their job, enslaved over again by new masters.

Political activity, therefore, is a special kind of behaviour, characterised by its complete unscrupulousness, and occurring only among small groups of the population, especially among dissatisfied groups whose talents do not get free play under the existing form of society. The great mass of the people–and this is where (2) ties up with (1)–will always be unpolitical. In effect, therefore, humanity is divided into two classes: the self-seeking, hypocritical minority, and the brainless mob whose destiny is always to be led or driven, as one gets a pig back to the sty by kicking it on the bottom or by rattling a stick inside a swill-bucket, according to the needs of the moment. And this beautiful pattern is to continue for ever. Individuals may pass from one category to another, whole classes may destroy other classes and rise to the dominant position, but the division of humanity into rulers and ruled is unalterable. In their capabilities, as in their desires and needs, men are not equal. There is an "iron law of oligarchy", which would operate even if democracy were not impossible for mechanical reasons.

It is curious that in all his talk about the struggle for power, Burnham never stops to ask why people want power. He seems to assume that power hunger, although only dominant in comparatively few people, is a natural instinct that does not have to be explained, like the desire for food. He also assumes that the division of society

into classes serves the same purpose in all ages. This is practically to ignore the history of hundreds of years. When Burnham's master, Machiavelli, was writing, class divisions were not only unavoidable, but desirable. So long as methods of production were primitive, the great mass of the people were necessarily tied down to dreary, exhausting manual labour: and a few people had to be set free from such labour, otherwise civilisation could not maintain itself, let alone make any progress. But since the arrival of the machine the whole pattern has altered. The justification for class distinctions, if there is a justification, is no longer the same, because there is no mechanical reason why the average human being should continue to be a drudge. True, drudgery persists; class distinctions are probably re-establishing themselves in a new form, and individual liberty is on the down-grade: but as these developments are now technically avoidable, they must have some psychological cause which Burnham makes no attempt to discover. The question that he ought to ask, and never does ask, is: Why does the lust for naked power become a major human motive exactly NOW, when the dominion of man over man is ceasing to be necessary? As for the claim that "human nature", or "inexorable laws" of this and that, make Socialism impossible, it is simply a projection of the past into the future. In effect, Burnham argues that because a society of free and equal human beings has never existed, it never can exist. By the same argument one could have demonstrated the impossibility of aeroplanes in 1900, or of motor cars in 1850.

The notion that the machine has altered human relationships, and that in consequence Machiavelli is out of date, is a very obvious one. If Burnham fails to deal with it, it can, I think, only be because his own power instinct leads him to brush aside any suggestion that the Machiavellian world of force, fraud, and tyranny may somehow come to an end. It is important to bear in mind what I said above: that Burnham's theory is only a variant–an American variant, and interesting because of its comprehensiveness–of the power worship now so prevalent among intellectuals. A more normal variant, at any rate in England, is Communism. If one examines the people who, having some idea of what the Russian régime is like, are strongly russophile, one finds that, on the whole, they belong to the

"managerial" class of which Burnham writes. That is, they are not managers in the narrow sense, but scientists, technicians, teachers, journalists, broadcasters, bureaucrats, professional politicians: in general, middling people who feel themselves cramped by a system that is still partly aristocratic, and are hungry for more power and more prestige. These people look towards the USSR and see in it, or think they see, a system which eliminates the upper class, keeps the working class in its place, and hands unlimited power to people very similar to themselves. It was only AFTER the Soviet régime became unmistakably totalitarian that English intellectuals, in large numbers, began to show an interest in it. Burnham, although the English russophile intelligentsia would repudiate him, is really voicing their secret wish: the wish to destroy the old, equalitarian version of Socialism and usher in a hierarchical society where the intellectual can at last get his hands on the whip. Burnham at least has the honesty to say that Socialism isn't coming; the others merely say that Socialism is coming, and then give the word "Socialism" a new meaning which makes nonsense of the old one. But his theory, for all its appearance of objectivity, is the rationalisation of a wish. There is no strong reason for thinking that it tells us anything about the future, except perhaps the immediate future. It merely tells us what kind of world the "managerial" class themselves, or at least the more conscious and ambitious members of the class, would like to live in.

Fortunately the "managers" are not so invincible as Burnham believes. It is curious how persistently, in THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION, he ignores the advantages, military as well as social, enjoyed by a democratic country. At every point the evidence is squeezed in order to show the strength, vitality, and durability of Hitler's crazy régime. Germany is expanding rapidly, and "rapid territorial expansion has always been a sign, not of decadence...but of renewal". Germany makes war successfully, and "the ability to make war well is never a sign of decadence but of its opposite". Germany also "inspires in millions of persons a fanatical loyalty. This, too, never accompanies decadence". Even the cruelty and dishonesty of the Nazi régime are cited in its favour, since "the young, new, rising social order is, as against the old, more likely to resort on a large scale to lies, terror, persecution". Yet, within only five years this

young, new, rising social order had smashed itself to pieces and become, in Burnham's usage of the word, decadent. And this had happened quite largely because of the "managerial" (i.e. undemocratic) structure which Burnham admires. The immediate cause of the German defeat was the unheard-of folly of attacking the USSR while Britain was still undefeated and America was manifestly getting ready to fight. Mistakes of this magnitude can only be made, or at any rate they are most likely to be made, in countries where public opinion has no power. So long as the common man can get a hearing, such elementary rules as not fighting all your enemies simultaneously are less likely to be violated.

But, in any case, one should have been able to see from the start that such a movement as Nazism could not produce any good or stable result. Actually, so long as they were winning, Burnham seems to have seen nothing wrong with the methods of the Nazis. Such methods, he says, only appear wicked because they are new:

There is no historical law that polite manners and "Justice" shall conquer. In history there is always the question of WHOSE manners and WHOSE justice. A rising social class and a new order of society have got to break through the old moral codes just as they must break through the old economic and political institutions. Naturally, from the point of view of the old, they are monsters. If they win, they take care in due time of manners and morals.

This implies that literally anything can become right or wrong if the dominant class of the moment so wills it. It ignores the fact that certain rules of conduct have to be observed if human society is to hold together at all. Burnham, therefore, was unable to see that the crimes and follies of the Nazi régime MUST lead by one route or another to disaster. So also with his new-found admiration for Stalinism. It is too early to say in just what way the Russian régime will destroy itself. If I had to make a prophecy, I should say that a continuation of the Russian policies of the last fifteen years–and internal and external policy, of course, are merely two facets of the same thing–can only lead to a war conducted with atomic bombs, which will make Hitler's invasion look like a tea-party. But at any rate, the Russian régime will either democratise itself, or it will perish. The huge, invincible, everlasting slave empire of which

Burnham appears to dream will not be established, or, if established, will not endure, because slavery is no longer a stable basis for human society.

One cannot always make positive prophecies, but there are times when one ought to be able to make negative ones. No one could have been expected to foresee the exact results of the Treaty of Versailles, but millions of thinking people could and did foresee that those results would be bad. Plenty of people, though not so many in this case, can foresee that the results of the settlement now being forced on Europe will also be bad. And to refrain from admiring Hitler or Stalin–that, too, should not require an enormous intellectual effort.

But it is partly a moral effort. That a man of Burnham's gifts should have been able for a while to think of Nazism as something rather admirable, something that could and probably would build up a workable and durable social order, shows what damage is done to the sense of reality by the cultivation of what is now called "realism".

[Note: With title "Second Thoughts on James Burnham", 1946; with title "James Burnham", 1947; printed as a pamphlet with title "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution", Summer 1946]

PLEASURE SPOTS

Some months ago I cut out of a shiny magazine some paragraphs written by a female journalist and describing the pleasure resort of the future. She had recently been spending some time at Honolulu, where the rigours of war do not seem to have been very noticeable. However, "a transport pilot...told me that with all the inventiveness packed into this war, it was a pity someone hadn't found out how a tired and life-hungry man could relax, rest, play poker, drink, and make love, all at once, and round the clock, and come out of it feeling good and fresh and ready for the job again." This reminded her of an entrepreneur she had met recently who was planning a "pleasure spot which he thinks will catch on tomorrow as dog racing and dance halls did yesterday." The entrepreneur's dream is described in some detail:

His blue-prints pictured a space covering several acres, under a series of sliding roofs-for the British weather is unreliable and with a central space spread over with an immense dance floor made of translucent plastic which can be illuminated from beneath. Around it are grouped other functional spaces, at different levels. Balcony bars and restaurants commanding high views of the city roofs, and ground-level replicas. A battery of skittle alleys. Two blue lagoons: one, periodically agitated by waves, for strong swimmers, and another, a smooth and summery pool, for playtime bathers. Sunlight lamps over the pools to simulate high summer on days when the roofs don't slide back to disclose a hot sun in a cloudless sky. Rows of bunks on which people wearing sun-glasses and slips can lie and start a tan or deepen an existing one under a sunray lamp.

Music seeping through hundreds of grills connected with a central distributing stage, where dance or symphonic orchestras play or the radio programme can be caught, amplified, and disseminated. Outside, two 1,000-car parks. One, free. The other, an open-air cinema drive-in, cars queueing to move through turnstiles, and the film thrown on a giant screen facing a row of assembled cars. Uniformed male attendants check the cars, provide free aid and water, sell petrol and oil. Girls in white satin slacks take orders for

buffet dishes and drinks, and bring them on trays.

Whenever one hears such phrases as "pleasure spot", "pleasure resort", "pleasure city", it is difficult not to remember the often quoted opening of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan".

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But it will be seen that Coleridge has got it all wrong. He strikes a false note straight off with that talk about "sacred" rivers and "measureless" caverns. In the hands of the above-mentioned entrepreneur, Kubla Khan's project would have become something quite different. The caverns, air-conditioned, discreetly lighted and with their original rocky interior buried under layers of tastefully-coloured plastics, would be turned into a series of tea-grottoes in the Moorish, Caucasian or Hawaiian styles. Alph, the sacred river, would be dammed up to make an artificially-warmed bathing pool, while the sunless sea would be illuminated from below with pink electric lights, and one would cruise over it in real Venetian gondolas each equipped with its own radio set. The forests and "spots of greenery" referred to by Coleridge would be cleaned up to make way for glass-covered tennis courts, a bandstand, a roller-skating rink and perhaps a nine-hole golf course. In short, there would be everything that a "life-hungry" man could desire.

I have no doubt that, all over the world, hundreds of pleasure resorts similar to the one described above are now being planned, and perhaps are even being built. It is unlikely that they will be finished-world events will see to that-but they represent faithfully enough the modern civilised man's idea of pleasure. Something of the kind is already partially attained in the more magnificent dance

halls, movie palaces, hotels, restaurants and luxury liners. On a pleasure cruise or in a Lyons Corner House one already gets something more than a glimpse of this future paradise. Analysed, its main characteristics are these:

1. One is never alone.
2. One never does anything for oneself.
3. One is never within sight of wild vegetation or natural objects of any kind.
4. Light and temperature are always artificially regulated.
5. One is never out of the sound of music.

The music-and if possible it should be the same music for everybody-is the most important ingredient. Its function is to prevent thought and conversation, and to shut out any natural sound, such as the song of birds or the whistling of the wind, that might otherwise intrude. The radio is already consciously used for this purpose by innumerable people. In very many English homes the radio is literally never turned off, though it is manipulated from time to time so as to make sure that only light music will come out of it. I know people who will keep the radio playing all through a meal and at the same time continue talking just loudly enough for the voices and the music to cancel out. This is done with a definite purpose. The music prevents the conversation from becoming serious or even coherent, while the chatter of voices stops one from listening attentively to the music and thus prevents the onset of that dreaded thing, thought. For:

The lights must never go out.
The music must always play,
Lest we should see where we are;
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the dark
Who have never been happy or good.

It is difficult not to feel that the unconscious aim in the most typical modern pleasure resorts is a return to the womb. For there, too, one was never alone, one never saw daylight, the temperature was always regulated, one did not have to worry about work or food, and one's thoughts, if any, were drowned by a continuous rhythmic throbbing.

When one looks at Coleridge's very different conception of a

"pleasure dome", one sees that it revolves partly round gardens and partly round caverns, rivers, forests and mountains with "deep romantic chasms"-in short, round what is called Nature. But the whole notion of admiring Nature, and feeling a sort of religious awe in the presence of glaciers, deserts or waterfalls, is bound up with the sense of man's littleness and weakness against the power of the universe. The moon is beautiful partly because we cannot reach it, the sea is impressive because one can never be sure of crossing it safely. Even the pleasure one takes in a flower-and this is true even of a botanist who knows all there is to be known about the flower is dependent partly on the sense of mystery. But meanwhile man's power over Nature is steadily increasing. With the aid of the atomic bomb we could literally move mountains: we could even, so it is said, alter the climate of the earth by melting the polar ice-caps and irrigating the Sahara. Isn't there, therefore, something sentimental and obscurantist in preferring bird-song to swing music and in wanting to leave a few patches of wildness here and there instead of covering the whole surface of the earth with a network of Autobahnen flooded by artificial sunlight?

The question only arises because in exploring the physical universe man has made no attempt to explore himself. Much of what goes by the name of pleasure is simply an effort to destroy consciousness. If one started by asking, what is man? what are his needs? how can he best express himself? one would discover that merely having the power to avoid work and live one's life from birth to death in electric light and to the tune of tinned music is not a reason for doing so. Man needs warmth, society, leisure, comfort and security: he also needs solitude, creative work and the sense of wonder. If he recognised this he could use the products of science and industrialism eclectically, applying always the same test: does this make me more human or less human? He would then learn that the highest happiness does not lie in relaxing, resting, playing poker, drinking and making love simultaneously. And the instinctive horror which all sensitive people feel at the progressive mechanisation of life would be seen not to be a mere sentimental archaism, but to be fully justified. For man only stays human by preserving large patches of simplicity in his life, while the tendency of many modern

inventions-in particular the film, the radio and the aeroplane-is to weaken his consciousness, dull his curiosity, and, in general, drive him nearer to the animals.

POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilization is decadent, and our language–so the argument runs–must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers. I will come back to this presently, and I hope that by that time the meaning of what I have said here will have become clearer. Meanwhile, here are five specimens of the English language as it is now habitually written.

These five passages have not been picked out because they are especially bad–I could have quoted far worse if I had chosen–but because they illustrate various of the mental vices from which we now suffer. They are a little below the average, but are fairly representative samples. I number them so that I can refer back to

them when necessary:

(1) I am not, indeed, sure whether it is not true to say that the Milton who once seemed not unlike a seventeenth-century Shelley had not become, out of an experience ever more bitter in each year, more alien (sic) to the founder of that Jesuit sect which nothing could induce him to tolerate.

— PROFESSOR HAROLD LASKI (Essay in FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION)

(2) Above all, we cannot play ducks and drakes with a native battery of idioms which prescribes such egregious collocations of vocables as the Basic PUT UP WITH for TOLERATE or PUT AT A LOSS for BEWILDER.

— PROFESSOR LANCELOT HOGBEN (INTERGLOSSA)

(3) On the one side we have the free personality; by definition it is not neurotic, for it has neither conflict nor dream. Its desires, such as they are, are transparent, for they are just what institutional approval keeps in the forefront of consciousness; another institutional pattern would alter their number and intensity; there is little in them that is natural, irreducible, or culturally dangerous. But ON THE OTHER SIDE, the social bond itself is nothing but the mutual reflection of these self-secure integrities. Recall the definition of love. Is not this the very picture of a small academic? Where is there a place in this hall of mirrors for either personality or fraternity?

— Essay on psychology in POLITICS (New York)

(4) All the "best people" from the gentlemen's clubs, and all the frantic fascist captains, united in common hatred of Socialism and bestial horror of the rising tide of the mass revolutionary movement, have turned to acts of provocation, to foul incendiarism, to medieval legends of poisoned wells, to legalize their own destruction of proletarian organizations, and rouse the agitated petty-bourgeoisie to chauvinistic fervor on behalf of the fight against the revolutionary way out of the crisis.

— Communist pamphlet

(5) If a new spirit is to be infused into this old country, there is one thorny and contentious reform which must be tackled, and that is the humanization and galvanization of the B.B.C. Timidity here will bespeak canker and atrophy of the soul. The heart of Britain may lee

sound and of strong beat, for instance, but the British lion's roar at present is like that of Bottom in Shakespeare's MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM–as gentle as any sucking dove. A virile new Britain cannot continue indefinitely to be traduced in the eyes, or rather ears, of the world by the effete languors of Langham Place, brazenly masquerading as "standard English." When the Voice of Britain is heard at nine o'clock, better far and infinitely less ludicrous to hear aitches honestly dropped than the present priggish, inflated, inhibited, school-ma'am-ish arch braying of blameless bashful mewing maidens.

— Letter in TRIBUNE

Each of these passages has faults of its own, but quite apart from avoidable ugliness, two qualities are common to all of them. The first is staleness of imagery; the other is lack of precision. The writer either has a meaning and cannot express it, or he inadvertently says something else, or he is almost indifferent as to whether his words mean anything or not. This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing. As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of WORDS chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of PHRASES tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house. I list below, with notes and examples, various of the tricks by means of which the work of prose-construction is habitually dodged:

DYING METAPHORS. A newly-invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image, while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically "dead" (e.g., IRON RESOLUTION) has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness. But in between these two classes there is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves. Examples are: RING THE CHANGES ON, TAKE UP THE CUDGELS FOR, TOE THE LINE, RIDE ROUGHSHOD OVER, STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH, PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF, AN AXE TO

GRIND, GRIST TO THE MILL, FISHING IN TROUBLED WATERS, ON THE ORDER OF THE DAY, ACHILLES' HEEL, SWAN SONG, HOTBED. Many of these are used without knowledge of their meaning (what is a "rift," for instance?), and incompatible metaphors are frequently mixed, a sure sign that the writer is not interested in what he is saying. Some metaphors now current have been twisted out of their original meaning without those who use them even being aware of the fact. For example, TOE THE LINE is sometimes written TOW THE LINE. Another example is THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL, now always used with the implication that the anvil gets the worst of it. In real life it is always the anvil that breaks the hammer, never the other way about: a writer who stopped to think what he was saying would be aware of this, and would avoid perverting the original phrase.

OPERATORS, or VERBAL FALSE LIMBS. These save the trouble of picking out appropriate verbs and nouns, and at the same time pad each sentence with extra syllables which give it an appearance of symmetry. Characteristic phrases are: RENDER INOPERATIVE, MILITATE AGAINST, PROVE UNACCEPTABLE, MAKE CONTACT WITH, BE SUBJECTED TO, GIVE RISE TO, GIVE GROUNDS FOR, HAVING THE EFFECT OF, PLAY A LEADING PART (RÔLE) IN, MAKE ITSELF FELT, TAKE EFFECT, EXHIBIT A TENDENCY TO, SERVE THE PURPOSE OF, etc., etc. The keynote is the elimination of simple verbs. Instead of being a single word, such as BREAK, STOP, SPOIL, MEND, KILL, a verb becomes a PHRASE, made up of a noun or adjective tacked on to some general-purposes verb as PROVE, SERVE, FORM, PLAY, RENDER. In addition, the passive voice is wherever possible used in preference to the active, and noun constructions are used instead of gerunds (BY EXAMINATION OF instead of BY EXAMINING). The range of verbs is further cut down by means of the '-IZE' AND 'DE-' formations, and banal statements are given an appearance of profundity by means of the NOT 'UN-' formation. Simple conjunctions and prepositions are replaced by such phrases as WITH RESPECT TO, HAVING REGARD TO, THE FACT THAT, BY DINT OF, IN VIEW OF, IN THE INTERESTS OF, ON THE HYPOTHESIS THAT; and the ends of

sentences are saved from anti-climax by such resounding commonplaces as GREATLY TO BE DESIRED, CANNOT BE LEFT OUT OF ACCOUNT, A DEVELOPMENT TO BE EXPECTED IN THE NEAR FUTURE, DESERVING OF SERIOUS CONSIDERATION, BROUGHT TO A SATISFACTORY CONCLUSION, and so on and so forth.

PRETENTIOUS DICTION. Words like PHENOMENON, ELEMENT, INDIVIDUAL (as noun), OBJECTIVE, CATEGORICAL, EFFECTIVE, VIRTUAL, BASIS, PRIMARY, PROMOTE, CONSTITUTE, EXHIBIT, EXPLOIT, UTILIZE, ELIMINATE, LIQUIDATE, are used to dress up simple statements and give an air of scientific impartiality to biased judgments. Adjectives like EPOCH-MAKING, EPIC, HISTORIC, UNFORGETTABLE, TRIUMPHANT, AGE-OLD, INEVITABLE, INEXORABLE, VERITABLE, are used to dignify the sordid processes of international politics, while writing that aims at glorifying war usually takes on an archaic color, its characteristic words being: REALM, THRONE, CHARIOT, MAILED FIST, TRIDENT, SWORD, SHIELD, BUCKLER, BANNER, JACKBOOT, CLARION. Foreign words and expressions such as CUL DE SAC, ANCIEN RÉGIME, DEUS EX MACHINA, MUTATIS MUTANDIS, STATUS QUO, GLEICHSCHALTUNG, WELTANSCHAUUNG, are used to give an air of culture and elegance. Except for the useful abbreviations I.E., E.G., and ETC., there is no real need for any of the hundreds of foreign phrases now current in English. Bad writers, and especially scientific, political and sociological writers, are nearly always haunted by the notion that Latin or Greek words are grander than Saxon ones, and unnecessary words like EXPEDITE, AMELIORATE, PREDICT, EXTRANEOUS, DERACINATED, CLANDESTINE, SUB-AQUEOUS and hundreds of others constantly gain ground from their Anglo-Saxon opposite numbers. [Note 1, below] The jargon peculiar to Marxist writing (HYENA, HANGMAN, CANNIBAL, PETTY BOURGEOIS, THESE GENTRY, LACKEY, FLUNKEY, MAD DOG, WHITE GUARD, etc.) consists largely of words and phrases translated from Russian, German or French; but the normal way of coining a new word is to use a Latin or Greek root with the

appropriate affix and, where necessary, the '-ize' formation. It is often easier to make up words of this kind (DE-REGIONALIZE, IMPERMISSIBLE, EXTRAMARITAL, NON-FRAGMENTARY and so forth) than to think up the English words that will cover one's meaning. The result, in general, is an increase in slovenliness and vagueness.

[Note: 1. An interesting illustration of this is the way in which the English flower names which were in use till very recently are being ousted by Greek ones, SNAPDRAGON becoming ANTIRRHINUM, FORGET-ME-NOT becoming MYOSOTIS, etc. It is hard to see any practical reason for this change of fashion: it is probably due to an instinctive turning-away from the more homely word and a vague feeling that the Greek word is scientific. (Author's footnote.)]

MEANINGLESS WORDS. In certain kinds of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are almost completely lacking in meaning. [Note, below] Words like ROMANTIC, PLASTIC, VALUES, HUMAN, DEAD, SENTIMENTAL, NATURAL, VITALITY, as used in art criticism, are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they not only do not point to any discoverable object, but are hardly even expected to do so by the reader. When one critic writes, "The outstanding feature of Mr. X's work is its living quality," while another writes, "The immediately striking thing about Mr. X's work is its peculiar deadness," the reader accepts this as a simple difference of opinion If words like BLACK and WHITE were involved, instead of the jargon words DEAD and LIVING, he would see at once that language was being used in an improper way. Many political words are similarly abused. The word FASCISM has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies "something not desirable." The words DEMOCRACY, SOCIALISM, FREEDOM, PATRIOTIC, REALISTIC, JUSTICE, have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like DEMOCRACY, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of régime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the

word if it were tied down to any one meaning. Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different. Statements like MARSHAL PÉTAIN WAS A TRUE PATRIOT, THE SOVIET PRESS IS THE FREEST IN THE WORLD, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS OPPOSED TO PERSECUTION, are almost always made with intent to deceive. Other words used in variable meanings, in most cases more or less dishonestly, are: CLASS, TOTALITARIAN, SCIENCE, PROGRESSIVE, REACTIONARY BOURGEOIS, EQUALITY.

[Note: Example: "Comfort's catholicity of perception and image, strangely Whitmanesque in range, almost the exact opposite in aesthetic compulsion, continues to evoke that trembling atmospheric accumulative hinting at a cruel, an inexorably serene timelessness...Wrey Gardiner scores by aiming at simple bulls-eyes with precision. Only they are not so simple, and through this contented sadness runs more than the surface bittersweet of resignation." (POETRY QUARTERLY.) (Author's footnote.)]

Now that I have made this catalogue of swindles and perversions, let me give another example of the kind of writing that they lead to. This time it must of its nature be an imaginary one. I am going to translate a passage of good English into modern English of the worst sort. Here is a well-known verse from ECCLESIASTES:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth.

Here it is in modern English:

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

This is a parody, but not a very gross one. Exhibit (3), above, for instance, contains several patches of the same kind of English. It will be seen that I have not made a full translation. The beginning and

ending of the sentence follow the original meaning fairly closely, but in the middle the concrete illustrations–race, battle, bread–dissolve into the vague phrase "success or failure in competitive activities." This had to be so, because no modern writer of the kind I am discussing–no one capable of using phrases like "objective consideration of contemporary phenomena"–would ever tabulate his thoughts in that precise and detailed way. The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness. Now analyze these two sentences a little more closely. The first contains 49 words but only 60 syllables, and all its words are those of everyday life. The second contains 38 words of 90 syllables: 18 of its words are from Latin roots, and one from Greek. The first sentence contains six vivid images, and only one phrase ("time and chance") that could be called vague. The second contains not a single fresh, arresting phrase, and in spite of its 90 syllables it gives only a shortened version of the meaning contained in the first. Yet without a doubt it is the second kind of sentence that is gaining ground in modern English. I do not want to exaggerate. This kind of writing is not yet universal, and outcrops of simplicity will occur here and there in the worst-written page. Still, if you or I were told to write a few lines on the uncertainty of human fortunes, we should probably come much nearer to my imaginary sentence than to the one from ECCLESIASTES.

As I have tried to show, modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug. The attraction of this way of writing, is that it is easy. It is easier–even quicker, once you have the habit–to say IN MY OPINION IT IS A NOT UNJUSTIFIABLE ASSUMPTION THAT than to say I THINK. If you use ready-made phrases, you not only don't have to hunt about for words; you also don't have to bother with the rhythms of your sentences, since these phrases are generally so arranged as to be more or less euphonious. When you are composing in a hurry–when you are dictating to a stenographer, for instance, or making a public speech–it is natural to fall into a

pretentious, Latinized style. Tags like A CONSIDERATION WHICH WE SHOULD DO WELL TO BEAR IN MIND OR A CONCLUSION TO WHICH ALL OF US WOULD READILY ASSENT will save many a sentence from coming down with a bump. By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself. This is the significance of mixed metaphors. The sole aim of a metaphor is to call up a visual image. When these images clash–as in THE FASCIST OCTOPUS HAS SUNG ITS SWAN SONG, THE JACKBOOT IS THROWN INTO THE MELTING POT–it can be taken as certain that the writer is not seeing a mental image of the objects he is naming; in other words he is not really thinking. Look again at the examples I gave at the beginning of this essay. Professor Laski (1) uses five negatives in 53 words. One of these is superfluous, making nonsense of the whole passage, and in addition there is the slip ALIEN for akin, making further nonsense, and several avoidable pieces of clumsiness which increase the general vagueness. Professor Hogben (2) plays ducks and drakes with a battery which is able to write prescriptions, and, while disapproving of the everyday phrase PUT UP WITH, is unwilling to look EGREGIOUS up in the dictionary and see what it means. (3), if one takes an uncharitable attitude towards it, is simply meaningless: probably one could work out its intended meaning by reading the whole of the article in which it occurs. In (4), the writer knows more or less what he wants to say, but an accumulation of stale phrases chokes him like tea leaves blocking a sink. In (5), words and meaning have almost parted company. People who write in this manner usually have a general emotional meaning–they dislike one thing and want to express solidarity with another–but they are not interested in the detail of what they are saying. A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and

letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you–even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent-and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself. It is at this point that the special connection between politics and the debasement of language becomes clear.

In our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where it is not true, it will generally be found that the writer is some kind of rebel, expressing his private opinions and not a "party line." Orthodoxy, of whatever color, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style. The political dialects to be found in pamphlets, leading articles, manifestoes, White Papers and the speeches of under-secretaries do, of course, vary from party to party, but they are all alike in that one almost never finds in them a fresh, vivid, home-made turn of speech. When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases–BESTIAL ATROCITIES, IRON HEEL, BLOODSTAINED TYRANNY, FREE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD, STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER–one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance towards turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favorable to political conformity.

In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to

consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called PACIFICATION. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called TRANSFER OF POPULATION or RECTIFICATION OF FRONTIERS. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called ELIMINATION OF UNRELIABLE ELEMENTS. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, "I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so." Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:

While freely conceding that the Soviet régime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigors which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.

The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns, as it were instinctively, to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as "keeping out of politics." All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find–this is a guess which I have not sufficient knowledge to verify–that the German, Russian and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years as a result of dictatorship.

But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt

thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who should and do know better. The debased language that I have been discussing is in some ways very convenient. Phrases like A NOT UNJUSTIFIABLE ASSUMPTION, LEAVES MUCH TO BE DESIRED, WOULD SERVE NO GOOD PURPOSE, A CONSIDERATION WHICH WE SHOULD DO WELL TO BEAR IN MIND, are a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at one's elbow. Look back through this essay, and for certain you will find that I have again and again committed the very faults I am protesting against. By this morning's post I have received a pamphlet dealing with conditions in Germany. The author tells me that he "felt impelled" to write it. I open it at random, and here is almost the first sentence that I see: "[The Allies] have an opportunity not only of achieving a radical transformation of Germany's social and political structure in such a way as to avoid a nationalistic reaction in Germany itself, but at the same time of laying the foundations of a cooperative and unified Europe." You see, he "feels impelled" to write–feels, presumably, that he has something new to say–and yet his words, like cavalry horses answering the bugle, group themselves automatically into the familiar dreary pattern. This invasion of one's mind by ready-made phrases (LAY THE FOUNDATIONS, ACHIEVE A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION) can only be prevented if one is constantly on guard against them, and every such phrase anesthetizes a portion of one's brain.

I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions. So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. Silly words and expressions have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process but owing to the conscious action of a minority. Two recent examples were EXPLORE EVERY AVENUE and LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED, which were killed by the jeers of a few journalists. There is a long list of fly-blown metaphors which could similarly be got rid of if enough people would interest themselves in the job; and it should also be

possible to laugh the NOT 'UN-' formation out of existence, [Note, below] to reduce the amount of Latin and Greek in the average sentence, to drive out foreign phrases and strayed scientific words, and, in general, to make pretentiousness unfashionable. But all these are minor points. The defense of the English language implies more than this, and perhaps it is best to start by saying what it does NOT imply.

[Note: One can cure oneself of the NOT 'UN-' formation by memorizing this sentence: A NOT UNBLACK DOG WAS CHASING A NOT UNSMALL RABBIT ACROSS A NOT UNGREEN FIELD. (Author's footnote.)]

To begin with, it has nothing to do with archaism, with the salvaging of obsolete words and turns of speech, or with the setting-up of a "standard-English" which must never be departed from. On the contrary, it is especially concerned with the scrapping of every word or idiom which has outworn its usefulness. It has nothing to do with correct grammar and syntax, which are of no importance so long as one makes one's meaning clear, or with the avoidance of Americanisms, or with having what is called a "good prose style." On the other hand it is not concerned with fake simplicity and the attempt to make written English colloquial. Nor does it even imply in every case preferring the Saxon word to the Latin one, though it does imply using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one's meaning. What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about. In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is to surrender them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualizing, you probably hunt about till you find the exact words that seem to fit it. When you think of something abstract you are more inclined to use words from the start, and unless you make a conscious effort to prevent it, the existing dialect will come rushing in and do the job for you, at the expense of blurring or even changing your meaning. Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures or sensations. Afterwards one can choose–not simply ACCEPT–the phrases that will best cover the meaning, and then switch round and decide what impressions one's words are

likely to make on another person. This last effort of the mind cuts out all stale or mixed images, all prefabricated phrases, needless repetitions, and humbug and vagueness generally. But one can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails. I think the following rules will cover most cases:

(i) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

(ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.

(iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

(iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.

(v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything barbarous.

These rules sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable. One could keep all of them and still write bad English, but one could not write the kind of stuff that I quoted in these five specimens at the beginning of this article.

I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought. Stuart Chase and others have come near to claiming that all abstract words are meaningless, and have used this as a pretext for advocating a kind of political quietism. Since you don't know what Fascism is, how can you struggle against Fascism? One need not swallow such absurdities as this, but one ought to recognize that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end. If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language-and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists–is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one

jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase–some JACKBOOT, ACHILLES' HEEL, HOTBED, MELTING POT, ACID TEST, VERITABLE INFERNO or other lump of verbal refuse–into the dustbin where it belongs.

POLITICS VS. LITERATURE: AN EXAMINATION OF GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

In GULLIVER'S TRAVELS humanity is attacked, or criticized, from at least three different angles, and the implied character of Gulliver himself necessarily changes somewhat in the process. In Part I he is the typical eighteenth-century voyager, bold, practical and unromantic, his homely outlook skilfully impressed on the reader by the biographical details at the beginning, by his age (he is a man of forty, with two children, when his adventures start), and by the inventory of the things in his pockets, especially his spectacles, which make several appearances. In Part II he has in general the same character, but at moments when the story demands it he has a tendency to develop into an imbecile who is capable of boasting of "our noble Country, the Mistress of Arts and Arms, the Scourge of France", etc., etc., and at the same time of betraying every available scandalous fact about the country which he professes to love. In Part III he is much as he was in Part I, though, as he is consorting chiefly with courtiers and men of learning, one has the impression that he has risen in the social scale. In Part IV he conceives a horror of the human race which is not apparent, or only intermittently apparent, in the earlier books, and changes into a sort of unreligious anchorite whose one desire is to live in some desolate spot where he can devote himself to meditating on the goodness of the Houyhnhnms. However, these inconsistencies are forced upon Swift by the fact that Gulliver is there chiefly to provide a contrast. It is necessary, for instance, that he should appear sensible in Part I and at least intermittently silly in Part II because in both books the essential manoeuvre is the same, i.e. to make the human being look ridiculous by imagining him as a creature six inches high. Whenever Gulliver is not acting as a stooge there is a sort of continuity in his character, which comes out especially in his resourcefulness and his observation of physical detail. He is much the same kind of person, with the same prose style, when he bears off the warships of Blefuscu, when he rips open the belly of the monstrous rat, and when he sails away upon the ocean in his frail coracle made from the skins

of Yahoos. Moreover, it is difficult not to feel that in his shrewder moments Gulliver is simply Swift himself, and there is at least one incident in which Swift seems to be venting his private grievance against contemporary Society. It will be remembered that when the Emperor of Lilliput's palace catches fire, Gulliver puts it out by urinating on it. Instead of being congratulated on his presence of mind, he finds that he has committed a capital offence by making water in the precincts of the palace, and I was privately assured, that the Empress, conceiving the greatest Abhorrence of what I had done, removed to the most distant Side of the Court, firmly resolved that those buildings should never be repaired for her Use; and, in the Presence of her chief Confidents, could not forbear vowing Revenge.

According to Professor G. M. Trevelyan (ENGLAND UNDER QUEEN ANNE), part of the reason for Swift's failure to get preferment was that the Queen was scandalized by A TALE OF A TUB–a pamphlet in which Swift probably felt that he had done a great service to the English Crown, since it scarifies the Dissenters and still more the Catholics while leaving the Established Church alone. In any case no one would deny that GULLIVER'S TRAVELS is a rancorous as well as a pessimistic book, and that especially in Parts I and III it often descends into political partisanship of a narrow kind. Pettiness and magnanimity, republicanism and authoritarianism, love of reason and lack of curiosity, are all mixed up in it. The hatred of the human body with which Swift is especially associated is only dominant in Part IV, but somehow this new preoccupation does not come as a surprise. One feels that all these adventures, and all these changes of mood, could have happened to the same person, and the inter-connexion between Swift's political loyalties and his ultimate despair is one of the most interesting features of the book.

Politically, Swift was one of those people who are driven into a sort of perverse Toryism by the follies of the progressive party of the moment. Part I of GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, ostensibly a satire on human greatness, can be seen, if one looks a little deeper, to be simply an attack on England, on the dominant Whig Party, and on the war with France, which–however bad the motives of the Allies may have been–did save Europe from being tyrannized over by a

single reactionary power. Swift was not a Jacobite nor strictly speaking a Tory, and his declared aim in the war was merely a moderate peace treaty and not the outright defeat of England. Nevertheless there is a tinge of quislingism in his attitude, which comes out in the ending of Part I and slightly interferes with the allegory. When Gulliver flees from Lilliput (England) to Blefuscu (France) the assumption that a human being six inches high is inherently contemptible seems to be dropped. Whereas the people of Lilliput have behaved towards Gulliver with the utmost treachery and meanness, those of Blefuscu behave generously and straightforwardly, and indeed this section of the book ends on a different note from the all-round disillusionment of the earlier chapters. Evidently Swift's animus is, in the first place, against ENGLAND. It is "your Natives" (i.e. Gulliver's fellow-countrymen) whom the King of Brobdingnag considers to be "the most pernicious Race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the Earth", and the long passage at the end, denouncing colonization and foreign conquest, is plainly aimed at England, although the contrary is elaborately stated. The Dutch, England's allies and target of one of Swift's most famous pamphlets, are also more or less wantonly attacked in Part III. There is even what sounds like a personal note in the passage in which Gulliver records his satisfaction that the various countries he has discovered cannot be made colonies of the British Crown:

The HOUYHNHNMS, indeed, appear not to be so well prepared for War, a Science to which they are perfect Strangers, and especially against missive Weapons. However, supposing myself to be a Minister of State, I could never give my advice for invading them...Imagine twenty thousand of them breaking into the midst of an EUROPEAN army, confounding the Ranks, overturning the Carriages, battering the Warriors' Faces into Mummy, by terrible Yerks from their hinder hoofs...

Considering that Swift does not waste words, that phrase, "battering the warriors' faces into mummy", probably indicates a secret wish to see the invincible armies of the Duke of Marlborough treated in a like manner. There are similar touches elsewhere. Even the country mentioned in Part III, where "the Bulk of the People

consist, in a Manner, wholly of Discoverers, Witnesses, Informers, Accusers, Prosecutors, Evidences, Swearers, together with their several subservient and subaltern Instruments, all under the Colours, the Conduct, and Pay of Ministers of State", is called Langdon, which is within one letter of being an anagram of England. (As the early editions of the book contain misprints, it may perhaps have been intended as a complete anagram.) Swift's PHYSICAL repulsion from humanity is certainly real enough, but one has the feeling that his debunking of human grandeur, his diatribes against lords, politicians, court favourites, etc., has mainly a local application and springs from the fact that he belonged to the unsuccessful party. He denounces injustice and oppression, but he gives no evidence of liking democracy. In spite of his enormously greater powers, his implied position is very similar to that of the innumerable silly-clever Conservatives of our own day–people like Sir Alan Herbert, Professor G. M. Young, Lord Eiton, the Tory Reform Committee or the long line of Catholic apologists from W. H. Mallock onwards: people who specialize in cracking neat jokes at the expense of whatever is "modern" and "progressive", and whose opinions are often all the more extreme because they know that they cannot influence the actual drift of events. After all, such a pamphlet as AN ARGUMENT TO PROVE THAT THE ABOLISHING OF CHRISTIANITY, etc., is very like "Timothy Shy" having a bit of clean fun with the Brains Trust, or Father Ronald Knox exposing the errors of Bertrand Russell. And the ease with which Swift has been forgiven–and forgiven, sometimes, by devout believers–for the blasphemies of A TALE OF A TUB demonstrates clearly enough the feebleness of religious sentiments as compared with political ones.

However, the reactionary cast of Swift's mind does not show itself chiefly in his political affiliations. The important thing is his attitude towards Science, and, more broadly, towards intellectual curiosity. The famous Academy of Lagado, described in Part III of GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, is no doubt a justified satire on most of the so-called scientists of Swift's own day. Significantly, the people at work in it are described as "Projectors", that is, people not engaged in disinterested research but merely on the look-out for gadgets which will save labour and bring in money. But there is no

sign–indeed, all through the book there are many signs to the contrary–that "pure" science would have struck Swift as a worthwhile activity. The more serious kind of scientist has already had a kick in the pants in Part II, when the "Scholars" patronized by the King of Brobdingnag try to account for Gulliver's small stature:

After much Debate, they concluded unanimously that I was only RELPLUM SCALCATH, which is interpreted literally, LUSUS NATURAE, a Determination exactly agreeable to the modern philosophy of EUROPE, whose Professors, disdaining the old Evasion of OCCULT CAUSES, whereby the followers of ARISTOTLE endeavoured in vain to disguise their Ignorance, have invented this wonderful solution of All Difficulties, to the unspeakable Advancement of human Knowledge.

If this stood by itself one might assume that Swift is merely the enemy of SHAM science. In a number of places, however, he goes out of his way to proclaim the uselessness of all learning or speculation not directed towards some practical end:

The learning of (the Brobdingnaglans) is very defective, consisting only in Morality, History, Poetry, and Mathematics, wherein they must be allowed to excel. But, the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in Life, to the improvement of Agriculture, and all mechanical Arts so that among us it would be little esteemed. And as to Ideas, Entities, Abstractions, and Transcendentals, I could never drive the least Conception into their Heads.

The Houyhnhnms, Swift's ideal beings, are backward even in a mechanical sense. They are unacquainted with metals, have never heard of boats, do not, properly speaking, practise agriculture (we are told that the oats which they live upon "grow naturally"), and appear not to have invented wheels. [Note, below] They have no alphabet, and evidently have not much curiosity about the physical world. They do not believe that any inhabited country exists beside their own, and though they understand the motions of the sun and moon, and the nature of eclipses, "this is the utmost progress of their ASTRONOMY". By contrast, the philosophers of the flying island of Laputa are so continuously absorbed in mathematical speculations that before speaking to them one has to attract their attention by napping them on the ear with a bladder. They have catalogued ten

thousand fixed stars, have settled the periods of ninety-three comets, and have discovered, in advance of the astronomers of Europe, that Mars has two moons–all of which information Swift evidently regards as ridiculous, useless and uninteresting. As one might expect, he believes that the scientist's place, if he has a place, is in the laboratory, and that scientific knowledge has no bearing on political matters:

[Note: Houyhnhnms too old to walk are described as being carried on "sledges" or in "a kind of vehicle, drawn like a sledge". Presumably these had no wheels. (Author's note.)]

What I...thought altogether unaccountable, was the strong Disposition I observed in them towards News and Politics, perpetually enquiring into Public Affairs, giving their judgements in Matters of State, and passionately disputing every inch of a Party Opinion. I have, indeed, observed the same Disposition among most of the Mathematicians I have known in EUROPE, though I could never discover the least Analogy between the two Sciences; unless those people suppose, that, because the smallest Circle hath as many Degrees as the largest, therefore the Regulation and Management of the World require no more Abilities, than the Handling and Turning of a Globe.

Is there not something familiar in that phrase "I could never discover the least analogy between the two sciences"? It has precisely the note of the popular Catholic apologists who profess to be astonished when a scientist utters an opinion on such questions as the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. The scientist, we are told, is an expert only in one restricted field: why should his opinions be of value in any other? The implication is that theology is just as much an exact science as, for instance, chemistry, and that the priest is also an expert whose conclusions on certain subjects must be accepted. Swift in effect makes the same claim for the politician, but he goes one better in that he will not allow the scientist–either the "pure" scientist or the ad hoc investigator–to be a useful person in his own line. Even if he had not written Part III of GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, one could infer from the rest of the book that, like Tolstoy and like Blake, he hates the very idea of studying the processes of Nature. The "Reason" which he so admires in the

Houyhnhnms does not primarily mean the power of drawing logical inferences from observed facts. Although he never defines it, it appears in most contexts to mean either common sense–i.e. acceptance of the obvious and contempt for quibbles and abstractions–or absence of passion and superstition. In general he assumes that we know all that we need to know already, and merely use our knowledge incorrectly. Medicine, for instance, is a useless science, because if we lived in a more natural way, there would be no diseases. Swift, however, is not a simple-lifer or an admirer of the Noble Savage. He is in favour of civilization and the arts of civilization. Not only does he see the value of good manners, good conversation, and even learning of a literary and historical kind, he also sees that agriculture, navigation and architecture need to be studied and could with advantages be improved. But his implied aim is a static, incurious civilization–the world of his own day, a little cleaner, a little saner, with no radical change and no poking into the unknowable. More than one would expect in anyone so free from accepted fallacies, he reveres the past, especially classical antiquity, and believes that modern man has degenerated sharply during the past hundred years. [Note, below] In the island of sorcerers, where the spirits of the dead can be called up at will:

[Note: The physical decadence which Swift claims to have observed may have been a reality at that date. He attributes it to syphilis, which was a new disease in Europe and may have been more virulent than it is now. Distilled liquors, also, were a novelty in the seventeenth century and must have led at first to a great increase in drunkenness. (Author's footnote.)]

I desired that the Senate of ROME might appear before me in one large chamber, and a modern Representative in Counterview, in another. The first seemed to be an Assembly of Heroes and Demy-Gods, the other a Knot of Pedlars, Pick-pockets, Highwaymen and Bullies.

Although Swift uses this section of Part III to attack the truthfulness of recorded history, his critical spirit deserts him as soon as he is dealing with Greeks and Romans. He remarks, of course, upon the corruption of imperial Rome, but he has an almost unreasoning admiration for some of the leading figures of the ancient

world:

I was struck with profound Veneration at the sight of BRUTUS, and could easily discover the most consummate Virtue, the greatest Intrepidity and Firmness of Mind, the truest Love of his Country, and general Benevolence for Mankind, in every Lineament of his Countenance...I had the honour to have much Conversation with BRUTUS, and was told, that his Ancestors JUNIUS, SOCRATES, EPAMINONDAS, CATO the younger, SIR THOMAS MORE, and himself, were perpetually together: a SEXTUMVIRATE, to which all the Ages of the World cannot add a seventh.

It will be noticed that of these six people, only one is a Christian. This is an important point. If one adds together Swift's pessimism, his reverence for the past, his incuriosity and his horror of the human body, one arrives at an attitude common among religious reactionaries–that is, people who defend an unjust order of Society by claiming that this world cannot be substantially improved and only the "next world" matters. However, Swift shows no sign of having any religious beliefs, at least in any ordinary sense of the words. He does not appear to believe seriously in life after death, and his idea of goodness is bound up with republicanism, love of liberty, courage, "benevolence" (meaning in effect public spirit), "reason" and other pagan qualities. This reminds one that there is another strain in Swift, not quite congruous with his disbelief in progress and his general hatred of humanity.

To begin with, he has moments when he is "constructive" and even "advanced". To be occasionally inconsistent is almost a mark of vitality in Utopia books, and Swift sometimes inserts a word of praise into a passage that ought to be purely satirical. Thus, his ideas about the education of the young are fathered on to the Lilliputians, who have much the same views on this subject as the Houyhnhnms. The Lilliputians also have various social and legal institutions (for instance, there are old age pensions, and people are rewarded for keeping the law as well as punished for breaking it) which Swift would have liked to see prevailing in his own country. In the middle of this passage Swift remembers his satirical intention and adds, "In relating these and the following Laws, I would only be understood to mean the original Institutions, and not the most scandalous

Corruptions into which these people are fallen by the degenerate Nature of Man" but as Lilliput is supposed to represent England, and the laws he is speaking of have never had their parallel in England, it is clear that the impulse to make constructive suggestions has been too much for him. But Swift's greatest contribution to political thought in the narrower sense of the words, is his attack, especially in Part III, on what would now be called totalitarianism. He has an extraordinarily clear prevision of the spy-haunted "police State", with its endless heresy-hunts and treason trials, all really designed to neutralize popular discontent by changing it into war hysteria. And one must remember that Swift is here inferring the whole from a quite small part, for the feeble governments of his own day did not give him illustrations ready-made. For example, there is the professor at the School of Political Projectors who "shewed me a large Paper of Instructions for discovering Plots and Conspiracies", and who claimed that one can find people's secret thoughts by examining their excrement:

Because Men are never so serious, thoughtful, and intent, as when they are at Stool, which he found by frequent Experiment: for in such Conjunctures, when he used meerly as a trial to consider what was the best Way of murdering the King, his Ordure would have a tincture of Green; but quite different when he thought only of raising an Insurrection, or burning the Metropolis.

The professor and his theory are said to have been suggested to Swift by the–from our point of view–not particularly astonishing or disgusting fact that in a recent State trial some letters found in somebody's privy had been put in evidence. Later in the same chapter we seem to be positively in the middle of the Russian purges:

In the Kingdom of Tribnia, by the Natives called Langdon...the Bulk of the People consist, in a Manner, wholly of Discoverers, Witnesses, Informers, Accusers, Prosecutors, Evidences, Swearers...It is first agreed, and settled among them, what suspected Persons shall be accused of a Plot: Then, effectual Care is taken to secure all their Letters and Papers, and put the Owners in Chains. These papers are delivered to a Sett of Artists, very dexterous in finding out the mysterious Meanings of Words, Syllables, and Letters...Where this method fails, they have two others more

effectual, which the Learned among them call ACROSTICS and ANAGRAMS. FIRST, they can decypher all initial Letters into political Meanings: Thus: N shall signify a Plot, B a Regiment of Horse, L a Fleet at Sea: Or, SECONDLY, by transposing the Letters of the Alphabet in any suspected Paper, they can lay open the deepest Designs of a discontented Party. So, for Example if I should say in a Letter to a Friend, OUR BROTHER TOM HAS JUST GOT THE PILES, a skilful Decypherer would discover that the same Letters, which compose that Sentence, may be analysed in the following Words: RESIST–A PLOT IS BROUGHT HOME–THE TOUR (Note: tower). And this is the anagrammatic method.

Other professors at the same school invent simplified languages, write books by machinery, educate their pupils by inscribing the lesson on a wafer and causing them to swallow it, or propose to abolish individuality altogether by cutting off part of the brain of one man and grafting it on to the head of another. There is something queerly familiar in the atmosphere of these chapters, because, mixed up with much fooling, there is a perception that one of the aims of totalitarianism is not merely to make sure that people will think the right thoughts, but actually to make them LESS CONSCIOUS. Then, again, Swift's account of the Leader who is usually to be found ruling over a tribe of Yahoos, and of the "favourite" who acts first as a dirty-worker and later as a scapegoat, fits remarkably well into the pattern of our own times. But are we to infer from all this that Swift was first and foremost an enemy of tyranny and a champion of the free intelligence? No: his own views, so far as one can discern them, are not markedly liberal. No doubt he hates lords, kings, bishops, generals, ladies of fashion, orders, titles and flummery generally, but he does not seem to o think better of the common people than of their rulers, or to be in favour of increased social equality, or to be enthusiastic about representative institutions. The Houyhnhnms are organized upon a sort of caste system which is racial in character, the horses which do the menial work being of different colours from their masters and not interbreeding with them. The educational system which Swift admires in the Lilliputians takes hereditary class distinctions for granted, and the children of the poorest classes do not go to school, because "their Business being only to till and cultivate

the Earth... therefore their Education is of little Consequence to the Public". Nor does he seem to have been strongly in favour of freedom of speech and the Press, in spite of the toleration which his own writings enjoyed. The King of Brobdingnag is astonished at the multiplicity of religious and political sects in England, and considers that those who hold "opinions prejudicial to the public" (in the context this seems to mean simply heretical opinions), though they need not be obliged to change them, ought to be obliged to conceal them: for "as it was Tyranny in any Government to require the first, so it was weakness not to enforce the second". There is a subtler indication of Swift's own attitude in the manner in which Gulliver leaves the land of the Houyhnhnms. Intermittently, at least. Swift was a kind of anarchist, and Part IV of GULLIVER'S TRAVELS is a picture of an anarchistic Society, not governed by law in the ordinary sense, but by the dictates of "Reason", which arc voluntarily accepted by everyone. The General Assembly of the Houyhnhnms "exhorts" Gulliver's master to get rid of him, and his neighbours put pressure on him to make him comply. Two reasons are given. One is that the presence of this unusual Yahoo may unsettle the rest of the tribe, and the other is that a friendly relationship between a Houyhnhnm and a Yahoo is "not agreeable to Reason or Nature, or a Thing ever heard of before among them". Gulliver's master is somewhat unwilling to obey, but the "exhortation" (a Houyhnhnm, we are told, is never COMPELLED to do anything, he is merely "exhorted" or "advised") cannot be disregarded. This illustrates very well the totalitarian tendency which is explicit in the anarchist or pacifist vision of Society. In a Society in which there is no law, and in theory no compulsion, the only arbiter of behaviour is public opinion. But public opinion, because of the tremendous urge to conformity in gregarious animals, is less tolerant than any system of law. When human beings are governed by "thou shalt not", the individual can practise a certain amount of eccentricity: when they are supposedly governed by "love" or "reason", he is under continuous pressure to make him behave and think in exactly the same way as everyone else. The Houyhnhnms, we are told, were unanimous on almost all subjects. The only question they ever DISCUSSED was how to deal with the Yahoos. Otherwise there was

no room for disagreement among them, because the truth is always either self-evident, or else it is undiscoverable and unimportant. They had apparently no word for "opinion" in their language, and in their conversations there was no "difference of sentiments". They had reached, in fact, the highest stage of totalitarian organization, the stage when conformity has become so general that there is no need for a police force. Swift approves of this kind of thing because among his many gifts neither curiosity nor good-nature was included. Disagreement would always seem to him sheer perversity. "Reason," among the Houyhnhnms, he says, "is not a Point Problematical, as with us, where men can argue with Plausibility on both Sides of a Question; but strikes you with immediate Conviction; as it must needs do, where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by Passion and Interest." In other words, we know everything already, so why should dissident opinions be tolerated? The totalitarian Society of the Houyhnhnms, where there can be no freedom and no development, follows naturally from this.

We are right to think of Swift as a rebel and iconoclast, but except in certain secondary matters, such as his insistence that women should receive the same education as men, he cannot be labelled "Left". He is a Tory anarchist, despising authority while disbelieving in liberty, and preserving the aristocratic outlook while seeing clearly that the existing aristocracy is degenerate and contemptible. When Swift utters one of his characteristic diatribes against the rich and powerful, one must probably, as I said earlier, write off something for the fact that he himself belonged to the less successful party, and was personally disappointed. The "outs", for obvious reasons, are always more radical than the "ins". [Note, below] But the most essential thing in Swift is his inability to believe that life–ordinary life on the solid earth, and not some rationalized, deodorized version of it–could be made worth living. Of course, no honest person claims that happiness is NOW a normal condition among adult human beings; but perhaps it COULD be made normal, and it is upon this question that all serious political controversy really turns. Swift has much in common–more, I believe, than has been noticed–with Tolstoy, another disbeliever in the possibility of happiness. In both men you have the same anarchistic outlook covering an authoritarian

cast of mind; in both a similar hostility to Science, the same impatience with opponents, the same inability to see the importance of any question not interesting to themselves; and in both cases a sort of horror of the actual process of life, though in Tolstoy's case it was arrived at later and in a different way. The sexual unhappiness of the two men was not of the same kind, but there was this in common, that in both of them a sincere loathing was mixed up with a morbid fascination. Tolstoy was a reformed rake who ended by preaching complete celibacy, while continuing to practise the opposite into extreme old age. Swift was presumably impotent, and had an exaggerated horror of human dung: he also thought about it incessantly, as is evident throughout his works. Such people are not likely to enjoy even the small amount of happiness that falls to most human beings, and, from obvious motives, are not likely to admit that earthly life is capable of much improvement. Their incuriosity, and hence their intolerance, spring from the same root.

[Note: At the end of the book, as typical specimens of human folly and viciousness, Swift names "a Lawyer, a Pickpocket, a Colonel, a Fool, a Lord, a Gamester, a Politician, a Whore-master, a Physician, an Evidence, a Suborner, an Attorney, a Traitor, or the like". One sees here the irresponsible violence of the powerless. The list lumps together those who break the conventional code, and those who keep it. For instance, if you automatically condemn a colonel, as such, on what grounds do you condemn a traitor? Or again, if you want to suppress pickpockets, you must have laws, which means that you must have lawyers. But the whole closing passage, in which the hatred is so authentic, and the reason given for it so inadequate, is somehow unconvincing. One has the feeling that personal animosity is at work. (Author's footnote.)]

Swift's disgust, rancour and pessimism would make sense against the background of a "next world" to which this one is the prelude. As he does not appear to believe seriously in any such thing, it becomes necessary to construct a paradise supposedly existing on the surface of the earth, but something quite different from anything we know, with all that he disapproves of–lies, folly, change, enthusiasm, pleasure, love and dirt–eliminated from it. As his ideal being he chooses the horse, an animal whose excrement is not offensive. The

Houyhnhnms are dreary beasts–this is so generally admitted that the point is not worth labouring. Swift's genius can make them credible, but there can have been very few readers in whom they have excited any feeling beyond dislike. And this is not from wounded vanity at seeing animals preferred to men; for, of the two, the Houyhnhnms are much liker to human beings than are the Yahoos, and Gulliver's horror of the Yahoos, together with his recognition that they are the same kind of creature as himself, contains a logical absurdity. This horror comes upon him at his very first sight of them. "I never beheld," he says, "in all my Travels, so disagreeable an Animal, nor one against which I naturally conceived so strong an Antipathy." But in comparison with what are the Yahoos disgusting? Not with the Houyhnhnms, because at this time Gulliver has not seen a Houyhnhnm. It can only be in comparison with himself, i.e. with a human being. Later, however, we are to be told that the Yahoos ARE human beings, and human society becomes insupportable to Gulliver because all men are Yahoos. In that case why did he not conceive his disgust of humanity earlier? In effect we are told that the Yahoos are fantastically different from men, and yet are the same. Swift has over-reached himself in his fury, and is shouting at his fellow-creatures, "You are filthier than you are!" However, it is impossible to feel much sympathy with the Yahoos, and it is not because they oppress the Yahoos that the Houyhnhnms are unattractive. They are unattractive because the "Reason" by which they are governed is really a desire for death. They are exempt from love, friendship, curiosity, fear, sorrow and–except in their feelings towards the Yahoos, who occupy rather the same place in their community as the Jews in Nazi Germany–anger and hatred. "They have no Fondness for their Colts or Foles, but the Care they take, in educating them, proceeds entirely from the Dictates of REASON." They lay store by "Friendship" and "Benevolence", but "these are not confined to particular Objects, but universal to the whole Race". They also value conversation, but in their conversations there are no differences of opinion, and "nothing passed but what was useful, expressed in the fewest and most significant Words". They practise strict birth control, each couple producing two offspring and thereafter abstaining from sexual intercourse. Their marriages are arranged for

them by their elders, on eugenic principles, and their language contains no word for "love", in the sexual sense. When somebody dies they carry on exactly as before, without feeling any grief. It will be seen that their aim is to be as like a corpse as is possible while retaining physical life. One or two of their characteristics, it is true, do not seem to be strictly "reasonable" in their own usage of the word. Thus, they place a great value not only on physical hardihood but on athleticism, and they are devoted to poetry. But these exceptions may be less arbitrary than they seem. Swift probably emphasizes the physical strength of the Houyhnhnms in order to make clear that they could never be conquered by the hated human race, while a taste for poetry may figure among their qualities because poetry appeared to Swift as the antithesis of Science, from his point of view the most useless of all pursuits. In Part III he names "Imagination, Fancy, and Invention" as desirable faculties in which the Laputan mathematicians (in spite of their love of music) were wholly lacking. One must remember that although Swift was an admirable writer of comic verse, the kind of poetry he thought valuable would probably be didactic poetry. The poetry of the Houyhnhnms, he says:

must be allowed to excel (that of) all other Mortals; wherein the Justness of their Similes, and the Minuteness, as well as exactness, of their Descriptions, are, indeed, inimitable. Their Verses abound very much in both of these; and usually contain either some exalted Notions of Friendship and Benevolence, or the Praises of those who were Victors in Races, and other bodily Exercises.

Alas, not even the genius of Swift was equal to producing a specimen by which we could judge the poetry of the Houyhnhnms. But it sounds as though it were chilly stuff (in heroic couplets, presumably), and not seriously in conflict with the principles of "Reason".

Happiness is notoriously difficult to describe, and pictures of a just and well-ordered Society are seldom either attractive or convincing. Most creators of "favourable" Utopias, however, are concerned to show what life could be like if it were lived more fully. Swift advocates a simple refusal of life, justifying this by the claim that "Reason" consists in thwarting your instincts. The Houyhnhnms,

creatures without a history, continue for generation after generation to live prudently, maintaining their population at exactly the same level, avoiding all passion, suffering from no diseases, meeting death indifferently, training up their young in the same principles–and all for what? In order that the same process may continue indefinitely. The notions that life here and now is worth living, or that it could be made worth living, or that it must be sacrificed for some future good, are all absent. The dreary world of the Houyhnhnms was about as good a Utopia as Swift could construct, granting that he neither believed in a "next world" nor could get any pleasure out of certain normal activities. But it is not really set up as something desirable in itself, but as the justification for another attack on humanity. The aim, as usual, is to humiliate Man by reminding him that he is weak and ridiculous, and above all that he stinks; and the ultimate motive, probably, is a kind of envy, the envy of the ghost for the living, of the man who knows he cannot be happy for the others who–so he fears–may be a little happier than himself. The political expression of such an outlook must be either reactionary or nihilistic, because the person who holds it will want to prevent Society from developing in some direction in which his pessimism may be cheated. One can do this either by blowing everything to pieces, or by averting social change. Swift ultimately blew everything to pieces in the only way that was feasible before the atomic bomb–that is, he went mad–but, as I have tried to show, his political aims were on the whole reactionary ones.

From what I have written it may have seemed that I am AGAINST Swift, and that my object is to refute him and even to belittle him. In a political and moral sense I am against him, so far as I understand him. Yet curiously enough he is one of the writers I admire with least reserve, and GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, in particular, is a book which it seems impossible for me to grow tired of. I read it first when I was, eight–one day short of eight, to be exact, for I stole and furtively read the copy which was to be given me next day on my eighth birthday–and I have certainly not read it less than half a dozen times since. Its fascination seems inexhaustible. If I had to make a list of six books which were to be preserved when all others were destroyed, I would certainly put GULLIVER'S

TRAVELS among them. This raises the question: what is the relationship between agreement with a writer's opinions, and enjoyment of his work?

If one is capable of intellectual detachment, one can PERCEIVE merit in a writer whom one deeply disagrees with, but ENJOYMENT is a different matter. Supposing that there is such a thing as good or bad art, then the goodness or badness must reside in the work of art itself–not independently of the observer, indeed, but independently of the mood of the observer. In one sense, therefore, it cannot be true that a poem is good on Monday and bad on Tuesday. But if one judges the poem by the appreciation it arouses, then it can certainly be true, because appreciation, or enjoyment, is a subjective condition which cannot be commanded. For a great deal of his waking life, even the most cultivated person has no aesthetic feelings whatever, and the power to have aesthetic feelings is very easily destroyed. When you are frightened, or hungry, or are suffering from toothache or sea-sickness, KING LEAR is no better from your point of view than PETER PAN. You may know in an intellectual sense that it is better, but that is simply a fact which you remember: you will not FEEL the merit of KING LEAR until you are normal again. And aesthetic judgement can be upset just as disastrously–more disastrously, because the cause is less readily recognized–by political or moral disagreement. If a book angers, wounds or alarms you, then you will not enjoy it, whatever its merits may be. If it seems to you a really pernicious book, likely to influence other people in some undesirable way, then you will probably construct an aesthetic theory to show that it HAS no merits. Current literary criticism consists quite largely of this kind of dodging to and fro between two sets of standards. And yet the opposite process can also happen: enjoyment can overwhelm disapproval, even though one clearly recognizes that one is enjoying something inimical. Swift, whose world-view is so peculiarly unacceptable, but who is nevertheless an extremely popular writer, is a good instance of this. Why is it that we don't mind being called Yahoos, although firmly convinced that we are NOT Yahoos?

It is not enough to make the usual answer that of course Swift was wrong, in fact he was insane, but he was "a good writer". It is true

that the literary quality of a book is to some small extent separable from its subject-matter. Some people have a native gift for using words, as some people have a naturally "good eye" at games. It is largely a question of timing and of instinctively knowing how much emphasis to use. As an example near at hand, look back at the passage I quoted earlier, starting "In the Kingdom of Tribnia, by the Natives called Langdon". It derives much of its force from the final sentence: "And this is the anagram-made Method." Strictly speaking this sentence is unnecessary, for we have already seen the anagram decyphered, but the mock-solemn repetition, in which one seems to hear Swift's own voice uttering the words, drives home the idiocy of the activities described, like the final tap to a nail. But not all the power and simplicity of Swift's prose, nor the imaginative effort that has been able to make not one but a whole series of impossible worlds more credible than the majority of history books–none of this would enable us to enjoy Swift if his world-view were truly wounding or shocking. Millions of people, in many countries, must have enjoyed GULLIVER'S TRAVELS while more or less seeing its anti-human implications: and even the child who accepts Parts i and ii as a simple story gets a sense of absurdity from thinking of human beings six inches high. The explanation must be that Swift's world-view is felt to be NOT altogether false–or it would probably be more accurate to say, not false all the time. Swift is a diseased writer. He remains permanently in a depressed mood which in most people is only intermittent, rather as though someone suffering from jaundice or the after-effects of influenza should have the energy to write books. But we all know that mood, and something in us responds to the expression of it. Take, for instance, one of his most characteristic works, The Lady's Dressing Room: one might add the kindred poem, Upon a Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed. Which is truer, the viewpoint expressed in these poems, or the viewpoint implied in Blake's phrase, "The naked female human form divine"? No doubt Blake is nearer the truth, and yet who can fail to feel a sort of pleasure in seeing that fraud, feminine delicacy, exploded for once? Swift falsifies his picture of the world by refusing to see anything in human life except dirt, folly and wickedness, but the part which he abstracts from the whole does exist, and it is something which we all

know about while shrinking from mentioning it. Part of our minds–in any normal person it is the dominant part–believes that man is a noble animal and life is worth living: but there is also a sort of inner self which at least intermittently stands aghast at the horror of existence. In the queerest way, pleasure and disgust are linked together. The human body is beautiful: it is also repulsive and ridiculous, a fact which can be verified at any swimming pool. The sexual organs are objects of desire and also of loathing, so much so that in many languages, if not in all languages, their names are used as words of abuse. Meat is delicious, but a butcher's shop makes one feel sick: and indeed all our food springs ultimately from dung and dead bodies, the two things which of all others seem to us the most horrible. A child, when it is past the infantile stage but still looking at the world with fresh eyes, is moved by horror almost as often as by wonder–horror of snot and spittle, of the dogs' excrement on the pavement, the dying toad full of maggots, the sweaty smell of grown-ups, the hideousness of old men, with their bald heads and bulbous noses. In his endless harping on disease, dirt and deformity, Swift is not actually inventing anything, he is merely leaving something out. Human behaviour, too, especially in politics, is as he describes it, although it contains other more important factors which he refuses to admit. So far as we can see, both horror and pain are necessary to the continuance of life on this planet, and it is therefore open to pessimists like Swift to say: "If horror and pain must always be with us, how can life be significantly improved?" His attitude is in effect the Christian attitude, minus the bribe of a "next world"–which, however, probably has less hold upon the minds of believers than the conviction that this world is a vale of tears and the grave is a place of rest. It is, I am certain, a wrong attitude, and one which could have harmful effects upon behaviour; but something in us responds to it, as it responds to the gloomy words of the burial service and the sweetish smell of corpses in a country church.

It is often argued, at least by people who admit the importance of subject-matter, that a book cannot be "good" if it expresses a palpably false view of life. We are told that in our own age, for instance, any book that has genuine literary merit will also be more or less "progressive" in tendency. This ignores the fact that

throughout history a similar struggle between progress and reaction has been raging, and that the best books of any one age have always been written from several different viewpoints, some of them palpably more false than others. In so far as a writer is a propagandist, the most one can ask of him is that he shall genuinely believe in what he is saying, and that it shall not be something blazingly silly. To-day, for example, one can imagine a good book being written by a Catholic, a Communist, a Fascist, pacifist, an anarchist, perhaps by an old-style Liberal or an ordinary Conservative: one cannot imagine a good book being written by a spiritualist, a Buchmanite or a member of the Ku-Klux-Klan. The views that a writer holds must be compatible with sanity, in the medical sense, and with the power of continuous thought: beyond that what we ask of him is talent, which is probably another name for conviction. Swift did not possess ordinary wisdom, but he did possess a terrible intensity of vision, capable of picking out a single hidden truth and then magnifying it and distorting it. The durability of GULLIVER'S TRAVELS goes to show that, if the force of belief is behind it, a world-view which only just passes the test of sanity is sufficient to produce a great work of art.

RIDING DOWN FROM BANGOR

The reappearance of HELEN'S BABIES, in its day one of the most popular books in the world–within the British Empire alone it was pirated by twenty different publishing firms, the author receiving a total profit of £40 from a sale of some hundreds of thousands or millions of copies–will ring a bell in any literate person over thirty-five. Not that the present edition is an altogether satisfactory one. It is a cheap little book with rather unsuitable illustrations, various American dialect words appear to have been cut out of it, and the sequel, OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN, which was often bound up with it in earlier editions, is missing. Still, it is pleasant to see HELEN'S BABIES in print again. It had become almost a rarity in recent years, and it is one of the best of the little library of American books on which people born at about the turn of the century were brought up.

The books one reads in childhood, and perhaps most of all the bad and good bad books, create in one's mind a sort of false map of the world, a series of fabulous countries into which one can retreat at odd moments throughout the rest of life, and which in some cases can even survive a visit to the real countries which they are supposed to represent. The pampas, the Amazon, the coral islands of the Pacific, Russia, land of birch-tree and samovar, Transylvania with its boyars and vampires, the China of Guy Boothby, the Paris of du Maurier–one could continue the list for a long time. But one other imaginary country that I acquired early in life was called America. If I pause on the word "America", and, deliberately putting aside the existing reality, call up my childhood vision of it, I see two pictures–composite pictures, of course, from which I am omitting a good deal of the detail.

One is of a boy sitting in a whitewashed stone schoolroom. He wears braces and has patches on his shirt, and if it is summer he is barefooted. In the corner of the school room there is a bucket of drinking water with a dipper. The boy lives in a farm-house, also of stone and also whitewashed, which has a mortgage on it. He aspires to be President, and is expected to keep the woodpile full.

Somewhere in the background of the picture, but completely dominating it, is a huge black Bible. The other picture is of a tall, angular man, with a shapeless hat pulled down over his eyes, leaning against a wooden paling and whittling at a stick. His lower jaw moves slowly but ceaselessly. At very long intervals he emits some piece of wisdom such as "A woman is the orneriest critter there is, 'ceptin' a mule", or "When you don't know a thing to do, don't do a thing"; but more often it is a jet of tobacco juice that issues from the gap in his front teeth. Between them those two pictures summed up my earliest impression of America. And of the two, the first–which, I suppose, represented New England, the other representing the South–had the stronger hold upon me.

The books from which these pictures were derived included, of course, books which it is still possible to take seriously, such as TOM SAWYER and UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, but the most richly American flavour was to be found in minor works which are now almost forgotten. I wonder, for instance, if anyone still reads REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM, which remained a popular favourite long enough to be filmed with Mary Pickford in the leading part. Or how about the "Katy" books by Susan Coolidge (WHAT KATY DID AT SCHOOL, etc), which, although girls' books and therefore "soppy", had the fascination of foreignness? Louisa M. Alcott's LITTLE WOMEN and GOOD WIVES are, I suppose, still flickeringly in print, and certainly they still have their devotees. As a child I loved both of them, though I was less pleased by the third of the trilogy, LITTLE MEN. That model school where the worst punishment was to have to whack the schoolmaster, on "this hurts me more than it hurts you" principles, was rather difficult to swallow.

HELEN'S BABIES belonged in much the same world as LITTLE WOMEN, and must have been published round about the same date. Then there were Artemus Ward, Bret Harte, and various songs, hymns and ballads, besides poems dealing with the civil war, such as "Barbara Fritchie" ("Shoot if you must this old grey head, But spare your country's flag,' she said") and "Little Gifford of Tennessee". There were other books so obscure that it hardly seems worth mentioning them, and magazine stories of which I remember nothing except that the old homestead always seemed to have a mortgage on

it. There was also BEAUTIFUL JOE, the American reply to BLACK BEAUTY, of which you might just possibly pick up a copy in a sixpenny box. All the books I have mentioned were written well before 1900, but something of the special American flavour lingered on into this century in, for instance, the Buster Brown coloured supplements, and even in Booth Tarkington's "Penrod" stories, which will have been written round about 1910. Perhaps there was even a tinge of it in Ernest Thompson Seton's animal books (WILD ANIMALS I HAVE KNOWN, etc), which have now fallen from favour but which drew tears from the pre-1914 child as surely as MISUNDERSTOOD had done from the children of a generation earlier.

Somewhat later my picture of nineteenth-century America was given greater precision by a song which is still fairly well known and which can be found (I think) in the SCOTTISH STUDENTS' SONG BOOK. As usual in these bookless days I cannot get hold of a copy, and I must quote fragments from memory. It begins:

Riding down from Bangor
On an Eastern train,
Bronzed with weeks of hunting
In the woods of Maine
Quite extensive whiskers,
Beard, moustache as well
Sat a student fellow,
Tall and slim and swell.

Presently an aged couple and a "village maiden", described as "beautiful, petite", get into the carriage. Quantities of cinders are flying about, and before long the student fellow gets one in his eye: the village maiden extracts it for him, to the scandal of the aged couple. Soon after this the train shoots into a long tunnel, "black as Egypt's night". When it emerges into the daylight again the maiden is covered with blushes, and the cause of her confusion is revealed when:

There suddenly appeared
A tiny little ear-ring
In that horrid student's beard!

I do not know the date of the song, but the primitiveness of the

train (no lights in the carriage, and a cinder in one's eye a normal accident) suggests that it belongs well back in the nineteenth century.

What connects this song with books like HELEN'S BABIES is first of all a sort of sweet innocence–the climax, the thing you are supposed to be slightly shocked at, is an episode with which any modern piece of naughty-naughty would START–and, secondly, a faint vulgarity of language mixed up with a certain cultural pretentiousness. HELEN'S BABIES is intended as a humorous, even a farcical book, but it is haunted all the way through by words like "tasteful" and "ladylike", and it is funny chiefly because its tiny disasters happen against a background of conscious gentility. "Handsome, intelligent, composed, tastefully dressed, without a suspicion of the flirt or the languid woman of fashion about her, she awakened to the utmost my every admiring sentiment"–thus is the heroine described, figuring elsewhere as "erect, fresh, neat, composed, bright-eyed, fair-faced, smiling and observant". One gets beautiful glimpses of a now-vanished world in such remarks as: "I believe you arranged the floral decorations at St Zephaniah's Fair last winter, Mr Burton? 'Twas the most tasteful display of the season." But in spite of the occasional use of "'twas" and other archaisms–"parlour" for sitting-room, "chamber" for bedroom, "real" as an adverb, and so forth–the book does not "date" very markedly, and many of its admirers imagine it to have been written round about 1900. Actually it was written in 1875, a fact which one might infer from internal evidence, since the hero, aged twenty-eight, is a veteran of the civil war.

The book is very short and the story is a simple one. A young bachelor is prevailed on by his sister to look after her house and her two sons, aged five and three, while she and her husband go on a fortnight's holiday. The children drive him almost mad by an endless succession of such acts as falling into ponds, swallowing poison, throwing keys down wells, cutting themselves with razors, and the like, but also facilitate his engagement to "a charming girl, whom, for about a year, I had been adoring from afar". These events take place in an outer suburb of New York, in a society which now seems astonishingly sedate, formal, domesticated and, according to current conceptions, un-American. Every action is governed by etiquette. To

pass a carriage full of ladies when your hat is crooked is an ordeal; to recognise an acquaintance in church is ill-bred; to become engaged after a ten days' courtship is a severe social lapse. We are accustomed to thinking of American society as more crude, adventurous and, in a cultural sense, democratic than our own, and from writers like Mark Twain, Whitman and Bret Harte, not to mention the cowboy and Red Indian stories of the weekly papers, one draws a picture of a wild anarchic world peopled by eccentrics and desperadoes who have no traditions and no attachment to one place. That aspect of nineteenth-century America did of course exist, but in the more populous eastern States a society similar to Jane Austen's seems to have survived longer than it did in England. And it is hard not to feel that it was a better kind of society than that which arose from the sudden industrialisation of the later part of the century. The people in HELEN'S BABIES or LITTLE WOMEN may be mildly ridiculous, but they are uncorrupted. They have something that is perhaps best described as integrity, or good morale, founded partly on an unthinking piety. It is a matter of course that everyone attends church on Sunday morning and says grace before meals and prayers at bedtime: to amuse the children one tells them Bible stories, and if they ask for a song it is probably "Glory, glory Hallelujah". Perhaps it is also a sign of spiritual health in the light literature of this period that death is mentioned freely. "Baby Phil", the brother of Budge and Toddie, has died shortly before HELEN'S BABIES opens, and there are various tear-jerking references to his "tiny coffin". A modern writer attempting a story of this kind would have kept coffins out of it.

English children are still Americanised by way of the films, but it would no longer be generally claimed that American books are the best ones for children. Who, without misgivings, would bring up a child on the coloured "comics" in which sinister professors manufacture atomic bombs in underground laboratories while Superman whizzes through the clouds, the machine-gun bullets bouncing off his chest like peas, and platinum blondes are raped, or very nearly, by steel robots and fifty-foot dinosaurs? It is a far cry from Superman to the Bible and the woodpile. The earlier children's books, or books readable by children, had not only innocence but a

sort of native gaiety, a buoyant, carefree feeling, which was the product, presumably, of the unheard-of freedom and security which nineteenth-century America enjoyed. That is the connecting link between books so seemingly far apart as LITTLE WOMEN and LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI. The society described in the one is subdued, bookish and home-loving, while the other tells of a crazy world of bandits, gold mines, duels, drunkenness and gambling hells: but in both one can detect an underlying confidence in the future, a sense of freedom and opportunity.

Nineteenth-century America was a rich, empty country which lay outside the main stream of world events, and in which the twin nightmares that beset nearly every modern man, the nightmare of unemployment and the nightmare of State interference, had hardly come into being. There were social distinctions, more marked than those of today, and there was poverty (in LITTLE WOMEN, it will be remembered, the family is at one time so hard up that one of the girls sells her hair to the barber), but there was not, as there is now, an all-prevailing sense of helplessness. There was room for everybody, and if you worked hard you could be certain of a living–could even be certain of growing rich: this was generally believed, and for the greater part of the population it was even broadly true. In other words, the civilisation of nineteenth-century America was capitalist civilisation at its best. Soon after the civil war the inevitable deterioration started. But for some decades, at least, life in America was much better fun than life in Europe–there was more happening, more colour, more variety, more opportunity–and the books and songs of that period had a sort of bloom, a childlike quality. Hence, I think, the popularity of HELEN'S BABIES and other "light" literature, which made it normal for the English child of thirty or forty years ago to grow up with a theoretical knowledge of raccoons, woodchucks, chipmunks, gophers, hickory trees, water-melons and other unfamiliar fragments of the American scene.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE COMMON TOAD

Before the swallow, before the daffodil, and not much later than the snowdrop, the common toad salutes the coming of spring after his own fashion, which is to emerge from a hole in the ground, where he has lain buried since the previous autumn, and crawl as rapidly as possible towards the nearest suitable patch of water. Something–some kind of shudder in the earth, or perhaps merely a rise of a few degrees in the temperature–has told him that it is time to wake up: though a few toads appear to sleep the clock round and miss out a year from time to time–at any rate, I have more than once dug them up, alive and apparently well, in the middle of the summer.

At this period, after his long fast, the toad has a very spiritual look, like a strict Anglo-Catholic towards the end of Lent. His movements are languid but purposeful, his body is shrunken, and by contrast his eyes look abnormally large. This allows one to notice, what one might not at another time, that a toad has about the most beautiful eye of any living creature. It is like gold, or more exactly it is like the golden-coloured semi-precious stone which one sometimes sees in signet-rings, and which I think is called a chrysoberyl.

For a few days after getting into the water the toad concentrates on building up his strength by eating small insects. Presently he has swollen to his normal size again, and then he hoes through a phase of intense sexiness. All he knows, at least if he is a male toad, is that he wants to get his arms round something, and if you offer him a stick, or even your finger, he will cling to it with surprising strength and take a long time to discover that it is not a female toad. Frequently one comes upon shapeless masses of ten or twenty toads rolling over and over in the water, one clinging to another without distinction of sex. By degrees, however, they sort themselves out into couples, with the male duly sitting on the female's back. You can now distinguish males from females, because the male is smaller, darker and sits on top, with his arms tightly clasped round the female's neck. After a day or two the spawn is laid in long strings which wind themselves in and out of the reeds and soon become invisible. A few more weeks, and the water is alive with masses of tiny tadpoles which

rapidly grow larger, sprout hind-legs, then forelegs, then shed their tails: and finally, about the middle of the summer, the new generation of toads, smaller than one's thumb-nail but perfect in every particular, crawl out of the water to begin the game anew.

I mention the spawning of the toads because it is one of the phenomena of spring which most deeply appeal to me, and because the toad, unlike the skylark and the primrose, has never had much of a boost from poets. But I am aware that many people do not like reptiles or amphibians, and I am not suggesting that in order to enjoy the spring you have to take an interest in toads. There are also the crocus, the missel-thrush, the cuckoo, the blackthorn, etc. The point is that the pleasures of spring are available to everybody, and cost nothing. Even in the most sordid street the coming of spring will register itself by some sign or other, if it is only a brighter blue between the chimney pots or the vivid green of an elder sprouting on a blitzed site. Indeed it is remarkable how Nature goes on existing unofficially, as it were, in the very heart of London. I have seen a kestrel flying over the Deptford gasworks, and I have heard a first-rate performance by a blackbird in the Euston Road. There must be some hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of birds living inside the four-mile radius, and it is rather a pleasing thought that none of them pays a halfpenny of rent.

As for spring, not even the narrow and gloomy streets round the Bank of England are quite able to exclude it. It comes seeping in everywhere, like one of those new poison gases which pass through all filters. The spring is commonly referred to as "a miracle", and during the past five or six years this worn-out figure of speech has taken on a new lease of life. After the sorts of winters we have had to endure recently, the spring does seem miraculous, because it has become gradually harder and harder to believe that it is actually going to happen. Every February since 1940 I have found myself thinking that this time winter is going to be permanent. But Persephone, like the toads, always rises from the dead at about the same moment. Suddenly, towards the end of March, the miracle happens and the decaying slum in which I live is transfigured. Down in the square the sooty privets have turned bright green, the leaves are thickening on the chestnut trees, the daffodils are out, the

wallflowers are budding, the policeman's tunic looks positively a pleasant shade of blue, the fishmonger greets his customers with a smile, and even the sparrows are quite a different colour, having felt the balminess of the air and nerved themselves to take a bath, their first since last September.

Is it wicked to take a pleasure in spring and other seasonal changes? To put it more precisely, is it politically reprehensible, while we are all groaning, or at any rate ought to be groaning, under the shackles of the capitalist system, to point out that life is frequently more worth living because of a blackbird's song, a yellow elm tree in October, or some other natural phenomenon which does not cost money and does not have what the editors of left-wing newspapers call a class angle? There is not doubt that many people think so. I know by experience that a favourable reference to "Nature" in one of my articles is liable to bring me abusive letters, and though the key-word in these letters is usually "sentimental", two ideas seem to be mixed up in them. One is that any pleasure in the actual process of life encourages a sort of political quietism. People, so the thought runs, ought to be discontented, and it is our job to multiply our wants and not simply to increase our enjoyment of the things we have already. The other idea is that this is the age of machines and that to dislike the machine, or even to want to limit its domination, is backward-looking, reactionary and slightly ridiculous. This is often backed up by the statement that a love of Nature is a foible of urbanized people who have no notion what Nature is really like. Those who really have to deal with the soil, so it is argued, do not love the soil, and do not take the faintest interest in birds or flowers, except from a strictly utilitarian point of view. To love the country one must live in the town, merely taking an occasional week-end ramble at the warmer times of year.

This last idea is demonstrably false. Medieval literature, for instance, including the popular ballads, is full of an almost Georgian enthusiasm for Nature, and the art of agricultural peoples such as the Chinese and Japanese centre always round trees, birds, flowers, rivers, mountains. The other idea seems to me to be wrong in a subtler way. Certainly we ought to be discontented, we ought not simply to find out ways of making the best of a bad job, and yet if we

kill all pleasure in the actual process of life, what sort of future are we preparing for ourselves? If a man cannot enjoy the return of spring, why should he be happy in a labour-saving Utopia? What will he do with the leisure that the machine will give him? I have always suspected that if our economic and political problems are ever really solved, life will become simpler instead of more complex, and that the sort of pleasure one gets from finding the first primrose will loom larger than the sort of pleasure one gets from eating an ice to the tune of a Wurlitzer. I think that by retaining one's childhood love of such things as trees, fishes, butterflies and–to return to my first instance–toads, one makes a peaceful and decent future a little more probable, and that by preaching the doctrine that nothing is to be admired except steel and concrete, one merely makes it a little surer that human beings will have no outlet for their surplus energy except in hatred and leader worship.

At any rate, spring is here, even in London N.1, and they can't stop you enjoying it. This is a satisfying reflection. How many a time have I stood watching the toads mating, or a pair of hares having a boxing match in the young corn, and thought of all the important persons who would stop me enjoying this if they could. But luckily they can't. So long as you are not actually ill, hungry, frightened or immured in a prison or a holiday camp, spring is still spring. The atom bombs are piling up in the factories, the police are prowling through the cities, the lies are streaming from the loudspeakers, but the earth is still going round the sun, and neither the dictators nor the bureaucrats, deeply as they disapprove of the process, are able to prevent it.

THE PREVENTION OF LITERATURE

About a year ago I attended a meeting of the P.E.N. Club, the occasion being the tercentenary of Milton's AEROPAGITICA–A pamphlet, it may be remembered, in defense of freedom of the press. Milton's famous phrase about the sin of "killing" a book was printed on the leaflets advertising the meeting which had been circulated beforehand.

There were four speakers on the platform. One of them delivered a speech which did deal with the freedom of the press, but only in relation to India; another said, hesitantly, and in very general terms, that liberty was a good thing; a third delivered an attack on the laws relating to obscenity in literature. The fourth devoted most of his speech to a defense of the Russian purges. Of the speeches from the body of the hall, some reverted to the question of obscenity and the laws that deal with it, others were simply eulogies of Soviet Russia. Moral liberty–the liberty to discuss sex questions frankly in print–seemed to be generally approved, but political liberty was not mentioned. Out of this concourse of several hundred people, perhaps half of whom were directly connected with the writing trade, there was not a single one who could point out that freedom of the press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticize and oppose. Significantly, no speaker quoted from the pamphlet which was ostensibly being commemorated. Nor was there any mention of the various books which have been "killed" in England and the United States during the war. In its net effect the meeting was a demonstration in favor of censorship. [Note: It is fair to say that the P.E.N. club celebrations, which lasted a week or more, did not always stick at quite the same level. I happened to strike a bad day. But an examination of the speeches (printed under the title FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION) shows that almost nobody in our own day is able to speak out as roundly in favour of intellectual liberty as Milton could do 300 years ago–and this in spite of the fact Milton was writing in a period of civil war. (Author's footnote)]

There was nothing particularly surprising in this. In our age, the idea of intellectual liberty is under attack from two directions. On the

one side are its theoretical enemies, the apologists of totalitarianism, and on the other its immediate, practical enemies, monopoly and bureaucracy. Any writer or journalist who wants to retain his integrity finds himself thwarted by the general drift of society rather than by active persecution. The sort of things that are working against him are the concentration of the press in the hands of a few rich men, the grip of monopoly on radio and the films, the unwillingness of the public to spend money on books, making it necessary for nearly every writer to earn part of his living by hackwork, the encroachment of official bodies like the M.O.I. [Ministry of Information] and the British Council, which help the writer to keep alive but also waste his time and dictate his opinions, and the continuous war atmosphere of the past ten years, whose distorting effects no one has been able to escape. Everything in our age conspires to turn the writer, and every other kind of artist as well, into a minor official, working on themes handed down from above and never telling what seems to him the whole of the truth. But in struggling against this fate he gets no help from his own side; that is, there is no large body of opinion which will assure him that he's in the right. In the past, at any rate throughout the Protestant centuries, the idea of rebellion and the idea of intellectual integrity were mixed up. A heretic–political, moral, religious, or aesthetic–was one who refused to outrage his own conscience. His outlook was summed up in the words of the Revivalist hymn:

Dare to be a Daniel
Dare to stand alone
Dare to have a purpose firm
Dare to make it known

To bring this hymn up to date one would have to add a "Don't" at the beginning of each line. For it is the peculiarity of our age that the rebels against the existing order, at any rate the most numerous and characteristic of them, are also rebelling against the idea of individual integrity. "Daring to stand alone" is ideologically criminal as well as practically dangerous. The independence of the writer and the artist is eaten away by vague economic forces, and at the same time it is undermined by those who should be its defenders. It is with the second process that I am concerned here.

Freedom of thought and of the press are usually attacked by arguments which are not worth bothering about. Anyone who has experience of lecturing and debating knows them off backwards. Here I am not trying to deal with the familiar claim that freedom is an illusion, or with the claim that there is more freedom in totalitarian countries than in democratic ones, but with the much more tenable and dangerous proposition that freedom is undesirable and that intellectual honesty is a form of anti-social selfishness. Although other aspects of the question are usually in the foreground, the controversy over freedom of speech and of the press is at bottom a controversy of the desirability, or otherwise, of telling lies. What is really at issue is the right to report contemporary events truthfully, or as truthfully as is consistent with the ignorance, bias and self-deception from which every observer necessarily suffers. In saying this I may seem to be saying that straightforward "reportage" is the only branch of literature that matters: but I will try to show later that at every literary level, and probably in every one of the arts, the same issue arises in more or less subtilized forms. Meanwhile, it is necessary to strip away the irrelevancies in which this controversy is usually wrapped up.

The enemies of intellectual liberty always try to present their case as a plea for discipline versus individualism. The issue truth-versus-untruth is as far as possible kept in the background. Although the point of emphasis may vary, the writer who refuses to sell his opinions is always branded as a mere egoist. He is accused, that is, of either wanting to shut himself up in an ivory tower, or of making an exhibitionist display of his own personality, or of resisting the inevitable current of history in an attempt to cling to unjustified privilege. The Catholic and the Communist are alike in assuming that an opponent cannot be both honest and intelligent. Each of them tacitly claims that "the truth" has already been revealed, and that the heretic, if he is not simply a fool, is secretly aware of "the truth" and merely resists it out of selfish motives. In Communist literature the attack on intellectual liberty is usually masked by oratory about "petty-bourgeois individualism", "the illusions of nineteenth-century liberalism", etc., and backed up by words of abuse such as "romantic" and "sentimental", which, since they do not have any

agreed meaning, are difficult to answer. In this way the controversy is maneuvered away from its real issue. One can accept, and most enlightened people would accept, the Communist thesis that pure freedom will only exist in a classless society, and that one is most nearly free when one is working to bring such a society about. But slipped in with this is the quite unfounded claim that the Communist Party is itself aiming at the establishment of the classless society, and that in the U.S.S.R. this aim is actually on the way to being realized. If the first claim is allowed to entail the second, there is almost no assault on common sense and common decency that cannot be justified. But meanwhile, the real point has been dodged. Freedom of the intellect means the freedom to report what one has seen, heard, and felt, and not to be obliged to fabricate imaginary facts and feelings. The familiar tirades against "escapism" and "individualism", "romanticism", and so forth, are merely a forensic device, the aim of which is to make the perversion of history seem respectable.

Fifteen years ago, when one defended the freedom of the intellect, one had to defend it against Conservatives, against Catholics, and to some extent–for they were not of great importance in England–against Fascists. Today one has to defend it against Communists and "fellow-travelers". One ought not to exaggerate the direct influence of the small English Communist Party, but there can be no question about the poisonous effect of the Russian MYTHOS on English intellectual life. Because of it known facts are suppressed and distorted to such an extent as to make it doubtful whether a true history of our times can ever be written. Let me give just one instance out of the hundreds that could be cited. When Germany collapsed, it was found that very large numbers of Soviet Russians–mostly, no doubt, from non-political motives–had changed sides and were fighting for the Germans. Also, a small but not negligible portion of the Russian prisoners and displaced persons refused to go back to the U.S.S.R., and some of them, at least, were repatriated against their will. These facts, known to many journalists on the spot, went almost unmentioned in the British press, while at the same time Russophile publicists in England continued to justify the purges and deportations of 1936-38 by claiming that the U.S.S.R. "had no

quislings". The fog of lies and misinformation that surrounds such subjects as the Ukraine famine, the Spanish civil war, Russian policy in Poland, and so forth, is not due entirely to conscious dishonesty, but any writer or journalist who is fully sympathetic for the U.S.S.R.–sympathetic, that is, in the way the Russians themselves would want him to be–does have to acquiesce in deliberate falsification on important issues. I have before me what must be a very rare pamphlet, written by Maxim Litvinoff in 1918 and outlining the recent events in the Russian Revolution. It makes no mention of Stalin, but gives high praise to Trotsky, and also to Zinoviev, Kamenev, and others. What could be the attitude of even the most intellectually scrupulous Communist towards such a pamphlet? At best, the obscurantist attitude of saying that it is an undesirable document and better suppressed. And if for some reason it were decided to issue a garbled version of the pamphlet, denigrating Trotsky and inserting references to Stalin, no Communist who remained faithful to his party could protest. Forgeries almost as gross as this have been committed in recent years. But the significant thing is not that they happen, but that, even when they are known about, they provoke no reaction from the left-wing intelligentsia as a whole. The argument that to tell the truth would be "inopportune" or would "play into the hands of" somebody or other is felt to be unanswerable, and few people are bothered by the prospect of the lies which they condone getting out of the newspapers and into the history books.

The organized lying practiced by totalitarian states is not, as is sometimes claimed, a temporary expedient of the same nature as military deception. It is something integral to totalitarianism, something that would still continue even if concentration camps and secret police forces had ceased to be necessary. Among intelligent Communists there is an underground legend to the effect that although the Russian government is obliged now to deal in lying propaganda, frame-up trials, and so forth, it is secretly recording the true facts and will publish them at some future time. We can, I believe, be quite certain that this is not the case, because the mentality implied by such an action is that of a liberal historian who believes that the past cannot be altered and that a correct knowledge

of history is valuable as a matter of course. From the totalitarian point of view history is something to be created rather than learned. A totalitarian state is in effect a theocracy, and its ruling caste, in order to keep its position, has to be thought of as infallible. But since, in practice, no one is infallible, it is frequently necessary to rearrange past events in order to show that this or that mistake was not made, or that this or that imaginary triumph actually happened. Then again, every major change in policy demands a corresponding change of doctrine and a revelation of prominent historical figures. This kind of thing happens everywhere, but is clearly likelier to lead to outright falsification in societies where only one opinion is permissible at any given moment. Totalitarianism demands, in fact, the continuous alteration of the past, and in the long run probably demands a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth. The friends of totalitarianism in this country usually tend to argue that since absolute truth is not attainable, a big lie is no worse than a little lie. It is pointed out that all historical records are biased and inaccurate, or on the other hand, that modern physics has proven that what seems to us the real world is an illusion, so that to believe in the evidence of one's senses is simply vulgar philistinism. A totalitarian society which succeeded in perpetuating itself would probably set up a schizophrenic system of thought, in which the laws of common sense held good in everyday life and in certain exact sciences, but could be disregarded by the politician, the historian, and the sociologist. Already there are countless people who would think it scandalous to falsify a scientific textbook, but would see nothing wrong in falsifying an historical fact. It is at the point where literature and politics cross that totalitarianism exerts its greatest pressure on the intellectual. The exact sciences are not, at this date, menaced to anything like the same extent. This partly accounts for the fact that in all countries it is easier for the scientists than for the writers to line up behind their respective governments.

To keep the matter in perspective, let me repeat what I said at the beginning of this essay: that in England the immediate enemies of truthfulness, and hence of freedom of thought, are the press lords, the film magnates, and the bureaucrats, but that on a long view the weakening of the desire for liberty among the intellectuals

themselves is the most serious symptom of all. It may seem that all this time I have been talking about the effects of censorship, not on literature as a whole, but merely on one department of political journalism. Granted that Soviet Russia constitutes a sort of forbidden area in the British press, granted that issues like Poland, the Spanish civil war, the Russo-German pact, and so forth, are debarred from serious discussion, and that if you possess information that conflicts with the prevailing orthodoxy you are expected to either distort it or keep quiet about it–granted all this, why should literature in the wider sense be affected? Is every writer a politician, and is every book necessarily a work of straightforward "reportage"? Even under the tightest dictatorship, cannot the individual writer remain free inside his own mind and distill or disguise his unorthodox ideas in such a way that the authorities will be too stupid to recognize them? And in any case, if the writer himself is in agreement with the prevailing orthodoxy, why should it have a cramping effect on him? Is not literature, or any of the arts, likeliest to flourish in societies in which there are no major conflicts of opinion and no sharp distinction between the artist and his audience? Does one have to assume that every writer is a rebel, or even that a writer as such is an exceptional person?

Whenever one attempts to defend intellectual liberty against the claims of totalitarianism, one meets with these arguments in one form or another. They are based on a complete misunderstanding of what literature is, and how–one should perhaps say why–it comes into being. They assume that a writer is either a mere entertainer or else a venal hack who can switch from one line of propaganda to another as easily as an organ grinder changing tunes. But after all, how is it that books ever come to be written? Above a quite low level, literature is an attempt to influence the viewpoint of one's contemporaries by recording experience. And so far as freedom of expression is concerned, there is not much difference between a mere journalist and the most "unpolitical" imaginative writer. The journalist is unfree, and is conscious of unfreedom, when he is forced to write lies or suppress what seems to him important news; the imaginative writer is unfree when he has to falsify his subjective feelings, which from his point of view are facts. He may distort and

caricature reality in order to make his meaning clearer, but he cannot misrepresent the scenery of his own mind; he cannot say with any conviction that he likes what he dislikes, or believes what he disbelieves. If he is forced to do so, the only result is that his creative faculties will dry up. Nor can he solve the problem by keeping away from controversial topics. There is no such thing as a genuinely non-political literature, and least of all in an age like our own, when fears, hatreds, and loyalties of a directly political kind are near to the surface of everyone's consciousness. Even a single taboo can have an all-round crippling effect upon the mind, because there is always the danger that any thought which is freely followed up may lead to the forbidden thought. It follows that the atmosphere of totalitarianism is deadly to any kind of prose writer, though a poet, at any rate a lyric poet, might possibly find it breathable. And in any totalitarian society that survives for more than a couple of generations, it is probable that prose literature, of the kind that has existed during the past four hundred years, must actually come to an end.

Literature has sometimes flourished under despotic regimes, but, as has often been pointed out, the despotisms of the past were not totalitarian. Their repressive apparatus was always inefficient, their ruling classes were usually either corrupt or apathetic or half-liberal in outlook, and the prevailing religious doctrines usually worked against perfectionism and the notion of human infallibility. Even so it is broadly true that prose literature has reached its highest levels in periods of democracy and free speculation. What is new in totalitarianism is that its doctrines are not only unchallengeable but also unstable. They have to be accepted on pain of damnation, but on the other hand, they are always liable to be altered on a moment's notice. Consider, for example, the various attitudes, completely incompatible with one another, which an English Communist or "fellow-traveler" has had to adopt toward the war between Britain and Germany. For years before September, 1939, he was expected to be in a continuous stew about "the horrors of Nazism" and to twist everything he wrote into a denunciation of Hitler: after September, 1939, for twenty months, he had to believe that Germany was more sinned against than sinning, and the word "Nazi", at least as far as print went, had to drop right out of his vocabulary. Immediately after

hearing the 8 o'clock news bulletin on the morning of June 22, 1941, he had to start believing once again that Nazism was the most hideous evil the world had ever seen. Now, it is easy for the politician to make such changes: for a writer the case is somewhat different. If he is to switch his allegiance at exactly the right moment, he must either tell lies about his subjective feelings, or else suppress them altogether. In either case he has destroyed his dynamo. Not only will ideas refuse to come to him, but the very words he uses will seem to stiffen under his touch. Political writing in our time consists almost entirely of prefabricated phrases bolted together like the pieces of a child's Meccano set. It is the unavoidable result of self-censorship. To write in plain, vigorous language one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox. It might be otherwise in an "age of faith", when the prevailing orthodoxy has long been established and is not taken too seriously. In that case it would be possible, or might be possible, for large areas of one's mind to remain unaffected by what one officially believed. Even so, it is worth noticing that prose literature almost disappeared during the only age of faith that Europe has ever enjoyed. Throughout the whole of the Middle Ages there was almost no imaginative prose literature and very little in the way of historical writing; and the intellectual leaders of society expressed their most serious thoughts in a dead language which barley altered during a thousand years.

Totalitarianism, however, does not so much promise an age of faith as an age of schizophrenia. A society becomes totalitarian when its structure becomes flagrantly artificial: that is, when its ruling class has lost its function but succeeds in clinging to power by force or fraud. Such a society, no matter how long it persists, can never afford to become either tolerant or intellectually stable. It can never permit either the truthful recording of facts or the emotional sincerity that literary creation demands. But to be corrupted by totalitarianism one does not have to live in a totalitarian country. The mere prevalence of certain ideas can spread a kind of poison that makes one subject after another impossible for literary purposes. Wherever there is an enforced orthodoxy–or even two orthodoxies, as often happens–good writing stops. This was well illustrated by the Spanish civil war. To

many English intellectuals the war was a deeply moving experience, but not an experience about which they could write sincerely. There were only two things that you were allowed to say, and both of them were palpable lies: as a result, the war produced acres of print but almost nothing worth reading.

It is not certain whether the effects of totalitarianism upon verse need be so deadly as its effects on prose. There is a whole series of converging reasons why it is somewhat easier for a poet than a prose writer to feel at home in an authoritarian society. To begin with, bureaucrats and other "practical" men usually despise the poet too deeply to be much interested in what he is saying. Secondly, what the poet is saying–that is, what his poem "means" if translated into prose–is relatively unimportant, even to himself. The thought contained in a poem is always simple, and is no more the primary purpose of the poem than the anecdote is the primary purpose of the picture. A poem is an arrangement of sounds and associations, as a painting is an arrangement of brushmarks. For short snatches, indeed, as in the refrain of a song, poetry can even dispense with meaning altogether. It is therefore fairly easy for a poet to keep away from dangerous subjects and avoid uttering heresies; and even when he does utter them, they may escape notice. But above all, good verse, unlike good prose, is not necessarily and individual product. Certain kinds of poems, such as ballads, or, on the other hand, very artificial verse forms, can be composed co-operatively by groups of people. Whether the ancient English and Scottish ballads were originally produced by individuals, or by the people at large, is disputed; but at any rate they are non-individual in the sense that they constantly change in passing from mouth to mouth. Even in print no two versions of a ballad are ever quite the same. Many primitive peoples compose verse communally. Someone begins to improvise, probably accompanying himself on a musical instrument, somebody else chips in with a line or a rhyme when the first singer breaks down, and so the process continues until there exists a whole song or ballad which has no identifiable author.

In prose, this kind of intimate collaboration is quite impossible. Serious prose, in any case, has to be composed in solitude, whereas the excitement of being part of a group is actually an aid to certain

kinds of versification. Verse–and perhaps good verse of its own kind, though it would not be the highest kind–might survive under even the most inquisitorial régime. Even in a society where liberty and individuality had been extinguished, there would still be a need either for patriotic songs and heroic ballads celebrating victories, or for elaborate exercises in flattery; and these are the kinds of poems that can be written to order, or composed communally, without necessarily lacking artistic value. Prose is a different matter, since the prose writer cannot narrow the range of his thoughts without killing his inventiveness. But the history of totalitarian societies, or of groups of people who have adopted the totalitarian outlook, suggests that loss of liberty is inimical to all forms of literature. German literature almost disappeared during the Hitler régime, and the case was not much better in Italy. Russian literature, so far as one can judge by translations, has deteriorated markedly since the early days of the revolution, though some of the verse appears to be better than the prose. Few if any Russian novels that it is possible to take seriously have been translated for about fifteen years. In western Europe and America large sections of the literary intelligentsia have either passed through the Communist Party or have been warmly sympathetic to it, but this whole leftward movement has produced extraordinarily few books worth reading. Orthodox Catholicism, again, seems to have a crushing effect upon certain literary forms, especially the novel. During a period of three hundred years, how many people have been at once good novelists and good Catholics? The fact is that certain themes cannot be celebrated in words, and tyranny is one of them. No one ever wrote a good book in praise of the Inquisition. Poetry might survive in a totalitarian age, and certain arts or half-arts, such as architecture, might even find tyranny beneficial, but the prose writer would have no choice between silence or death. Prose literature as we know it is the product of rationalism, of the Protestant centuries, of the autonomous individual. And the destruction of intellectual liberty cripples the journalist, the sociological writer, the historian, the novelist, the critic, and the poet, in that order. In the future it is possible that a new kind of literature, not involving individual feeling or truthful observation, may arise, but no such thing is at present imaginable. It seems much likelier that

if the liberal culture that we have lived in since the Renaissance comes to an end, the literary art will perish with it.

Of course, print will continue to be used, and it is interesting to speculate what kinds of reading matter would survive in a rigidly totalitarian society. Newspapers will presumably continue until television technique reaches a higher level, but apart from newspapers it is doubtful even now whether the great mass of people in the industrialized countries feel the need for any kind of literature. They are unwilling, at any rate, to spend anywhere near as much on reading matter as they spend on several other recreations. Probably novels and stories will be completely superseded by film and radio productions. Or perhaps some kind of low grade sensational fiction will survive, produced by a sort of conveyor-belt process that reduces human initiative to the minimum.

It would probably not be beyond human ingenuity to write books by machinery. But a sort of mechanizing process can already be seen at work in the film and radio, in publicity and propaganda, and in the lower reaches of journalism. The Disney films, for instance, are produced by what is essentially a factory process, the work being done partly mechanically and partly by teams of artists who have to subordinate their individual style. Radio features are commonly written by tired hacks to whom the subject and the manner of treatment are dictated beforehand: even so, what they write is merely a kind of raw material to be chopped into shape by producers and censors. So also with the innumerable books and pamphlets commissioned by government departments. Even more machine-like is the production of short stories, serials, and poems for the very cheap magazines. Papers such as the WRITER abound with advertisements of literary schools, all of them offering you ready-made plots at a few shillings a time. Some, together with the plot, supply the opening and closing sentences of each chapter. Others furnish you with a sort of algebraical formula by the use of which you can construct plots for yourself. Others have packs of cards marked with characters and situations, which have only to be shuffled and dealt in order to produce ingenious stories automatically. It is probably in some such way that the literature of a totalitarian society would be produced, if literature were still felt to

be necessary. Imagination–even consciousness, so far as possible–would be eliminated from the process of writing. Books would be planned in their broad lines by bureaucrats, and would pass through so many hands that when finished they would be no more an individual product than a Ford car at the end of the assembly line. It goes without saying that anything so produced would be rubbish; but anything that was not rubbish would endanger the structure of the state. As for the surviving literature of the past, it would have to be suppressed or at least elaborately rewritten.

Meanwhile, totalitarianism has not fully triumphed anywhere. Our own society is still, broadly speaking, liberal. To exercise your right of free speech you have to fight against economic pressure and against strong sections of public opinion, but not, as yet, against a secret police force. You can say or print almost anything so long as you are willing to do it in a hole-and-corner way. But what is sinister, as I said at the beginning of this essay, is that the conscious enemies of liberty are those to whom liberty ought to mean most. The big public do not care about the matter one way or the other. They are not in favour of persecuting the heretic, and they will not exert themselves to defend him. They are at once too sane and too stupid to acquire the totalitarian outlook. The direct, conscious attack on intellectual decency comes from the intellectuals themselves.

It is possible that the Russophile intelligentsia, if they had not succumbed to that particular myth, would have succumbed to another of much the same kind. But at any rate the Russian myth is there, and the corruption it causes stinks. When one sees highly educated men looking on indifferently at oppression and persecution, one wonders which to despise more, their cynicism or their shortsightedness. Many scientists, for example, are the uncritical admirers of the U.S.S.R. They appear to think that the destruction of liberty is of no importance so long as their own line of work is for the moment unaffected. The U.S.S.R. is a large, rapidly developing country which has an acute need of scientific workers and, consequently, treats them generously. Provided that they steer clear of dangerous subjects such as psychology, scientists are privileged persons. Writers, on the other hand, are viciously persecuted. It is true that literary prostitutes like Ilya Ehrenburg or Alexei Tolstoy are paid huge sums of money, but

the only thing which is of any value to the writer as such–his freedom of expression–is taken away from him. Some, at least, of the English scientists who speak so enthusiastically of the opportunities to be enjoyed by scientists in Russia are capable of understanding this. But their reflection appears to be: "Writers are persecuted in Russia. So what? I am not a writer." They do not see that any attack on intellectual liberty, and on the concept of objective truth, threatens in the long run every department of thought.

For the moment the totalitarian state tolerates the scientist because it needs him. Even in Nazi Germany, scientists, other than Jews, were relatively well treated and the German scientific community, as a whole, offered no resistance to Hitler. At this stage of history, even the most autocratic ruler is forced to take account of physical reality, partly because of the lingering-on of liberal habits of thought, partly because of the need to prepare for war. So long as physical reality cannot altogether be ignored, so long as two and two have to make four when you are, for example, drawing the blueprint of an aeroplane, the scientist has his function, and can even be allowed a measure of liberty. His awakening will come later, when the totalitarian state is firmly established. Meanwhile, if he wants to safeguard the integrity of science, it is his job to develop some kind of solidarity with his literary colleagues and not disregard it as a matter of indifference when writers are silenced or driven to suicide, and newspapers systematically falsified.

But however it may be with the physical sciences, or with music, painting and architecture, it is–as I have tried to show–certain that literature is doomed if liberty of thought perishes. Not only is it doomed in any country which retains a totalitarian structure; but any writer who adopts the totalitarian outlook, who finds excuses for persecution and the falsification of reality, thereby destroys himself as a writer. There is no way out of this. No tirades against "individualism" and the "ivory tower", no pious platitudes to the effect that "true individuality is only attained through identification with the community", can get over the fact that a bought mind is a spoiled mind. Unless spontaneity enters at some point or another, literary creation is impossible, and language itself becomes something totally different from what it is now, we may learn to

separate literary creation from intellectual honesty. At present we know only that the imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity. Any writer or journalist who denies that fact–and nearly all the current praise of the Soviet Union contains or implies such a denial–is, in effect, demanding his own destruction.

WHY I WRITE (1946)

From a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer. Between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-four I tried to abandon this idea, but I did so with the consciousness that I was outraging my true nature and that sooner or later I should have to settle down and write books.

I was the middle child of three, but there was a gap of five years on either side, and I barely saw my father before I was eight. For this and other reasons I was somewhat lonely, and I soon developed disagreeable mannerisms which made me unpopular throughout my schooldays. I had the lonely child's habit of making up stories and holding conversations with imaginary persons, and I think from the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and undervalued. I knew that I had a facility with words and a power of facing unpleasant facts, and I felt that this created a sort of private world in which I could get my own back for my failure in everyday life. Nevertheless the volume of serious–i.e. seriously intended–writing which I produced all through my childhood and boyhood would not amount to half a dozen pages. I wrote my first poem at the age of four or five, my mother taking it down to dictation. I cannot remember anything about it except that it was about a tiger and the tiger had 'chair-like teeth'–a good enough phrase, but I fancy the poem was a plagiarism of Blake's 'Tiger, Tiger'. At eleven, when the war or 1914-18 broke out, I wrote a patriotic poem which was printed in the local newspaper, as was another, two years later, on the death of Kitchener. From time to time, when I was a bit older, I wrote bad and usually unfinished 'nature poems' in the Georgian style. I also attempted a short story which was a ghastly failure. That was the total of the would-be serious work that I actually set down on paper during all those years.

However, throughout this time I did in a sense engage in literary activities. To begin with there was the made-to-order stuff which I produced quickly, easily and without much pleasure to myself. Apart from school work, I wrote VERS D'OCCASION, semi-comic poems which I could turn out at what now seems to me astonishing speed–at

fourteen I wrote a whole rhyming play, in imitation of Aristophanes, in about a week–and helped to edit a school magazines, both printed and in manuscript. These magazines were the most pitiful burlesque stuff that you could imagine, and I took far less trouble with them than I now would with the cheapest journalism. But side by side with all this, for fifteen years or more, I was carrying out a literary exercise of a quite different kind: this was the making up of a continuous 'story' about myself, a sort of diary existing only in the mind. I believe this is a common habit of children and adolescents. As a very small child I used to imagine that I was, say, Robin Hood, and picture myself as the hero of thrilling adventures, but quite soon my 'story' ceased to be narcissistic in a crude way and became more and more a mere description of what I was doing and the things I saw. For minutes at a time this kind of thing would be running through my head: 'He pushed the door open and entered the room. A yellow beam of sunlight, filtering through the muslin curtains, slanted on to the table, where a match-box, half-open, lay beside the inkpot. With his right hand in his pocket he moved across to the window. Down in the street a tortoiseshell cat was chasing a dead leaf', etc. etc. This habit continued until I was about twenty-five, right through my non-literary years. Although I had to search, and did search, for the right words, I seemed to be making this descriptive effort almost against my will, under a kind of compulsion from outside. The 'story' must, I suppose, have reflected the styles of the various writers I admired at different ages, but so far as I remember it always had the same meticulous descriptive quality.

When I was about sixteen I suddenly discovered the joy of mere words, i.e. the sounds and associations of words. The lines from PARADISE LOST,

So hee with difficulty and labour hard
Moved on: with difficulty and labour hee.

which do not now seem to me so very wonderful, sent shivers down my backbone; and the spelling 'hee' for 'he' was an added pleasure. As for the need to describe things, I knew all about it already. So it is clear what kind of books I wanted to write, in so far

as I could be said to want to write books at that time. I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their own sound. And in fact my first completed novel, BURMESE DAYS, which I wrote when I was thirty but projected much earlier, is rather that kind of book.

I give all this background information because I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development. His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in–at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own–but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape. It is his job, no doubt, to discipline his temperament and avoid getting stuck at some immature stage, in some perverse mood; but if he escapes from his early influences altogether, he will have killed his impulse to write. Putting aside the need to earn a living, I think there are four great motives for writing, at any rate for writing prose. They exist in different degrees in every writer, and in any one writer the proportions will vary from time to time, according to the atmosphere in which he is living. They are:

(i) Sheer egoism. Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get your own back on the grown-ups who snubbed you in childhood, etc., etc. It is humbug to pretend this is not a motive, and a strong one. Writers share this characteristic with scientists, artists, politicians, lawyers, soldiers, successful businessmen–in short, with the whole top crust of humanity. The great mass of human beings are not acutely selfish. After the age of about thirty they almost abandon the sense of being individuals at all–and live chiefly for others, or are simply smothered under drudgery. But there is also the minority of gifted, willful people who are determined to live their own lives to the end, and writers belong in this class. Serious writers, I should say, are on the whole more vain and self-centered than journalists, though less interested in money.

(ii) Aesthetic enthusiasm. Perception of beauty in the external world, or, on the other hand, in words and their right arrangement.

Pleasure in the impact of one sound on another, in the firmness of good prose or the rhythm of a good story. Desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed. The aesthetic motive is very feeble in a lot of writers, but even a pamphleteer or writer of textbooks will have pet words and phrases which appeal to him for non-utilitarian reasons; or he may feel strongly about typography, width of margins, etc. Above the level of a railway guide, no book is quite free from aesthetic considerations.

(iii) Historical impulse. Desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity.

(iv) Political purpose.–Using the word 'political' in the widest possible sense. Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples' idea of the kind of society that they should strive after. Once again, no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.

It can be seen how these various impulses must war against one another, and how they must fluctuate from person to person and from time to time. By nature–taking your 'nature' to be the state you have attained when you are first adult–I am a person in whom the first three motives would outweigh the fourth. In a peaceful age I might have written ornate or merely descriptive books, and might have remained almost unaware of my political loyalties. As it is I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer. First I spent five years in an unsuitable profession (the Indian Imperial Police, in Burma), and then I underwent poverty and the sense of failure. This increased my natural hatred of authority and made me for the first time fully aware of the existence of the working classes, and the job in Burma had given me some understanding of the nature of imperialism: but these experiences were not enough to give me an accurate political orientation. Then came Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, etc. By the end of 1935 I had still failed to reach a firm decision. I remember a little poem that I wrote at that date, expressing my dilemma:

A happy vicar I might have been
Two hundred years ago
To preach upon eternal doom

And watch my walnuts grow;

But born, alas, in an evil time,
I missed that pleasant haven,
For the hair has grown on my upper lip
And the clergy are all clean-shaven.

And later still the times were good,
We were so easy to please,
We rocked our troubled thoughts to sleep
On the bosoms of the trees.

All ignorant we dared to own
The joys we now dissemble;
The greenfinch on the apple bough
Could make my enemies tremble.

But girl's bellies and apricots,
Roach in a shaded stream,
Horses, ducks in flight at dawn,
All these are a dream.

It is forbidden to dream again;
We maim our joys or hide them:
Horses are made of chromium steel
And little fat men shall ride them.

I am the worm who never turned,
The eunuch without a harem;
Between the priest and the commissar
I walk like Eugene Aram;

And the commissar is telling my fortune
While the radio plays,
But the priest has promised an Austin Seven,
For Duggie always pays.

I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls,
And woke to find it true;
I wasn't born for an age like this;
Was Smith? Was Jones? Were you?

The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, AGAINST totalitarianism and FOR democratic socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity.

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art'. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience. Anyone who cares to examine my work will see that even when it is downright propaganda it contains much that a full-time politician would consider irrelevant. I am not able, and do not want, completely to abandon the world view that I acquired in childhood. So long as I remain alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style, to love the surface of the earth, and to take a pleasure in solid objects and scraps of useless information. It is no use trying to suppress that side of myself. The job is to reconcile my ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us.

It is not easy. It raises problems of construction and of language, and it raises in a new way the problem of truthfulness. Let me give just one example of the cruder kind of difficulty that arises. My book about the Spanish civil war, HOMAGE TO CATALONIA, is of

course a frankly political book, but in the main it is written with a certain detachment and regard for form. I did try very hard in it to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts. But among other things it contains a long chapter, full of newspaper quotations and the like, defending the Trotskyists who were accused of plotting with Franco. Clearly such a chapter, which after a year or two would lose its interest for any ordinary reader, must ruin the book. A critic whom I respect read me a lecture about it. 'Why did you put in all that stuff?' he said. 'You've turned what might have been a good book into journalism.' What he said was true, but I could not have done otherwise. I happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I should never have written the book.

In one form or another this problem comes up again. The problem of language is subtler and would take too long to discuss. I will only say that of late years I have tried to write less picturesquely and more exactly. In any case I find that by the time you have perfected any style of writing, you have always outgrown it. ANIMAL FARM was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole. I have not written a novel for seven years, but I hope to write another fairly soon. It is bound to be a failure, every book is a failure, but I do know with some clarity what kind of book I want to write.

Looking back through the last page or two, I see that I have made it appear as though my motives in writing were wholly public-spirited. I don't want to leave that as the final impression. All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand. For all one knows that demon is simply the same instinct that makes a baby squall for attention. And yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality. Good prose is like a windowpane. I cannot say with certainty which of my motives are the strongest, but I know which of them deserve to

be followed. And looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a POLITICAL purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally.

LEAR, TOLSTOY AND THE FOOL

Tolstoy's pamphlets are the least-known part of his work, and his attack on Shakespeare [Note, below] is not even an easy document to get hold of, at any rate in an English translation. Perhaps, therefore, it will be useful if I give a summary of the pamphlet before trying to discuss it.

[Note: SHAKESPEARE AND THE DRAMA. Written about 1903 as an introduction to another pamphlet, SHAKESPEARE AND THE WORKING CLASSES, by Ernest Crosby. (Author's footnote)]

Tolstoy begins by saying that throughout life Shakespeare has aroused in him "an irresistible repulsion and tedium". Conscious that the opinion of the civilized world is against him, he has made one attempt after another on Shakespeare's works, reading and re-reading them in Russian, English and German; but "I invariably underwent the same feelings; repulsion, weariness and bewilderment". Now, at the age of seventy-five, he has once again re-read the entire works of Shakespeare, including the historical plays, and I have felt with an even greater force, the same feelings–this time, however, not of bewilderment, but of firm, indubitable conviction that the unquestionable glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys, and which compels writers of our time to imitate him and readers and spectators to discover in him non-existent merits–thereby distorting their aesthetic and ethical understanding–is a great evil, as is every untruth.

Shakespeare, Tolstoy adds, is not merely no genius, but is not even "an average author", and in order to demonstrate this fact he will examine KING LEAR, which, as he is able to show by quotations from Hazlitt, Brandes and others, has been extravagantly praised and can be taken as an example of Shakespeare's best work.

Tolstoy then makes a sort of exposition of the plot of KING LEAR, finding it at every step to be stupid, verbose, unnatural, unintelligible, bombastic, vulgar, tedious and full of incredible events, "wild ravings", "mirthless jokes", anachronisms, irrelevancies, obscenities, worn-out stage conventions and other faults both moral and aesthetic. LEAR is, in any case, a plagiarism of

an earlier and much better play, KING LEIR, by an unknown author, which Shakespeare stole and then ruined. It is worth quoting a specimen paragraph to illustrate the manner in which Tolstoy goes to work. Act III, Scene 2 (in which Lear, Kent and the Fool are together in the storm) is summarized thus:

Lear walks about the heath and says word which are meant to express his despair: he desires that the winds should blow so hard that they (the winds) should crack their cheeks and that the rain should flood everything, that lightning should singe his white bead, and the thunder flatten the world and destroy all germs "that make ungrateful man"! The fool keeps uttering still more senseless words. Enter Kent: Lear says that for some reason during this storm all criminals shall be found out and convicted. Kent, still unrecognized by Lear, endeavours to persuade him to take refuge in a hovel. At this point the fool utters a prophecy in no wise related to the situation and they all depart.

Tolstoy's final verdict on LEAR is that no unhypnotized observer, if such an observer existed, could read it to the end with any feeling except "aversion and weariness". And exactly the same is true of "all the other extolled dramas of Shakespeare, not to mention the senseless dramatized tales, PERICLES, TWELFTH NIGHT, THE TEMPEST, CYMBELINE, TROILUS AND CRESSIDA."

Having dealt with Lear Tolstoy draws up a more general indictment against Shakespeare. He finds that Shakespeare has a certain technical skill which is partly traceable to his having been an actor, but otherwise no merits whatever. He has no power of delineating character or of making words, and actions spring naturally out of situations, Us language is uniformly exaggerated and ridiculous, he constantly thrusts his own random thoughts into the mouth of any character who happens to be handy, he displays a "complete absence of aesthetic feeling", and his words "have nothing whatever in common with art and poetry".

"Shakespeare might have been whatever you like," Tolstoy concludes, "but he was not an artist." Moreover, his opinions are not original or interesting, and his tendency is "of the lowest and most immoral". Curiously enough, Tolstoy does not base this last judgement on Shakespeare's own utterances, but on the statements of

two critics, Gervinus and Brandes. According to Gervinus (or at any, rate Tolstoy's reading of Gervinus) "Shakespeare taught...THAT ONE MAY BE TOO GOOD", while according to Brandes: "Shakespeare's fundamental principle...is that THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS." Tolstoy adds on his own account that Shakespeare was a jingo patriot of the worst type, but apart from this he considers that Gervinus and Brandes have given a true and adequate description of Shakespeare's view of life.

Tolstoy then recapitulates in a few paragraphs the theory of art which he had expressed at greater length elsewhere. Put still more shortly, it amounts to a demand for dignity of subject matter, sincerity, and good craftsmanships. A great work of art must deal with some subject which is "important to the life of mankind", it must express something which the author genuinely feels, and it must use such technical methods as will produce the desired effect. As Shakespeare is debased in outlook, slipshod in execution and incapable of being sincere even for a moment, he obviously stands condemned.

But here there arises a difficult question. If Shakespeare is all that Tolstoy has shown him to be, how did he ever come to be so generally admired? Evidently the answer can only lie in a sort of mass hypnosis, or "epidemic suggestion". The whole civilized world has somehow been deluded into thinking Shakespeare a good writer, and even the plainest demonstration to the contrary makes no impression, because one is not dealing with a reasoned opinion but with something akin to religious faith. Throughout history, says Tolstoy, there has been an endless series of these "epidemic suggestions"–for example, the Crusades, the search for the Philosopher's Stone, the craze for tulip growing which once swept over Holland, and so on and so forth. As a contemporary instance he cites, rather significantly, the Dreyfus case, over which the whole world grew violently excited for no sufficient reason. There are also sudden short-lived crazes for new political and philosophical theories, or for this or that writer, artist or scientist–for example, Darwin who (in 1903) is "beginning to be forgotten". And in some cases a quite worthless popular idol may remain in favour for centuries, for "it also happens that such crazes, having arisen in

consequence of special reasons accidentally favouring their establishment correspond in such a degree to the views of life spread in society, and especially in literary circles, that they are maintained for a long time". Shakespeare's plays have continued to be admired over a long period because "they corresponded to the irreligious and unmoral frame of mind of the upper classes of his time and ours".

As to the manner in which Shakespeare's fame STARTED, Tolstoy explains it as having been "got up" by German professors towards the end of the eighteenth century. His reputation "originated in Germany, and thence was transferred to England". The Germans chose to elevate Shakespeare because, at a time when there was no German drama worth speaking about and French classical literature was beginning to seem frigid and artificial, they were captivated by Shakespeare's "clever development of scenes" and also found in him a good expression of their own attitude towards life. Goethe pronounced Shakespeare a great poet, whereupon all the other critics flocked after him like a troop of parrots, and the general infatuation has lasted ever since. The result has been a further debasement of the drama–Tolstoy is careful to include his own plays when condemning the contemporary stage–and a further corruption of the prevailing moral outlook. It follows that "the false glorification of Shakespeare" is an important evil which Tolstoy feels it his duty to combat.

This, then, is the substance of Tolstoy's pamphlet. One's first feeling is that in describing Shakespeare as a bad writer he is saying something demonstrably untrue. But this is not the case. In reality there is no kind of evidence or argument by which one can show that Shakespeare, or any other writer, is "good". Nor is there any way of definitely proving that–for instance–Warwick Beeping is "bad". Ultimately there is no test of literary merit except survival, which is itself an index to majority opinion. Artistic theories such as Tolstoy's are quite worthless, because they not only start out with arbitrary assumptions, but depend on vague terms ("sincere", "important" and so forth) which can be interpreted in any way one chooses. Properly speaking one cannot ANSWER Tolstoy's attack. The interesting question is: why did he make it? But it should be noticed in passing that he uses many weak or dishonest arguments. Some of these are worth pointing out, not because they invalidate his main charge but

because they are, so to speak, evidence of malice.

To begin with, his examination of KING LEAR is not "impartial", as he twice claims. On the contrary, it is a prolonged exercise in misrepresentation. It is obvious that when you are summarizing KING LEAR for the benefit of someone who has not read it, you are not really being impartial if you introduce an important speech (Lear's speech when Cordelia is dead in his arms) in this manner: "Again begin Lear's awful ravings, at which one feels ashamed, as at unsuccessful jokes." And in a long series of instances Tolstoy slightly alters or colours the passages he is criticizing, always in such a way as to make the plot appear a little more complicated and improbable, or the language a little more exaggerated. For example, we are told that Lear "has no necessity or motive for his abdication", although his reason for abdicating (that he is old and wishes to retire from the cares of state) has been clearly indicated in the first scene. It will be seen that even in the passage which I quoted earlier, Tolstoy has wilfully misunderstood one phrase and Slightly changed this meaning of another, making nonsense of a remark which is reasonable enough in its context. None of these misreadings is very gross in itself, but their cumulative effect is to exaggerate the psychological incoherence of the play. Again, Tolstoy is not able to explain why Shakespeare's plays were still in print, and still on the stage, two hundred years after his death (BEFORE the "epidemic suggestion" started, that is); and his whole account of Shakespeare's rise to fame is guesswork punctuated by outright misstatements. And again, various of his accusations contradict one another: for example, Shakespeare is a mere entertainer and "not in earnest", but on the other hand he is constantly putting his own thoughts into the mouths of his characters. On the whole it is difficult to feel that Tolstoy's criticisms are uttered in good faith. In any case it is impossible that he should fully have believed in his main thesis–believed, that is to say, that for a century or more the entire civilized world had been taken in by a huge and palpable lie which he alone was able to see through. Certainly his dislike of Shakespeare is real enough, but the reasons for it may be different, or partly different, from what he avows; and therein lies the interest of his pamphlet.

At this point one is obliged to start guessing. However, there is

one possible clue, or at least there is a question which may point the way to a clue. It is: why did Tolstoy, with thirty or more plays to choose from, pick out KING LEAR as his especial target? True, LEAR is so well known and has been so much praised that it could justly be taken as representative of Shakespeare's best work; still, for the purpose of a hostile analysis Tolstoy would probably choose the play he disliked most. Is it not possible that he bore an especial enmity towards this particular play because he was aware, consciously or unconsciously, of the resemblance between Lear's story and his own? But it is better to approach this clue from the opposite direction–that is, by examining LEAR itself, and the qualities in it that Tolstoy fails to mention.

One of the first things an English reader would notice in Tolstoy's pamphlet is that it hardly deals with Shakespeare as a poet. Shakespeare is treated as a dramatist, and in so far as his popularity is not spurious, it is held to be due to tricks of stagecraft which give good opportunities to clever actors. Now, so far as the English-speaking countries go, this is not true; Several of the plays which are most valued by lovers of Shakespeare (for instance, TIMON OF ATHENS) are seldom or never acted, while some of the most actable, such as A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, are the least admired. Those who care most for Shakespeare value him in the first place for his use of language, the "verbal music" which even Bernard Shaw, another hostile critic, admits to be "irresistible". Tolstoy ignores this, and does not seem to realize that a poem may have a special value for those who speak the language in which it was written. However, even if one puts oneself in Tolstoy's place and tries to think of Shakespeare as a foreign poet it is still clear that there is something that Tolstoy has left out. Poetry, it seems, is NOT solely a matter of sound and association, and valueless outside its own language-group: otherwise how is it that some poems, including poems written in dead languages, succeed in crossing frontiers? Clearly a lyric like "To-morrow is Saint Valentine's Day" could not be satisfactorily translated, but in Shakespeare's major work there is something describable as poetry that can be separated from the words. Tolstoy is right in saying that LEAR is not a very good play, as a play. It is too drawn-out and has too many characters and sub-

plots. One wicked daughter would have been quite enough, and Edgar is a superfluous character: indeed it would probably be a better play if Gloucester and both his sons were eliminated. Nevertheless, something, a kind of pattern, or perhaps only an atmosphere, survives the complications and the LONGUEURS. LEAR can be imagined as a puppet show, a mime, a ballet, a series of pictures. Part of its poetry, perhaps the most essential part, is inherent in the story and is dependent neither on any particular set of words, nor on flesh-and-blood presentation.

Shut your eyes and think of KING LEAR, if possible without calling to mind any of the dialogue. What do you see? Here at any rate is what I see; a majestic old man in a long black robe, with flowing white hair and beard, a figure out of Blake's drawings (but also, curiously enough, rather like Tolstoy), wandering through a storm and cursing the heavens, in company with a Fool and a lunatic. Presently the scene shifts and the old man, still cursing, still understanding nothing, is holding a dead girl in his arms while the Fool dangles on a gallows somewhere in the background. This is the bare skeleton of the play, and even here Tolstoy wants to cut out most of what is essential. He objects to the storm, as being unnecessary, to the Fool, who in his eyes is simply a tedious nuisance and an excuse for making bad jokes, and to the death of Cordelia, which, as he sees it, robs the play of its moral. According to Tolstoy, the earlier play. KING LEIR, which Shakespeare adapted terminates more naturally and more in accordance with the moral demands of the spectator than does Shakespeare's; namely, by the King of the Gauls conquering the husbands of the elder sisters, and by Cordelia, instead of being killed, restoring Leir to his former position.

In other words the tragedy ought to have been a comedy, or perhaps a melodrama. It is doubtful whether the sense of tragedy is compatible with belief in God: at any rate, it is not compatible with disbelief in human dignity and with the kind of "moral demand" which feels cheated when virtue fails to triumph. A tragic situation exists precisely when virtue does NOT triumph but when it is still felt that man is nobler than the forces which destroy him. It is perhaps more significant that Tolstoy sees no justification for the

presence of the Fool. The Fool is integral to the play. He acts not only as a sort of chorus, making the central situation clearer by commenting on it more intelligently than the other characters, but as a foil to Lear's frenzies. His jokes, riddles and scraps of rhyme, and his endless digs at Lear's high-minded folly, ranging from mere derision to a sort of melancholy poetry ("All thy other titles thou hast given away, that thou wast born with"), are like a trickle of sanity running through the play, a reminder that somewhere or other in spite of the injustices, cruelties, intrigues, deceptions and misunderstandings that are being enacted here, life is going on much as usual. In Tolstoy's impatience with the Fool one gets a glimpse of his deeper quarrel with Shakespeare. He objects, with some justification, to the raggedness of Shakespeare's plays, the irrelevancies, the incredible plots, the exaggerated language: but what at bottom he probably most dislikes is a sort of exuberance, a tendency to take–not so much a pleasure as simply an interest in the actual process of life. It is a mistake to write Tolstoy off as a moralist attacking an artist. He never said that art, as such, is wicked or meaningless, nor did he even say that technical virtuosity is unimportant. But his main aim, in his later years, was to narrow the range of human consciousness. One's interests, one's points of attachment to the physical world and the day-to-day struggle, must be as few and not as many as possible. Literature must consist of parables, stripped of detail and almost independent of language. The parables–this is where Tolstoy differs from the average vulgar puritan–must themselves be works of art, but pleasure and curiosity must be excluded from them. Science, also, must be divorced from curiosity. The business of science, he says, is not to discover what happens but to teach men how they ought to live. So also with history and politics. Many problems (for example, the Dreyfus case) are simply not worth solving, and he is willing to leave them as loose ends. Indeed his whole theory of "crazes" or "epidemic suggestions", in which he lumps together such things as the Crusades and the Dutch passion of tulip growing, shows a willingness to regard many human activities as mere ant-like rushings to and fro, inexplicable and uninteresting. Clearly he could have no patience with a chaotic, detailed, discursive writer like Shakespeare. His reaction is that of an

irritable old man who is being pestered by a noisy child. “Why do you keep jumping up and down like that? Why can’t you sit still like I do?” In a way the old man is in the right, but the trouble is that the child, has a feeling in its limbs which the old man has lost. And if the old man knows of the existence of this feeling, the effect is merely to increase his irritation: he would make children senile, if he could. Tolstoy does not know, perhaps, just WHAT he misses in Shakespeare, but he is aware that he misses something, and he is determined that others shall be deprived of it as well. By nature he was imperious as well as egotistical. Well after he was grown up he would still occasionally strike his servant in moments of anger, and somewhat later, according to his English biographer, Derrick Leon, he felt “a frequent desire upon the slenderest provocation to slap the faces of those with whom he disagreed”. One docs not necessarily get rid of that kind of temperament by undergoing religious conversion, and indeed it is obvious that the illusion of having been reborn may allow one’s native vices to flourish more freely than ever, though perhaps in subtler forms. Tolstoy was capable of abjuring physical violence and of seeing what this implies, but he was not capable of tolerance or humility, and even if one knew nothing of his other writings, one could deduce his tendency towards spiritual bullying from this single pamphlet.

However, Tolstoy is not simply trying to rob others of a pleasure he does not share. He is doing that, but his quarrel with Shakespeare goes further. It is the quarrel between the religious and the humanist attitudes towards life. Here one comes back to the central theme of KING LEAR, which Tolstoy does not mention, although he sets forth the plot in some detail.

Lear is one of the minority of Shakespeare’s plays that are unmistakably ABOUT something. As Tolstoy justly complains, much rubbish has been written about Shakespeare as a philosopher, as a psychologist, as a “great moral teacher”, and what-not. Shakespeare was not a systematic thinker, his most serious thoughts are uttered irrelevantly or indirectly, and we do not know to what extent he wrote with a “purpose” or even how much of the work attributed to him was actually written by him. In the sonnets he never even refers to the plays as part of his achievement, though he does

make what seems to be a half-ashamed allusion to his career as an actor. It is perfectly possible that he looked on at least half of his plays as mere pot-boilers and hardly bothered about purpose or probability so long as he could patch up something, usually from stolen material, which would more or less hang together on the stage. However, that is not the whole story. To begin with, as Tolstoy himself points out, Shakespeare has a habit of thrusting uncalled-for general reflections into the mouths of his characters. This is a serious fault in a dramatist, but it does not fit in with Tolstoy's picture of Shakespeare as a vulgar hack who has no opinions of his own and merely wishes to produce the greatest effect with the least trouble. And more than this, about a dozen of his plays, written for the most part later than 1600, do unquestionably have a meaning and even a moral. They revolve round a central subject which in some cases can be reduced to a single word. For example, MACBETH is about ambition, Othello is about jealousy, and TIMON OF ATHENS is about money. The subject of LEAR is renunciation, and it is only by being wilfully blind that one can fail to understand what Shakespeare is saying.

Lear renounces his throne but expects everyone to continue treating him as a king. He does not see that if he surrenders power, other people will take advantage of his weakness: also that those who flatter him the most grossly, i.e. Regan and Goneril, are exactly the ones who will turn against him. The moment he finds that he can no longer make people obey him as he did before, he falls into a rage which Tolstoy describes as "strange and unnatural", but which in fact is perfectly in character. In his madness and despair, he passes through two moods which again are natural enough in his circumstances, though in one of them it is probable that he is being used partly as a mouthpiece for Shakespeare's own opinions. One is the mood of disgust in which Lear repents, as it were, for having been a king, and grasps for the first time the rottenness of formal justice and vulgar morality. The other is a mood of impotent fury in which he wreaks imaginary revenges upon those who have wronged him. "To have a thousand with red burning spits come hissing in upon 'em!", and:

It were a delicate stratagem to shoe

A troop of horse with felt; I'll put't in proof;
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

Only at the end does he realize, as a sane man, that power, revenge and victory are not worth while:

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison...
....and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.

But by the time he makes this discovery it is too late, for his death and Cordelia's are already decided on. That is the story, and, allowing for some clumsiness in the telling, it is a very good story.

But is it not also curiously similar to the history of Tolstoy himself? There is a general resemblance which one can hardly avoid seeing, because the most impressive event in Tolstoy's life, as in Lear's, was a huge and gratuitous act of renunciation. In his old age, he renounced his estate, his title and his copyrights, and made an attempt–a sincere attempt, though it was not successful–to escape from his privileged position and live the life of a peasant. But the deeper resemblance lies in the fact that Tolstoy, like Lear, acted on mistaken motives and failed to get the results he had hoped for. According to Tolstoy, the aim of every human being is happiness, and happiness can only be attained by doing the will of God. But doing the will of God means casting off all earthly pleasures and ambitions, and living only for others. Ultimately, therefore, Tolstoy renounced the world under the expectation that this would make him happier. But if there is one thing certain about his later years, it is that he was NOT happy. On the contrary he was driven almost to the edge of madness by the behaviour of the people about him, who persecuted him precisely BECAUSE of his renunciation. Like Lear, Tolstoy was not humble and not a good judge of character. He was inclined at moments to revert to the attitudes of an aristocrat, in spite of his peasant's blouse, and he even had two children whom he had believed in and who ultimately turned against him–though, of course, in a less sensational manner than Regan and Goneril. His exaggerated revulsion from sexuality was also distinctly similar to Lear's. Tolstoy's remark that marriage is "slavery, satiety, repulsion"

and means putting up with the proximity of "ugliness, dirtiness, smell, sores", is matched by Lear's well-known outburst:

But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends;
There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption, etc., etc.

And though Tolstoy could not foresee it when he wrote his essay on Shakespeare, even the ending of his life–the sudden unplanned flight across country, accompanied only by a faithful daughter, the death in a cottage in a strange village–seems to have in it a sort of phantom reminiscence of LEAR.

Of course, one cannot assume that Tolstoy was aware of this resemblance, or would have admitted it if it had been pointed out to him. But his attitude towards the play must have been influenced by its theme. Renouncing power, giving away your lands, was a subject on which he had reason to feel deeply; Probably, therefore, he would be more angered and disturbed by the moral that Shakespeare draws than he would be in the case of some other play–MACBETH, for example–which did not touch so closely on his own life. But what exactly is the moral of LEAR? Evidently there are two morals, one explicit, the other implied in the story.

Shakespeare starts by assuming that to make yourself powerless is to invite an attack. This does not mean that EVERYONE will turn against you (Kent and the Fool stand by Lear from first to last), but in all probability SOMEONE will. If you throw away your weapons, some less scrupulous person will pick them up. If you turn the other cheek, you will get a harder blow on it than you got on the first one. This docs not always happen, but it is to be expected, and you ought not to complain if it does happen. The second blow is, so to speak, part of the act of turning the other cheek. First of all, therefore, there is the vulgar, common-sense moral drawn by the Fool: "Don't relinquish power, don't give away your lands." But there is also another moral. Shakespeare never utters it in so many words, and it does not very much matter whether he was fully aware of it. It is contained in the story, which, after all, he made up, or altered to suit his purposes. It is: "Give away your lands if you want to, but don't expect to gain happiness by doing so. Probably you won't gain

happiness. If you live for others, you must live FOR OTHERS, and not as a roundabout way of getting an advantage for yourself."

Obviously neither of these conclusions could have been pleasing to Tolstoy. The first of them expresses the ordinary, belly-to-earth selfishness from which he was genuinely trying to escape. The other conflicts with his desire to eat his cake and have it–that is, to destroy his own egoism and by so doing to gain eternal life. Of course, LEAR is not a sermon in favour of altruism. It merely points out the results of practising self-denial for selfish reasons. Shakespeare had a considerable streak of worldliness in him, and if he had been forced to take sides in his own play, his sympathies would probably have lain with the Fool. But at least he could see the whole issue and treat it at the level of tragedy. Vice is punished, but virtue is not rewarded. The morality of Shakespeare's later tragedies is not religious in the ordinary sense, and certainly is not Christian. Only two of them, HAMLET and OTHELLO, are supposedly occurring inside the Christian era, and even in those, apart from the antics of the ghost in HAMLET, there is no indication of a "next world" where everything is to be put right. All of these tragedies start out with the humanist assumption that life, although full of sorrow, is worth living, and that Man is a noble animal–a belief which Tolstoy in his old age did not share.

Tolstoy was not a saint, but he tried very hard to make himself into a saint, and the standards he applied to literature were other-worldly ones. It is important to realize that the difference between a saint and an ordinary human being is a difference of kind and not of degree. That is, the one is not to be regarded as an imperfect form of the other. The saint, at any rate Tolstoy's kind of saint, is not trying to work an improvement in earthly life: he is trying to bring it to an end and put something different in its place. One obvious expression of this is the claim that celibacy is "higher" than marriage. If only, Tolstoy says in effect, we would stop breeding, fighting, struggling and enjoying, if we could get rid not only of our sins but of everything else that binds us to the surface of the earth–including love, then the whole painful process would be over and the Kingdom of Heaven would arrive. But a normal human being does not want the Kingdom of Heaven: he wants life on earth to continue. This is

not solely because he is "weak", "sinful" and anxious for a "good time". Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering, and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise. Ultimately it is the Christian attitude which is self-interested and hedonistic, since the aim is always to get away from the painful struggle of earthly life and find eternal peace in some kind of Heaven or Nirvana. The humanist attitude is that the struggle must continue and that death is the price of life. "Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all"–which is an un-Christian sentiment. Often there is a seeming truce between the humanist and the religious believer, but in fact their attitudes cannot be reconciled: one must choose between this world and the next. And the enormous majority of human beings, if they understood the issue, would choose this world. They do make that choice when they continue working, breeding and dying instead of crippling their faculties in the hope of obtaining a new lease of existence elsewhere.

We do not know a great deal about Shakespeare's religious beliefs, and from the evidence of his writings it would be difficult to prove that he had any. But at any rate he was not a saint or a would-be saint: he was a human being, and in some ways not a very good one. It is clear, for instance, that he liked to stand well with the rich and powerful, and was capable of flattering them in the most servile way. He is also noticeably cautious, not to say cowardly, in his manner of uttering unpopular opinions. Almost never does he put a subversive or sceptical remark into the mouth of a character likely to be identified with himself. Throughout his plays the acute social critics, the people who are not taken in by accepted fallacies, are buffoons, villains, lunatics or persons who are shamming insanity or are in a state of violent hysteria. LEAR is a play in which this tendency is particularly well marked. It contains a great deal of veiled social criticism–a point Tolstoy misses–but it is all uttered either by the Fool, by Edgar when he is pretending to be mad, or by Lear during his bouts of madness. In his sane moments Lear hardly ever makes an intelligent remark. And yet the very fact that Shakespeare had to use these subterfuges shows how widely his thoughts ranged. He could not restrain himself from commenting on

almost everything, although he put on a series of masks in order to do so. If one has once read Shakespeare with attention, it is not easy to go a day without quoting him, because there are not many subjects of major importance that he does not discuss or at least mention somewhere or other, in his unsystematic but illuminating way. Even the irrelevancies that litter every one of his plays–the puns and riddles, the lists of names, the scraps of "reportage" like the conversation of the carriers in HENRY IV the bawdy jokes, the rescued fragments of forgotten ballads–are merely the products of excessive vitality. Shakespeare was not a philosopher or a scientist, but he did have curiosity, he loved the surface of the earth and the process of life–which, it should be repealed, is NOT the same thing as wanting to have a good time and stay alive as long as possible. Of course, it is not because of the quality of his thought that Shakespeare has survived, and he might not even be remembered as a dramatist if he had not also been a poet. His main hold on us is through language. How deeply Shakespeare himself was fascinated by the music of words can probably be inferred from the speeches of Pistol. What Pistol says is largely meaningless, but if one considers his lines singly they are magnificent rhetorical verse. Evidently, pieces of resounding nonsense ("Let floods o'erswell, and fiends for food howl on", etc.) were constantly appearing in Shakespeare's mind of their own accord, and a half-lunatic character had to be invented to use them up.

Tolstoy's native tongue was not English, and one cannot blame him for being unmoved by Shakespeare's verse, nor even, perhaps, for refusing to believe that Shakespeare's skill with words was something out of the ordinary. But he would also have rejected the whole notion of valuing poetry for its texture–valuing it, that is to say, as a kind of music. If it could somehow have been proved to him that his whole explanation of Shakespeare's rise to fame is mistaken, that inside the English-speaking world, at any rate, Shakespeare's popularity is genuine, that his mere skill in placing one syllable beside another has given acute pleasure to generation after generation of English-speaking people–all this would not have been counted as a merit to Shakespeare, but rather the contrary. It would simply have been one more proof of the irreligious, earthbound nature of

Shakespeare and his admirers. Tolstoy would have said that poetry is to be judged by its meaning, and that seductive sounds merely cause false meanings to go unnoticed. At every level it is the same issue–this world against the next: and certainly the music of words is something that belongs to this world.

A sort of doubt has always hung around the character of Tolstoy, as round the character of Gandhi. He was not a vulgar hypocrite, as some people declared him to be, and he would probably have imposed even greater sacrifices on himself than he did, if he had not been interfered with at every step by the people surrounding him, especially his wife. But on the other hand it is dangerous to take such men as Tolstoy at their disciples' valuation. There is always the possibility–the probability, indeed–that they have done no more than exchange one form of egoism for another. Tolstoy renounced wealth, fame and privilege; he abjured violence in all its forms and was ready to suffer for doing so; but it is not easy to believe that he abjured the principle of coercion, or at least the DESIRE to coerce others. There are families in which the father will say to his child, "You'll get a thick car if you do that again", while the mother, her eyes brimming over with tears, will take the child in her arms and murmur lovingly, "Now, darling, IS it kind to Mummy to do that?" And who would maintain that the second method is less tyrannous than the first? The distinction that really matters is not between violence and non-violence, but between having and not having the appetite for power. There are people who are convinced of the wickedness both of armies and of police forces, but who are nevertheless much more intolerant and inquisitorial in outlook than the normal person who believes that it is necessary to use violence in certain circumstances. They will not say to somebody else, "Do this, that and the other or you will go to prison", but they will, if they can, get inside his brain and dictate his thoughts for him in the minutest particulars. Creeds like pacifism and anarchism, which seem on the surface to imply a complete renunciation of power, rather encourage this habit of mind. For if you have embraced a creed which appears to be free from the ordinary dirtiness of politics–a creed from which you yourself cannot expect to draw any material advantage–surely that proves that you are in the right? And the more you are in the

right, the more natural that everyone else should be bullied into thinking likewise.

If we are to believe what he says in his pamphlet, Tolstoy has never been able to see any merit in Shakespeare, and was always astonished to find that his fellow-writers, Turgenev, Fet and others thought differently. We may be sure that in his unregenerate days Tolstoy's conclusion would have been: "You like Shakespeare–I don't. Let's leave it at that." Later, when his perception that it takes all sorts to make a world had deserted him, he came to think of Shakespeare's writings as something dangerous to himself. The more pleasure people took in Shakespeare, the less they would listen to Tolstoy. Therefore nobody must be ALLOWED to enjoy Shakespeare, just as nobody must be allowed to drink alcohol or smoke tobacco. True, Tolstoy would not prevent them by force. He is not demanding that the police shall impound every copy of Shakespeare's works. But he will do dirt on Shakespeare, if he can. He will try to get inside the mind of every lover of Shakespeare and kill his enjoyment by every trick he can think of, including–as I have shown in my summary of his pamphlet–arguments which are self-contradictory or even doubtfully honest.

But finally the most striking thing is how little difference it all makes. As I said earlier, one cannot ANSWER Tolstoy's pamphlet, at least on its main counts. There is no argument by which one can defend a poem. It defends itself by surviving, or it is indefensible. And if this test is valid, I think the verdict in Shakespeare's case must be "not guilty". Like every other writer, Shakespeare will be forgotten sooner or later, but it is unlikely that a heavier indictment will ever be brought against him. Tolstoy was perhaps the most admired literary man of his age, and he was certainly not its least able pamphleteer. He turned all his powers of denunciation against Shakespeare, like all the guns of a battleship roaring simultaneously. And with what result? Forty years later Shakespeare is still there completely unaffected, and of the attempt to demolish him nothing remains except the yellowing pages of a pamphlet which hardly anyone has read, and which would be forgotten altogether if Tolstoy had not also been the author of WAR AND PEACE and ANNA KARENINA.

SUCH, SUCH WERE THE JOYS (1947)

Soon after I arrived at Crossgates (not immediately, but after a week or two, just when I seemed to be settling into routine of school life) I began wetting my bed. I was now aged eight, so that this was a reversion to a habit which I must have grown out of at least four years earlier.

Nowadays, I believe, bed-wetting in such circumstances is taken for granted. It is a normal reaction in children who have been removed from their homes to a strange place. In those days, however, it was looked on as a disgusting crime which the child committed on purpose and for which the proper cure was a beating. For my part I did not need to be told it was a crime. Night after night I prayed, with a fervor never previously attained in my prayers, 'Please God, do not let me wet my bed! Oh, please God, do not let me wet my bed!' but it made remarkably little difference. Some nights the thing happened, others not. There was no volition about it, no consciousness. You did not properly speaking do the deed: you were merely woke up in the morning and found that the sheets were wringing wet.

After the second or third offense I was warned that I should be beaten next time, but I received the warning in a curiously roundabout way. One afternoon, as we were filing out from tea, Mrs. Simpson, the headmaster's wife, was sitting at the head of one of the tables, chatting with a lady of whom I know nothing, except that she was on an afternoon's visit to the school. She was an intimidating, masculine-looking person wearing a riding habit, or something that I took to be a riding habit. I was just leaving the room when Mrs. Simpson called me back, as though to introduce me to the visitor.

Mrs. Simpson was nicknamed Bingo, and I shall call her by that name for I seldom think of her by any other. (Officially, however, she was addressed as Mum, probably a corruption of the 'Ma'am' used by public school boys to their housemasters' wives.) She was a stocky square-built woman with hard red cheeks, a flat top to her head, prominent brows and deepset, suspicious eyes. Although a great deal of the time she was full of false heartiness, jollying one along with mannish slang ('Buck up, old chap!' and so forth), and

even using one's Christian name, her eyes never lost their anxious, accusing look. It was very difficult to look her in the face without feeling guilty, even at moments when one was not guilty of anything in particular.

'Here is a little boy,' said Bingo, indicating me to the strange lady, 'who wets his bed every night. Do you know what I am going to do if you wet your bed again?' she added, turning to me. 'I am going to get the Sixth Form to beat you.'

The strange lady put on an air of being inexpressibly shocked, and exclaimed 'I-should-think-so!' And here occurred one of those wild, almost lunatic misunderstandings which are part of the daily experience of childhood. The Sixth Form was a group of older boys who were selected as having 'character' and were empowered to beat smaller boys. I had not yet learned of their existence, and I misheard the phrase 'the Sixth Form' as 'Mrs. Form.' I took it as referring to the strange lady–I thought, that is, that her name was Mrs. Form. It was an improbable name, but a child has no judgment in such matters. I imagined, therefore, that it was she who was to be deputed to beat me. It did not strike me as strange that this job should be turned over to a casual visitor in no way connected with the school. I merely assumed that 'Mrs. Form' was a stern disciplinarian who enjoyed beating people (somehow her appearance seemed to bear this out) and I had an immediate terrifying vision of her arriving for the occasion in full riding kit and armed with a hunting whip. To this day I can feel myself almost swooning with shame as I stood, a very small, round-faced boy in short corduroy knickers, before the two women. I could not speak. I felt that I should die if 'Mrs. Form' were to beat me. But my dominant feeling was not fear or even resentment: it was simply shame because one more person, and that a woman, had been told of my disgusting offense.

A little later, I forget how, I learned that it was not after all 'Mrs. Form' who would do the beating. I cannot remember whether it was that very night that I wetted my bed again, but at any rate I did wet it again quite soon. Oh, the despair, the feeling of cruel injustice, after all my prayers and resolutions, at once again waking between the clammy sheets! There was no chance of hiding what I had done. The grim statuesque matron, Daphne by name, arrived in the dormitory

specially to inspect my bed. She pulled back the clothes, then drew herself up, and the dreaded words seemed to come rolling out of her like a peal of thunder:

'REPORT YOURSELF to the headmaster after breakfast!'

I do not know how many times I heard that phrase during my early years at Crossgates. It was only very rarely that it did not mean a beating. The words always had a portentous sound in my ears, like muffled drums or the words of the death sentence.

When I arrived to report myself, Bingo was doing something or other at the long shiny table in the ante-room to the study. Her uneasy eyes searched me as I went past. In the study Mr. Simpson, nicknamed Sim, was waiting. Sim was a round-shouldered curiously oafish-looking man, not large but shambling in gait, with a chubby face which was like that of an overgrown baby, and which was capable of good humor. He knew, of course, why I had been sent to him, and had already taken a bone-handled riding crop out of the cupboard, but it was part of the punishment of reporting yourself that you had to proclaim your offense with your own lips. When I had said my say, he read me a short but pompous lecture, then seized me by the scruff of the neck, twisted me over and began beating me with the riding crop. He had a habit of continuing his lecture while he flogged you, and I remember the words 'you dirty little boy' keeping time with the blows. The beating did not hurt (perhaps as it was the first time, he was not hitting me very hard), and I walked out feeling very much better. The fact that the beating had not hurt was a sort of victory and partially wiped out the shame of the bed-wetting. I was even incautious enough to wear a grin on my face. Some small boys were hanging about in the passage outside the door of the ante-room.

'D'you get the cane?'

'It didn't hurt,' I said proudly.

Bingo had heard everything. Instantly her voice came screaming after me:

'Come here! Come here this instant! What was that you said?'

'I said it didn't hurt,' I faltered out.

'How dare you say a thing like that? Do you think that is a proper thing to say? Go in and REPORT YOURSELF AGAIN!'

This time Sim laid on in real earnest. He continued for a length of

time that frightened and astonished me–about five minutes, it seemed–ending up by breaking the riding crop. The bone handle went flying across the room.

'Look what you've made me do!' he said furiously, holding up the broken crop.

I had fallen into a chair, weakly sniveling. I remember that this was the only time throughout my boyhood when a beating actually reduced me to tears, and curiously enough I was not even now crying because of the pain. The second beating had not hurt very much either. Fright and shame seemed to have anesthetized me. I was crying partly because I felt that this was expected of me, partly from genuine repentance, but partly also because of a deeper grief which is peculiar to childhood and not easy to convey: a sense of desolate loneliness and helplessness, of being locked up not only in a hostile world but in a world of good and evil where the rules were such that it was actually not possible for me to keep them.

I knew that bed-wetting was (a) wicked and (b) outside my control. The second fact I was personally aware of, and the first I did not question. It was possible, therefore, to commit a sin without knowing that you committed it, without wanting to commit it, and without being able to avoid it. Sin was not necessarily something that you did: it might be something that happened to you. I do not want to claim that this idea flashed into my mind as a complete novelty at this very moment, under the blows of Sim's cane: I must have had glimpses of it even before I left home, for my early childhood had not been altogether happy. But at any rate this was the great, abiding lesson of my boyhood: that I was in a world where it was not possible for me to be good. And the double beating was a turning-point, for it brought home to me for the first time the harshness of the environment into which I had been flung. Life was more terrible, and I was more wicked, than I had imagined. At any rate, as I sat on the edge of a chair in Sim's study, with not even the self-possession to stand up while he stormed at me, I had a conviction of sin and folly and weakness, such as I do not remember to have felt before.

In general, one's memories of any period must necessarily weaken as one moves away from it. One is constantly learning new facts, and old ones have to drop out to make way for them. At twenty

I could have written the history of my schooldays with an accuracy which would be quite impossible now. But it can also happen that one's memories grow sharper after a long lapse of time, because one is looking at the past with fresh eyes and can isolate and, as it were, notice facts which previously existed undifferentiated among a mass of others. Here are two things which in a sense I remembered, but which did not strike me as strange or interesting until quite recently. One is that the second beating seemed to me a just and reasonable punishment. To get one beating, and then to get another and far fiercer one on top of it, for being so unwise as to show that the first had not hurt–that was quite natural. The gods are jealous, and when you have good fortune you should conceal it. The other is that I accepted the broken riding crop as my own crime. I can still recall my feeling as I saw the handle lying on the carpet–the feeling of having done an ill-bred clumsy thing, and ruined an expensive object. I had broken it: so Sim told me, and so I believed. This acceptance of guilt lay unnoticed in my memory for twenty or thirty years.

So much for the episode of the bed-wetting. But there is one more thing to be remarked. That is that I did not wet my bed again–at least, I did wet it once again, and received another beating, after which the trouble stopped. So perhaps this barbarous remedy does work, though at a heavy price, I have no doubt.

All this was thirty years ago and more. The question is: Does a child at school go through the same kind of experiences nowadays?

The only honest answer, I believe, is that we do not with certainty know. Of course it is obvious that the present-day attitude towards education is enormously more humane and sensible than that of the past. The snobbishness that was an integral part of my own education would be almost unthinkable today, because the society that nourished it is dead. I recall a conversation that must have taken place about a year before I left Crossgates. A Russian boy, large and fair-haired, a year older than myself, was questioning me.

'How much a-year has your father got?'

I told him what I thought it was, adding a few hundreds to make it sound better. The Russian boy, neat in his habits, produced a pencil and a small notebook and made a calculation.

‘My father has over two hundred times as much money as yours,’ he announced with a sort of amused contempt.

That was in 1915. What happened to that money a couple of years later, I wonder? And still more I wonder, do conversations of that kind happen at preparatory schools now?

Clearly there has been a vast change of outlook, a general growth of ‘enlightenment,’ even among ordinary, unthinking middle-class people. Religious belief, for instance, has largely vanished, dragging other kinds of nonsense after it. I imagine that very few people nowadays would tell a child that if it masturbates it will end in the lunatic asylum. Beating, too, has become discredited, and has even been abandoned at many schools. Nor is the underfeeding of children looked on as a normal, almost meritorious act. No one now would openly set out to give his pupils as little food as they could do with, or tell them that it is healthy to get up from a meal as hungry as you sat down. The whole status of children has improved, partly because they have grown relatively less numerous. And the diffusion of even a little psychological knowledge has made it harder for parents and schoolteachers to indulge their aberrations in the name of discipline. Here is a case, not known to me personally, but known to someone I can vouch for, and happening within my own lifetime. A small girl, daughter of a clergyman, continued wetting her bed at an age when she should have grown out of it. In order to punish her for this dreadful deed, her father took her to a large garden party and there introduced her to the whole company as a little girl who wetted her bed: and to underline her wickedness he had previously painted her face black. I do not suggest that Bingo and Sim would actually have done a thing like this, but I doubt whether it would have much surprised them. After all, things do change. And yet–!

The question is not whether boys are still buckled into Eton collars on Sunday, or told that babies are dug up under gooseberry bushes. That kind of thing is at an end, admittedly. The real question is whether it is still normal for a school child to live for years amid irrational terrors and lunatic misunderstandings. And here one is up against the very great difficulty of knowing what a child really feels and thinks. A child which appears reasonably happy may actually be suffering horrors which it cannot or will not reveal. It lives in a sort

of alien under-water world which we can only penetrate by memory or divination. Our chief clue is the fact that we were once children ourselves, and many people appear to forget the atmosphere of their own childhood almost entirely. Think for instance of the unnecessary torments that people will inflict by sending a child back to school with clothes of the wrong pattern, and refusing to see that this matters! Over things of this kind a child will sometimes utter a protest, but a great deal of the time its attitude is one of simple concealment. Not to expose your true feelings to an adult seems to be instinctive from the age of seven or eight onwards. Even the affection that one feels for a child, the desire to protect and cherish it, is a cause of misunderstanding. One can love a child, perhaps, more deeply than one can love another adult, but is rash to assume that the child feels any love in return. Looking back on my own childhood, after the infant years were over, I do not believe that I ever felt love for any mature person, except my mother, and even her I did not trust, in the sense that shyness made me conceal most of my real feelings from her. Love, the spontaneous, unqualified emotion of love, was something I could only feel for people who were young. Towards people who were old–and remember that 'old' to a child means over thirty, or even over twenty-five–I could feel reverence, respect, admiration or compunction, but I seemed cut off from them by a veil of fear and shyness mixed up with physical distaste. People are too ready to forget the child's physical shrinking from the adult. The enormous size of grownups, their ungainly, rigid bodies, their coarse wrinkled skins, their great relaxed eyelids, their yellow teeth, and the whiffs of musty clothes and beer and sweat and tobacco that disengage from them at every movement! Part of the reason for the ugliness of adults, in a child's eyes, is that the child is usually looking upwards, and few faces are at their best when seen from below. Besides, being fresh and unmarked itself, the child has impossibly high standards in the matter of skin and teeth and complexion. But the greatest barrier of all is the child's misconception about age. A child can hardly envisage life beyond thirty, and in judging people's ages it will make fantastic mistakes. It will think that a person of twenty-five is forty, that a person of forty is sixty-five, and so on. Thus, when I fell in love with Elsie I took her

to be grown up. I met her again, when I was thirteen and she, I think, must have been twenty-three; she now seemed to me a middle-aged woman, somewhat past her best. And the child thinks of growing old as an almost obscene calamity, which for some mysterious reason will never happen to itself. All who have passed the age of thirty are joyless grotesques, endlessly fussing about things of no importance and staying alive without, so far as the child can see, having anything to live for. Only child life is real life. The schoolmaster who imagines he is loved and trusted by his boys is in fact mimicked and laughed at behind his back. An adult who does not seem dangerous nearly always seems ridiculous.

I base these generalizations on what I can recall of my own childhood outlook. Treacherous though memory is, it seems to me the chief means we have of discovering how a child's mind works. Only by resurrecting our own memories can we realize how incredibly distorted is the child's vision of the world. Consider this, for example. How would Crossgates appear to me now, if I could go back, at my present age, and see it as it was in 1915? What should I think of Bingo and Sim, those terrible, all-powerful monsters? I should see them as a couple of silly, shallow, ineffectual people, eagerly clambering up a social ladder which any thinking person could see to be on the point of collapse. I would be no more frightened of them than I would be frightened of a dormouse. Moreover, in those days they seemed to me fantastically old, whereas–though of this I am not certain–I imagine they must have been somewhat younger than I am now. And how would Johnny Hall appear, with his blacksmith's arms and his red, jeering face? Merely a scruffy little boy, barely distinguishable from hundreds of other scruffy little boys. The two sets of facts can lie side by side in my mind, because these happen to be my own memories. But it would be very difficult for me to see with the eyes of any other child, except by an effort of the imagination which might lead me completely astray. The child and the adult live in different worlds. If that is so, we cannot be certain that school, at any rate boarding school, is not still for many children as dreadful an experience as it used to be. Take away God, Latin, the cane, class distinctions and sexual taboos, and the fear, the hatred, the snobbery and the misunderstanding might

still all be there. It will have been seen that my own main trouble was an utter lack of any sense of proportion or probability. This led me to accept outrages and believe absurdities, and to suffer torments over things which were in fact of no importance. It is not enough to say that I was 'silly' and 'ought to have known better.' Look back into your own childhood and think of the nonsense you used to believe and the trivialities which could make you suffer. Of course my own case had its individual variations, but essentially it was that of countless other boys. The weakness of the child is that it starts with a blank sheet. It neither understands nor questions the society in which it lives, and because of its credulity other people can work upon it, infecting it with the sense of inferiority and the dread of offending against mysterious, terrible laws. It may be that everything that happened to me at Crossgates could happen in the most 'enlightened' school, though perhaps in subtler forms. Of one thing, however, I do feel fairly sure, and that is that boarding schools are worse than day schools. A child has a better chance with the sanctuary of its home near at hand. And I think the characteristic faults of the English upper and middle classes may be partly due to the practice, general until recently, of sending children away from home as young as nine, eight or even seven.

I have never been back to Crossgates. In a way it is only within the last decade that I have really thought over my schooldays, vividly though their memory has haunted me. Nowadays, I believe, it would make very little impression on me to see the place again, if it still exists. And if I went inside and smelled again the inky, dusty smell of the big schoolroom, the rosiny smell of the chapel, the stagnant smell of the swimming bath and the cold reek of the lavatories, I think I should only feel what one invariably feels in revisiting any scene of childhood: How small everything has grown, and how terrible is the deterioration in myself!

WRITERS AND LEVIATHAN (1948)

The position of the writer in an age of State control is a subject that has already been fairly largely discussed, although most of the evidence that might be relevant is not yet available. In this place I do not want to express an opinion either for or against State patronage of the arts, but merely to point out that WHAT KIND of State rules over us must depend partly on the prevailing intellectual atmosphere: meaning, in this context, partly on the attitude of writers and artists themselves, and on their willingness or otherwise to keep the spirit of liberalism alive. If we find ourselves in ten years' time cringing before somebody like Zhdanov, it will probably be because that is what we have deserved. Obviously there are strong tendencies towards totalitarianism at work within the English literary intelligentsia already. But here I am not concerned with any organised and conscious movement such as Communism, but merely with the effect, on people of goodwill, of political thinking and the need to take sides politically.

This is a political age. War, Fascism, concentration camps, rubber truncheons, atomic bombs, etc are what we daily think about, and therefore to a great extent what we write about, even when we do not name them openly. We cannot help this. When you are on a sinking ship, your thoughts will be about sinking ships. But not only is our subject-matter narrowed, but our whole attitude towards literature is coloured by loyalties which we at least intermittently realise to be non-literary. I often have the feeling that even at the best of times literary criticism is fraudulent, since in the absence of any accepted standards whatever–any EXTERNAL reference which can give meaning to the statement that such and such a book is "good" or "bad"–every literary judgement consists in trumping up a set of rules to justify an instinctive preference. One's real reaction to a book, when one has a reaction at all, is usually "I like this book" or "I don't like it", and what follows is a rationalisation. But "I like this book" is not, I think, a non-literary reaction; the non-literary reaction is "This book is on my side, and therefore I must discover merits in it". Of course, when one praises a book for political reasons one may be

emotionally sincere, in the sense that one does feel strong approval of it, but also it often happens that party solidarity demands a plain lie. Anyone used to reviewing books for political periodicals is well aware of this. In general, if you are writing for a paper that you are in agreement with, you sin by commission, and if for a paper of the opposite stamp, by omission. At any rate, innumerable controversial books-books for or against Soviet Russia, for or against Zionism, for or against the Catholic Church, etc–are judged before they are read, and in effect before they are written. One knows in advance what reception they will get in what papers. And yet, with a dishonesty that sometimes is not even quarter-conscious, the pretence is kept up that genuinely literary standards are being applied.

Of course, the invasion of literature by politics was bound to happen. It must have happened, even if the special problem of totalitarianism had never arisen, because we have developed a sort of compunction which our grandparents did not have, an awareness of the enormous injustice and misery of the world, and a guilt-stricken feeling that one ought to be doing something about it, which makes a purely aesthetic attitude towards life impossible. No one, now, could devote himself to literature as single-mindedly as Joyce or Henry James. But unfortunately, to accept political responsibility now means yielding oneself over to orthodoxies and "party lines", with all the timidity and dishonesty that that implies. As against the Victorian writers, we have the disadvantage of living among clear-cut political ideologies and of usually knowing at a glance what thoughts are heretical. A modern literary intellectual lives and writes in constant dread–not, indeed, of public opinion in the wider sense, but of public opinion within his own group. As a rule, luckily, there is more than one group, but also at any given moment there is a dominant orthodoxy, to offend against which needs a thick skin and sometimes means cutting one's income in half for years on end. Obviously, for about fifteen years past, the dominant orthodoxy, especially among the young, has been "left". The key words are "progressive", "democratic" and "revolutionary", while the labels which you must at all costs avoid having gummed upon you are "bourgeois", "reactionary" and "Fascist". Almost everyone nowadays, even the majority of Catholics and Conservatives, is "progressive", or at least

wishes to be thought so. No one, so far as I know, ever describes himself as a "bourgeois", just as no one literate enough to have heard the word ever admits to being guilty of antisemitism. We are all of us good democrats, anti-Fascist, anti-imperialist, contemptuous of class distinctions, impervious to colour prejudice, and so on and so forth. Nor is there much doubt that the present-day "left" orthodoxy is better than the rather snobbish, pietistic Conservative orthodoxy which prevailed twenty years ago, when the CRITERION and (on a lower level) the LONDON MERCURY were the dominant literary magazines. For at the least its implied objective is a viable form of society which large numbers of people actually want. But it also has its own falsities which, because they cannot be admitted, make it impossible for certain questions to be seriously discussed.

The whole left-wing ideology, scientific and Utopian, was evolved by people who had no immediate prospect of attaining power. It was, therefore, an extremist ideology, utterly contemptuous of kings, governments, laws, prisons, police forces, armies, flags, frontiers, patriotism, religion, conventional morality, and, in fact, the whole existing scheme of things. Until well within living memory the forces of the Left in all countries were fighting against a tyranny which appeared to be invincible, and it was easy to assume that if only THAT particular tyranny–capitalism–could be overthrown, Socialism would follow. Moreover, the Left had inherited from Liberalism certain distinctly questionable beliefs, such as the belief that the truth will prevail and persecution defeats itself, or that man is naturally good and is only corrupted by his environment. This perfectionist ideology has persisted in nearly all of us, and it is in the name of it that we protest when (for instance) a Labour government votes huge incomes to the King's daughters or shows hesitation about nationalising steel. But we have also accumulated in our minds a whole series of unadmitted contradictions, as a result of successive bumps against reality.

The first big bump was the Russian Revolution. For somewhat complex reasons, nearly the whole of the English Left has been driven to accept the Russian régime as "Socialist", while silently recognising that its spirit and practice are quite alien to anything that is meant by "Socialism" in this country. Hence there has arisen a sort

of schizophrenic manner of thinking, in which words like "democracy" can bear two irreconcilable meanings, and such things as concentration camps and mass deportations can be right and wrong simultaneously. The next blow to the left-wing ideology was the rise of Fascism, which shook the pacifism and internationalism of the Left without bringing about a definite restatement of doctrine. The experience of German occupation taught the European peoples something that the colonial peoples knew already, namely, that class antagonisms are not all-important and that there is such a thing as national interest. After Hitler it was difficult to maintain seriously that "the enemy is in your own country" and that national independence is of no value. But though we all know this and act upon it when necessary, we still feel that to say it aloud would be a kind of treachery. And finally, the greatest difficulty of all, there is the fact that the Left is now in power and is obliged to take responsibility and make genuine decisions.

Left governments almost invariably disappoint their supporters because, even when the prosperity which they have promised is achievable, there is always need of an uncomfortable transition period about which little has been said beforehand. At this moment we see our own Government, in its desperate economic straits, fighting in effect against its own past propaganda. The crisis that we are now in is not a sudden unexpected calamity, like an earthquake, and it was not caused by the war, but merely hastened by it. Decades ago it could be foreseen that something of this kind was going to happen. Ever since the nineteenth century our national income, dependent partly on interest from foreign investments, and on assured markets and cheap raw materials in colonial countries, had been extremely precarious. It was certain that, sooner or later, something would go wrong and we should be forced to make our exports balance our imports: and when that happened the British standard of living, including the working-class standard, was bound to fall, at least temporarily. Yet the left-wing parties, even when they were vociferously anti-imperialist, never made these facts clear. On occasion they were ready to admit that the British workers had benefited, to some extent, by the looting of Asia and Africa, but they always allowed it to appear that we could give up our loot and yet in

some way contrive to remain prosperous. Quite largely, indeed, the workers were won over to Socialism by being told that they were exploited, whereas the brute truth was that, in world terms, they were exploiters. Now, to all appearances, the point has been reached when the working-class living-standard CANNOT be maintained, let alone raised. Even if we squeeze the rich out of existence, the mass of the people must either consume less or produce more. Or am I exaggerating the mess we are in? I may be, and I should be glad to find myself mistaken. But the point I wish to make is that this question, among people who are faithful to the Left ideology, cannot be genuinely discussed. The lowering of wages and raising of working hours are felt to be inherently anti-Socialist measures, and must therefore be dismissed in advance, whatever the economic situation may be. To suggest that they may be unavoidable is merely to risk being plastered with those labels that we are all terrified of. It is far safer to evade the issue and pretend that we can put everything right by redistributing the existing national income.

To accept an orthodoxy is always to inherit unresolved contradictions. Take for instance the fact that all sensitive people are revolted by industrialism and its products, and yet are aware that the conquest of poverty and the emancipation of the working class demand not less industrialisation, but more and more. Or take the fact that certain jobs are absolutely necessary and yet are never done except under some kind of coercion. Or take the fact that it is impossible to have a positive foreign policy without having powerful armed forces. One could multiply examples. In every such case there is a conclusion which is perfectly plain but which can only be drawn if one is privately disloyal to the official ideology. The normal response is to push the question, unanswered, into a corner of one's mind, and then continue repeating contradictory catchwords. One does not have to search far through the reviews and magazines to discover the effects of this kind of thinking.

I am not, of course, suggesting that mental dishonesty is peculiar to Socialists and left-wingers generally, or is commonest among them. It is merely that acceptance of ANY political discipline seems to be incompatible with literary integrity. This applies equally to movements like Pacifism and Personalism, which claim to be outside

the ordinary political struggle. Indeed, the mere sound of words ending in '-ism' seems to bring with it the smell of propaganda. Group loyalties are necessary, and yet they are poisonous to literature, so long as literature is the product of individuals. As soon as they are allowed to have any influence, even a negative one, on creative writing, the result is not only falsification, but often the actual drying-up of the inventive faculties.

Well, then what? Do we have to conclude that it is the duty of every writer to "keep out of politics"? Certainly not! In any case, as I have said already, no thinking person can or does genuinely keep out of politics, in an age like the present one. I only suggest that we should draw a sharper distinction than we do at present between our political and our literary loyalties, and should recognise that a willingness to DO certain distasteful but necessary things does not carry with it any obligation to swallow the beliefs that usually go with them. When a writer engages in politics he should do so as a citizen, as a human being, but not AS A WRITER. I do not think that he has the right, merely on the score of his sensibilities, to shirk the ordinary dirty work of politics. Just as much as anyone else, he should be prepared to deliver lectures in draughty halls, to chalk pavements, to canvass voters, to distribute leaflets, even to fight in civil wars if it seems necessary. But whatever else he does in the service of his party, he should never write for it. He should make it clear that his writing is a thing apart. And he should be able to act co-operatively while, if he chooses, completely rejecting the official ideology. He should never turn back from a train of thought because it may lead to a heresy, and he should not mind very much if his unorthodoxy is smelt out, as it probably will be. Perhaps it is even a bad sign in a writer if he is not suspected of reactionary tendencies today, just as it was a bad sign if he was not suspected of Communist sympathies twenty years ago.

But does all this mean that a writer should not only refuse to be dictated to by political bosses, but also that he should refrain from writing ABOUT politics? Once again, certainly not! There is no reason why he should not write in the most crudely political way, if he wishes to. Only he should do so as an individual, an outsider, at the most an unwelcome guerrilla on the flank of a regular army. This

attitude is quite compatible with ordinary political usefulness. It is reasonable, for example, to be willing to fight in a war because one thinks the war ought to be won, and at the same time to refuse to write war propaganda. Sometimes, if a writer is honest, his writings and his political activities may actually contradict one another. There are occasions when that is plainly undesirable: but then the remedy is not to falsify one's impulses, but to remain silent.

To suggest that a creative writer, in a time of conflict, must split his life into two compartments, may seem defeatist or frivolous: yet in practice I do not see what else he can do. To lock yourself up in an ivory tower is impossible and undesirable. To yield subjectively, not merely to a party machine, but even to a group ideology, is to destroy yourself as a writer. We feel this dilemma to be a painful one, because we see the need of engaging in politics while also seeing what a dirty, degrading business it is. And most of us still have a lingering belief that every choice, even every political choice, is between good and evil, and that if a thing is necessary it is also right. We should, I think, get rid of this belief, which belongs to the nursery. In politics one can never do more than decide which of two evils is the lesser, and there are some situations from which one can only escape by acting like a devil or a lunatic. War, for example, may be necessary, but it is certainly not right or sane. Even a General Election is not exactly a pleasant or edifying spectacle. If you have to take part in such things–and I think you do have to, unless you are armoured by old age or stupidity or hypocrisy–then you also have to keep part of yourself inviolate. For most people the problem does not arise in the same form, because their lives are split already. They are truly alive only in their leisure hours, and there is no emotional connection between their work and their political activities. Nor are they generally asked, in the name of political loyalty, to debase themselves as workers. The artist, and especially the writer, is asked just that–in fact, it is the only thing that Politicians ever ask of him. If he refuses, that does not mean that he is condemned to inactivity. One half of him, which in a sense is the whole of him, can act as resolutely, even as violently if need be, as anyone else. But his writings, in so far as they have any value, will always be the product of the saner self that stands aside, records the things that are done

and admits their necessity, but refuses to be deceived as to their true nature.

REFLECTIONS ON GANDHI

Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent, but the tests that have to be applied to them are not, of course, the same in all cases. In Gandhi's case the questions on feels inclined to ask are: to what extent was Gandhi moved by vanity–by the consciousness of himself as a humble, naked old man, sitting on a praying mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power–and to what extent did he compromise his own principles by entering politics, which of their nature are inseparable from coercion and fraud? To give a definite answer one would have to study Gandhi's acts and writings in immense detail, for his whole life was a sort of pilgrimage in which every act was significant. But this partial autobiography, which ends in the nineteen-twenties, is strong evidence in his favor, all the more because it covers what he would have called the unregenerate part of his life and reminds one that inside the saint, or near-saint, there was a very shrewd, able person who could, if he had chosen, have been a brilliant success as a lawyer, an administrator or perhaps even a businessman.

At about the time when the autobiography first appeared I remember reading its opening chapters in the ill-printed pages of some Indian newspaper. They made a good impression on me, which Gandhi himself at that time did not. The things that one associated with him–home-spun cloth, "soul forces" and vegetarianism–were unappealing, and his medievalist program was obviously not viable in a backward, starving, over-populated country. It was also apparent that the British were making use of him, or thought they were making use of him. Strictly speaking, as a Nationalist, he was an enemy, but since in every crisis he would exert himself to prevent violence–which, from the British point of view, meant preventing any effective action whatever–he could be regarded as "our man". In private this was sometimes cynically admitted. The attitude of the Indian millionaires was similar. Gandhi called upon them to repent, and naturally they preferred him to the Socialists and Communists who, given the chance, would actually have taken their money away. How reliable such calculations are in the long run is doubtful; as

Gandhi himself says, “in the end deceivers deceive only themselves”; but at any rate the gentleness with which he was nearly always handled was due partly to the feeling that he was useful. The British Conservatives only became really angry with him when, as in 1942, he was in effect turning his non-violence against a different conqueror.

But I could see even then that the British officials who spoke of him with a mixture of amusement and disapproval also genuinely liked and admired him, after a fashion. Nobody ever suggested that he was corrupt, or ambitious in any vulgar way, or that anything he did was actuated by fear or malice. In judging a man like Gandhi one seems instinctively to apply high standards, so that some of his virtues have passed almost unnoticed. For instance, it is clear even from the autobiography that his natural physical courage was quite outstanding: the manner of his death was a later illustration of this, for a public man who attached any value to his own skin would have been more adequately guarded. Again, he seems to have been quite free from that maniacal suspiciousness which, as E.M. Forster rightly says in A PASSAGE TO INDIA, is the besetting Indian vice, as hypocrisy is the British vice. Although no doubt he was shrewd enough in detecting dishonesty, he seems wherever possible to have believed that other people were acting in good faith and had a better nature through which they could be approached. And though he came of a poor middle-class family, started life rather unfavorably, and was probably of unimpressive physical appearance, he was not afflicted by envy or by the feeling of inferiority. Color feeling when he first met it in its worst form in South Africa, seems rather to have astonished him. Even when he was fighting what was in effect a color war, he did not think of people in terms of race or status. The governor of a province, a cotton millionaire, a half-starved Dravidian coolie, a British private soldier were all equally human beings, to be approached in much the same way. It is noticeable that even in the worst possible circumstances, as in South Africa when he was making himself unpopular as the champion of the Indian community, he did not lack European friends.

Written in short lengths for newspaper serialization, the autobiography is not a literary masterpiece, but it is the more

impressive because of the commonplaceness of much of its material. It is well to be reminded that Gandhi started out with the normal ambitions of a young Indian student and only adopted his extremist opinions by degrees and, in some cases, rather unwillingly. There was a time, it is interesting to learn, when he wore a top hat, took dancing lessons, studied French and Latin, went up the Eiffel Tower and even tried to learn the violin–all this was the idea of assimilating European civilization as thoroughly as possible. He was not one of those saints who are marked out by their phenomenal piety from childhood onwards, nor one of the other kind who forsake the world after sensational debaucheries. He makes full confession of the misdeeds of his youth, but in fact there is not much to confess. As a frontispiece to the book there is a photograph of Gandhi's possessions at the time of his death. The whole outfit could be purchased for about 5 pounds, and Gandhi's sins, at least his fleshly sins, would make the same sort of appearance if placed all in one heap. A few cigarettes, a few mouthfuls of meat, a few annas pilfered in childhood from the maidservant, two visits to a brothel (on each occasion he got away without "doing anything"), one narrowly escaped lapse with his landlady in Plymouth, one outburst of temper–that is about the whole collection. Almost from childhood onwards he had a deep earnestness, an attitude ethical rather than religious, but, until he was about thirty, no very definite sense of direction. His first entry into anything describable as public life was made by way of vegetarianism. Underneath his less ordinary qualities one feels all the time the solid middle-class businessmen who were his ancestors. One feels that even after he had abandoned personal ambition he must have been a resourceful, energetic lawyer and a hard-headed political organizer, careful in keeping down expenses, an adroit handler of committees and an indefatigable chaser of subscriptions. His character was an extraordinarily mixed one, but there was almost nothing in it that you can put your finger on and call bad, and I believe that even Gandhi's worst enemies would admit that he was an interesting and unusual man who enriched the world simply by being alive. Whether he was also a lovable man, and whether his teachings can have much for those who do not accept the religious beliefs on which they are founded, I have

never felt fully certain.

Of late years it has been the fashion to talk about Gandhi as though he were not only sympathetic to the Western Left-wing movement, but were integrally part of it. Anarchists and pacifists, in particular, have claimed him for their own, noticing only that he was opposed to centralism and State violence and ignoring the other-worldly, anti-humanist tendency of his doctrines. But one should, I think, realize that Gandhi's teachings cannot be squared with the belief that Man is the measure of all things and that our job is to make life worth living on this earth, which is the only earth we have. They make sense only on the assumption that God exists and that the world of solid objects is an illusion to be escaped from. It is worth considering the disciplines which Gandhi imposed on himself and which–though he might not insist on every one of his followers observing every detail–he considered indispensable if one wanted to serve either God or humanity. First of all, no meat-eating, and if possible no animal food in any form. (Gandhi himself, for the sake of his health, had to compromise on milk, but seems to have felt this to be a backsliding.) No alcohol or tobacco, and no spices or condiments even of a vegetable kind, since food should be taken not for its own sake but solely in order to preserve one's strength. Secondly, if possible, no sexual intercourse. If sexual intercourse must happen, then it should be for the sole purpose of begetting children and presumably at long intervals. Gandhi himself, in his middle thirties, took the vow of BRAMAHCHARYA, which means not only complete chastity but the elimination of sexual desire. This condition, it seems, is difficult to attain without a special diet and frequent fasting. One of the dangers of milk-drinking is that it is apt to arouse sexual desire. And finally this is the cardinal point–for the seeker after goodness there must be no close friendships and no exclusive loves whatever.

Close friendships, Gandhi says, are dangerous, because "friends react on one another" and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong-doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one's preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitude cease to

be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others. The autobiography leaves it uncertain whether Gandhi behaved in an inconsiderate way to his wife and children, but at any rate it makes clear that on three occasions he was willing to let his wife or a child die rather than administer the animal food prescribed by the doctor. It is true that the threatened death never actually occurred, and also that Gandhi–with, one gathers, a good deal of moral pressure in the opposite direction–always gave the patient the choice of staying alive at the price of committing a sin: still, if the decision had been solely his own, he would have forbidden the animal food, whatever the risks might be. There must, he says, be some limit to what we will do in order to remain alive, and the limit is well on this side of chicken broth. This attitude is perhaps a noble one, but, in the sense which–I think–most people would give to the word, it is inhuman. The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals. No doubt alcohol, tobacco, and so forth, are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid. There is an obvious retort to this, but one should be wary about making it. In this yogi-ridden age, it is too readily assumed that "non-attachment" is not only better than a full acceptance of earthly life, but that the ordinary man only rejects it because it is too difficult: in other words, that the average human being is a failed saint. It is doubtful whether this is true. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings. If one could follow it to its psychological roots, one would, I believe, find that the main motive for "non-attachment" is a desire to escape from the pain of living, and above all from love, which, sexual or non-sexual, is hard work. But it is not necessary here to argue whether the other-worldly or the humanistic ideal is "higher". The point is that they are incompatible. One must choose between God and Man, and all "radicals" and

"progressives", from the mildest Liberal to the most extreme Anarchist, have in effect chosen Man.

However, Gandhi's pacifism can be separated to some extent from his other teachings. Its motive was religious, but he claimed also for it that it was a definitive technique, a method, capable of producing desired political results. Gandhi's attitude was not that of most Western pacifists. SATYAGRAHA, first evolved in South Africa, was a sort of non-violent warfare, a way of defeating the enemy without hurting him and without feeling or arousing hatred. It entailed such things as civil disobedience, strikes, lying down in front of railway trains, enduring police charges without running away and without hitting back, and the like. Gandhi objected to "passive resistance" as a translation of SATYAGRAHA: in Gujarati, it seems, the word means "firmness in the truth". In his early days Gandhi served as a stretcher-bearer on the British side in the Boer War, and he was prepared to do the same again in the war of 1914-18. Even after he had completely abjured violence he was honest enough to see that in war it is usually necessary to take sides. He did not–indeed, since his whole political life centred round a struggle for national independence, he could not–take the sterile and dishonest line of pretending that in every war both sides are exactly the same and it makes no difference who wins. Nor did he, like most Western pacifists, specialize in avoiding awkward questions. In relation to the late war, one question that every pacifist had a clear obligation to answer was: "What about the Jews? Are you prepared to see them exterminated? If not, how do you propose to save them without resorting to war?" I must say that I have never heard, from any Western pacifist, an honest answer to this question, though I have heard plenty of evasions, usually of the "you're another" type. But it so happens that Gandhi was asked a somewhat similar question in 1938 and that his answer is on record in Mr. Louis Fischer's GANDHI AND STALIN. According to Mr. Fischer, Gandhi's view was that the German Jews ought to commit collective suicide, which "would have aroused the world and the people of Germany to Hitler's violence." After the war he justified himself: the Jews had been killed anyway, and might as well have died significantly. One has the impression that this attitude staggered even so warm an

admirer as Mr. Fischer, but Gandhi was merely being honest. If you are not prepared to take life, you must often be prepared for lives to be lost in some other way. When, in 1942, he urged non-violent resistance against a Japanese invasion, he was ready to admit that it might cost several million deaths.

At the same time there is reason to think that Gandhi, who after all was born in 1869, did not understand the nature of totalitarianism and saw everything in terms of his own struggle against the British government. The important point here is not so much that the British treated him forbearingly as that he was always able to command publicity. As can be seen from the phrase quoted above, he believed in "arousing the world", which is only possible if the world gets a chance to hear what you are doing. It is difficult to see how Gandhi's methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the régime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion, but to bring a mass movement into being, or even to make your intentions known to your adversary. Is there a Gandhi in Russia at this moment? And if there is, what is he accomplishing? The Russian masses could only practise civil disobedience if the same idea happened to occur to all of them simultaneously, and even then, to judge by the history of the Ukraine famine, it would make no difference. But let it be granted that non-violent resistance can be effective against one's own government, or against an occupying power: even so, how does one put it into practise internationally? Gandhi's various conflicting statements on the late war seem to show that he felt the difficulty of this. Applied to foreign politics, pacifism either stops being pacifist or becomes appeasement. Moreover the assumption, which served Gandhi so well in dealing with individuals, that all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture, needs to be seriously questioned. It is not necessarily true, for example, when you are dealing with lunatics. Then the question becomes: Who is sane? Was Hitler sane? And is it not possible for one whole culture to be insane by the standards of another? And, so far as one can gauge the feelings of whole nations, is there any apparent connection between a generous deed and a friendly

response? Is gratitude a factor in international politics?

These and kindred questions need discussion, and need it urgently, in the few years left to us before somebody presses the button and the rockets begin to fly. It seems doubtful whether civilization can stand another major war, and it is at least thinkable that the way out lies through non-violence. It is Gandhi's virtue that he would have been ready to give honest consideration to the kind of question that I have raised above; and, indeed, he probably did discuss most of these questions somewhere or other in his innumerable newspaper articles. One feels of him that there was much he did not understand, but not that there was anything that he was frightened of saying or thinking. I have never been able to feel much liking for Gandhi, but I do not feel sure that as a political thinker he was wrong in the main, nor do I believe that his life was a failure. It is curious that when he was assassinated, many of his warmest admirers exclaimed sorrowfully that he had lived just long enough to see his life work in ruins, because India was engaged in a civil war which had always been foreseen as one of the byproducts of the transfer of power. But it was not in trying to smooth down Hindu-Moslem rivalry that Gandhi had spent his life. His main political objective, the peaceful ending of British rule, had after all been attained. As usual the relevant facts cut across one another. On the other hand, the British did get out of India without fighting, and event which very few observers indeed would have predicted until about a year before it happened. On the other hand, this was done by a Labour government, and it is certain that a Conservative government, especially a government headed by Churchill, would have acted differently. But if, by 1945, there had grown up in Britain a large body of opinion sympathetic to Indian independence, how far was this due to Gandhi's personal influence? And if, as may happen, India and Britain finally settle down into a decent and friendly relationship, will this be partly because Gandhi, by keeping up his struggle obstinately and without hatred, disinfected the political air? That one even thinks of asking such questions indicates his stature. One may feel, as I do, a sort of aesthetic distaste for Gandhi, one may reject the claims of sainthood made on his behalf (he never made any such claim himself, by the way), one may also reject sainthood as an

ideal and therefore feel that Gandhi's basic aims were anti-human and reactionary: but regarded simply as a politician, and compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!

LIST OF BOOK REVIEWS

Review of Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler
Review of Personal Record by Julien Green
Review of The Totalitarian Enemy by Franz Borkenau
Review of Landfall by by Nevil Shute; Nailcruncher by Albert Cohen, translated from the French by Vyvyan Holland

Orwell, c. 1945

Review of Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler

It is a sign of the speed at which events are moving that Hurst and Blackett's unexpurgated edition of *Mein Kampf*, published only a year ago, is edited from a pro-Hitler angle. The obvious intention of the translator's preface and notes is to tone down the book's ferocity and present Hitler in as kindly a light as possible. For at that date Hitler was still respectable. He had crushed the German labour movement, and for that the property-owning classes were willing to forgive him almost anything. Both Left and Right concurred in the very shallow notion that National Socialism was merely a version of Conservatism.

Then suddenly it turned out that Hitler was not respectable after all. As one result of this, Hurst and Blackett's edition was reissued in a new jacket explaining that all profits would be devoted to the Red Cross. Nevertheless, simply on the internal evidence of *Mein Kampf*, it is difficult to believe that any real change has taken place in Hitler's aims and opinions. When one compares his utterances of a year or so ago with those made fifteen years earlier, a thing that strikes one is the rigidity of his mind, the way in which his world-view *doesn't* develop. It is the fixed vision of a monomaniac and not likely to be much affected by the temporary manoeuvres of power politics. Probably, in Hitler's own mind, the Russo-German Pact represents no more than an alteration of time-table. The plan laid down in *Mein Kampf* was to smash Russia first, with the implied intention of smashing England afterwards. Now, as it has turned out, England has got to be dealt with first, because Russia was the more easily bribed of the two. But Russia's turn will come when England is out of the picture — that, no doubt, is how Hitler sees it. Whether it will turn out that way is of course a different question.

Suppose that Hitler's programme could be put into effect. What he envisages, a hundred years hence, is a continuous state of 250 million Germans with plenty of "living room" (i.e. stretching to Afghanistan or thereabouts), a horrible brainless empire in which, essentially, nothing ever happens except the training of young men for war and the endless breeding of fresh cannon-fodder. How was it

that he was able to put this monstrous decision across? It is easy to say that at one stage of his career he was financed by the heavy industrialists, who saw in him the man who would smash the Socialists and Communists. They would not have backed him, however, if he had not talked a great movement into existence already. Again, the situation in Germany, with its seven million unemployed, was obviously favourable for demagogues. But Hitler could not have succeeded against his many rivals if it had not been for the attraction of his own personality, which one can feel even in the clumsy writing of *Mein Kampf*, and which is no doubt overwhelming when one hears his speeches. I should like to put it on record that I have never been able to dislike Hitler. Ever since he came to power — till then, like nearly everyone, I had been deceived into thinking that he did not matter — I have reflected that I would certainly kill him if I could get within reach of him, but that I could feel no personal animosity. The fact is that there is something deeply appealing about him. One feels it again when one sees his photographs — and I recommend especially the photograph at the beginning of Hurst and Blackett's edition, which shows Hitler in his early Brownshirt days. It is a pathetic, dog-like face, the face of a man suffering under intolerable wrongs. In a rather more manly way it reproduces the expression of innumerable pictures of Christ crucified, and there is little doubt that that is how Hitler sees himself. The initial personal cause of his grievance against the universe can only be guessed at; but at any rate the grievance is there. He is the martyr, the victim. Prometheus chained to the rock, the self-sacrificing hero who fights single-handed against impossible odds. If he were killing a mouse he would know how to make it seem like a dragon. One feels, as with Napoleon, that he is fighting against destiny, that he *can't* win, and yet that he somehow deserves to. The attraction of such a pose is of course enormous; half the films that one sees turn upon some such theme.

Also he has grasped the falsity of the hedonistic attitude to life. Nearly all western thought since the last war, certainly all "progressive" thought, has assumed tacitly that human beings desire nothing beyond ease, security and avoidance of pain. In such a view of life there is no room, for instance, for patriotism and the military

virtues. The Socialist who finds his children playing with soldiers is usually upset, but he is never able to think of a substitute for the tin soldiers; tin pacifists somehow won't do. Hitler, because in his own joyless mind he feels it with exceptional strength, knows that human beings *don't* only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades. However they may be as economic theories, Fascism and Nazism are psychologically far sounder than any hedonistic conception of life. The same is probably true of Stalin's militarized version of Socialism. All three of the great dictators have enhanced their power by imposing intolerable burdens on their peoples. Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people "I offer you a good time," Hitler has said to them "I offer you struggle, danger and death," and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet. Perhaps later on they will get sick of it and change their minds, as at the end of the last war. After a few years of slaughter and starvation "Greatest happiness of the greatest number" is a good slogan, but at this moment "Better an end with horror than a horror without end" is a winner. Now that we are fighting against the man who coined it, we ought not to underrate its emotional appeal.

Review of Personal Record by Julien Green

Julian Green's diaries, which ten years ago or even five years ago might have seemed comparatively commonplace, are at this moment of the greatest interest. What they really record is the twilight of the aesthetic age, the last gasp of the cultivated second-generation *rentier*. With his extreme sensitiveness and his almost effeminate manner of writing, Mr Green is a figure particularly representative of the nineteen-twenties, of the period when simply to preserve your aesthetic integrity seemed a sufficient return for living on inherited money. Although the diary records visits to London, to various parts of Europe, and to America (Mr Green is of American origin though he writes in French), one has the feeling of being all the while in Paris, the Paris of old yellow-faced houses and green plane trees, and also of first nights, private views and interminable literary conversations with Gide, Gertrude Stein and Madame de Noailles. Everything is recorded with the restless sensitiveness of the writer, who translates his experience into literature almost as automatically as a cow turns grass into milk:

December 19th. A gas-lamp burning behind the glass door of a concierge's room at the end of a winter's day, with darkness overhead — what a lovely opening for a novel! Today, for a whole hour, I had nothing but this admirable picture in my mind.

February 2nd. At Versailles. . . . As I looked at the ivy-leaves with their dainty pale yellow borders, I had a moment of sadness at the thought that, till my life's end, things as lovely as they will be there for me to see and I shall have no time to describe them.

He writes much of his work, and his difficulties with his work (like the majority of writers he never feels in the mood for writing, and yet his books somehow get finished), of his dreams, which seem to affect his waking life considerably, and of his remembered childhood in the golden age "before the war". Nearly all his thoughts have a nostalgic tinge. But what gives them their special interest is that he is far too intelligent to imagine that his way of life or his scheme of values will last for ever. Totally uninterested in politics, he is nevertheless able to see, even as early as the nineteen-twenties,

that the age of liberalism is ending and that wars, revolutions and dictatorships are just round the corner. Everything is cracking and collapsing. The shadow of Hitler flits almost constantly across the pages:

We are going to see life changing under our very eyes. Everything that gives us pleasure will be taken from us. . . . I am growing accustomed to the idea of vanishing from sight, together with all that I love in this world; for it seems reasonable to suppose that we are approaching the end of a long era. How long shall we sleep?. . . Paris is living in a sort of latent panic. . . . In the Europe of 1934 murder inevitably and fatally leads to other murder. How far can this go without the outbreak of war?. . . The war rumours continue as before. Everyone's daily life seems to be saturated with these feelings of apprehension. . . . The Rhineland has been reoccupied. . . . I was asked to say something on the wireless about *Minuit*. As if that were of the slightest importance with things as they are at the moment! But one has to go on pretending. . .

The feeling of futility and impermanence, of hanging about in a draughty room and waiting for the guns to begin to shoot, which has haunted many of us during the past seven years, is present everywhere, and it grows stronger as the diary moves towards 1939. Perhaps even the possession of this feeling depends upon being of a certain age (Julian Green is not quite forty), young enough to expect something from life and old enough to remember "before the war". It is a fact that the people who are now twenty do not appear to notice that the world is falling into ruins. But what is attractive in this diary is its complete impenitence, its refusal to move with the times. It is the diary of a civilized man who realizes that barbarism is bound to triumph, but who is unable to stop being civilized. A new world is coming to birth, a world in which there will be no room for him. He has too much vision to fight against it; on the other hand, he makes no pretence of liking it. As it is exactly that pretence that has been the stock-in-trade of the younger intelligentsia during the last few years, the ghostly sincerity of this book is deeply appealing. It has the charm of the ineffectual, which is so out-of-date as to wear an air of novelty.

Time and Tide, 13 April 1940

Review of The Totalitarian Enemy by Franz Borkenau

Although this is not one of Dr Borkenau's best books, it contains a study of the nature of totalitarianism which deserves and in fact needs to be widely read at this moment. We cannot struggle against Fascism unless we are willing to understand it, a thing which both left-wingers and right-wingers have conspicuously failed to do — basically, of course, because they dared not.

Until the signing of the Russo-German Pact, the assumption made on both sides was that the Nazi régime was in no way revolutionary. National Socialism was simply capitalism with the lid off, Hitler was a dummy with Thyssen pulling the strings — that was the official theory, proved in many a pamphlet by Mr John Strachey and tacitly accepted by *The Times.* Blimps and Left Book Club members alike swallowed it whole, both of them having, so to speak, a vested interest in ignoring the real facts. Quite naturally the propertied classes wanted to believe that Hitler would protect them against Bolshevism, and equally naturally the Socialists hated having to admit that the man who had slaughtered their comrades was a Socialist himself. Hence, on both sides, the frantic efforts to explain away the more and more striking resemblance between the German and Russian régimes. Then came the eye-opener of the Hitler-Stalin pact. Suddenly the scum of the earth and the blood-stained butcher of the workers (for so they had described one another) were marching arm in arm, their friendship "cemented in blood", as Stalin cheerily expressed it. Thereafter the Strachey-Blimp thesis became untenable. National Socialism *is* a form of Socialism, *is* emphatically revolutionary, *does* crush the property owner just as surely as it crushes the worker. The two régimes, having started from opposite ends, are rapidly evolving towards the same system — a form of oligarchical collectivism. And at the moment, as Dr Borkenau points out, it is Germany that is moving towards Russia, rather than the other way about. It is therefore nonsense to talk about Germany "going Bolshevik" if Hitler falls. Germany is going Bolshevik *because* of Hitler and not in spite of him.

The question that really arises is not so much how the Nazis could start out to save the world from Bolshevism and end by becoming Bolshevik, as how they could do it without losing either their power or their self-confidence. Dr Borkenau points to two reasons, one economic, the other psychological. From the first the aim of the Nazis was to turn Germany into a war-machine, and to subordinate everything else to that purpose. But a country, and especially a poor country, which is waging or preparing for "total" war must be in some sense socialistic. When the State has taken complete control of industry, then the so-called capitalist is reduced to the status of a manager, and when consumption goods are so scarce and so strictly rationed that you cannot spend a big income even if you earn one, then the essential structure of Socialism already exists, plus the comfortless equality of war-Communism. Simply in the interest of efficiency the Nazis found themselves expropriating, nationalizing, destroying the very people they had set out to save. It did not bother them, because their aim was simply power and not any particular form of society. They would just as soon be Reds as Whites, provided that it left them on top. If the first step is to smash the Socialists to the tune of anti-Marxist slogans — well and good, smash the Socialists. If the next step is to smash the capitalists to the tune of Marxist slogans — well and good, smash the capitalists. It is all-in wrestling, and the only rule is to win. Russia since 1928 shows distinctly similar reversals of policy, always tending to keep the ruling clique in power. As for the hate-campaigns in which totalitarian régimes ceaselessly indulge, they are real enough while they last, but are simply dictated by the needs of the moment. Jews, Poles, Trotskyists, English, French, Czechs, Democrats, Fascists, Marxists — almost anyone can figure as Public Enemy No. 1. Hatred can be turned in any direction at a moment's notice, like a plumber's blow-flame.

On the strategic aspects of the war Dr Borkenau is less satisfactory. He is too optimistic about the probable attitude of Italy, about the probable military effects of the Russo-German Pact, about the solidarity of the home front and, above all, about the power of the present Government to win the war and win the peace. Basically, as he sees and points out, what we have got to do is to put our own

house in order — to oppose a humaner, freer form of collectivism to the purge-and-censorship variety. We could do it rapidly, almost easily, but it needs the eye of faith to see the present Government doing it.

I hope that Dr Borkenau will write a longer and better book on approximately the same subject. The present one, in spite of some brilliant passages, seems to have been hastily written and has faults of arrangement. Nevertheless Dr Borkenau is one of the most valuable gifts that Hitler has made to England. In a period when nearly all books on current politics have been compounded of lies, or folly, or both, his has been one of the few sane voices heard in the land, and long may it continue.

Review of Landfall by by Nevil Shute; Nailcruncher by Albert Cohen, translated from the French by Vyvyan Holland

It is commonly said that every human being has in him the material for one good book, which is true in the same sense as it is true that every block of stone contains a statue. What is perhaps more to the point is that anyone able to hold a pen can write a fairly good novel of the unpretentious kind, if only at some period of his life he has managed to escape from literary society. There is no lack nowadays of clever writers; the trouble is that such writers are so cut off from the life of their time as to be unable to write about ordinary people. A "distinguished" modern novel almost always has some kind of artist or near-artist as its hero. There is, however, one experience that happens to nearly all human beings alike, and that is war. The "intellectual" has a chance of seeing war at close quarters as he will never see, for instance, stockbroking or marine insurance, and good war-books are in consequence fairly common. The present war, owing to its peculiar character, has not yet produced a literature of its own, but Mr Nevil Shute's *Landfall* is a beginning. It is a straightforward, convincing story, and I shall keep an eye open for Mr Shute's books in future.

What makes it interesting is that it brings out the essential peculiarity of war, the mixture of heroism and meanness. The whole story turns upon the jealousy between the navy and air force over the control of the Coastal Command. The hero, a young airman, is accused of bombing and sinking a British submarine. He has not in fact done so, but is found guilty by a board of inquiry composed of naval officers who are faintly prejudiced against him. Later in the book he is exonerated by a roundabout but curiously convincing chain of circumstances in which the chief link is a dirty joke about contraceptives. The way in which the author handles him shows what an advantage it is for a thinking man to live sometimes on equal terms with men who are not "thinking". The young airman is completely unintellectual. His hobbies are getting difficult stations on

the wireless and fitting together model ships of which he buys the parts ready-made. He is conducting a flirtation with a barmaid, whom he finally marries, and there are whole chapters of the kind of conversation that one hears flung to and fro across saloon bars, full of *doubles entendres* and "Oo, aren't you awful!" But the author treats none of this ironically. He sees the young airman's point of view, because, presumably, he has at some time shared his experiences. He can stand inside him as well as outside him and realize that he is heroic as well as childish, competent as well as silly. The result is a good, simple story, pleasantly free from cleverness, and at times genuinely moving.

Nailcruncher, on the other hand, is one of the most pretentious novels I have read for a long time. It is an enormous, deliberately farcical story about some semi-imbecile Jews, first in the Greek island of Cephalonia and later in Switzerland. What is chiefly remarkable in it is the length and disgustingness of its scatological passages. As soon as I came on the first of these I turned back to the blurb on the dust-jacket, well knowing what adjective I should find, and, sure enough, there it was— "Rabelaisian". It is curious that this word is invariably used as a term of praise. We are forever being told that whereas pornography is reprehensible, "hearty Rabelaisian humour" (meaning a preoccupation with the W.C.) is perfectly all right. This is partly, perhaps, because Rabelais is nowadays seldom read. So far from being "healthy" as is always alleged, he is an exceptionally perverse, morbid writer, a case for psycho-analysis. But people who lead strict lives have dirty minds, and Rabelais had a considerable underground reputation in Victorian times. Archdeacon Grantly read him on the sly, it will be remembered, and the bachelor in Browning's poem possessed "a little edition of Rabelais". Perhaps the only way of making him respectable was to maintain that there is something "normal" and "hearty" in coprophilia, and the legend has survived into an age when few people have glanced at his dirtier passages. At any rate "Rabelaisian" is a correct description of *Nailcruncher.* If you like scatology, this is the book for you; if you don't, I should steer clear of it, for long passages in it are calculated to make any ordinary person physically sick.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I was born in 1903 at Motihari, Bengal, the second child of an Anglo-Indian family. I was educated at Eton, 1917-21, as I had been lucky enough to win a scholarship, but I did no work there and learned very little, and I don't feel that Eton has been much of a formative influence in my life.

From 1922 to 1927 I served with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. I gave it up partly because the climate had ruined my health, partly because I already had vague ideas of writing books, but mainly because I could not go on any longer serving an imperialism which I had come to regard as very largely a racket. When I came back to Europe I lived for about a year and a half in Paris, writing novels and short stories which no one would publish. After my money came to an end I had several years of fairly severe poverty during which I was, among other things, a dish-washer, a private tutor and a teacher in cheap private schools. For a year or more I was also a part-time assistant in a London bookshop, a job which was interesting in itself but had the disadvantage of compelling me to live in London, which I detest. By about 1935 I was able to live on what I earned by writing, and at the end of that year I moved into the country and set up a small general store. It barely paid its way, but it taught me things about the trade which would be useful if I ever made a venture in that direction again. I was married in the summer of 1936. At the end of the year I went to Spain to take part in the Civil War, my wife following soon afterwards. I served four months on the Aragon front with the P.O.U.M. militia and was rather badly wounded, but luckily with no serious after-effects. Since that, except for spending a winter in Morocco, I cannot honestly say that I have done anything except write books and raise hens and vegetables.

What I saw in Spain, and what I have seen since of the inner working of left-wing political parties, have given me a horror of politics. I was for a while a member of the Independent Labour Party, but left them at the beginning of the present war because I

considered that they were talking nonsense and proposing a line of policy that could only make things easier for Hitler. In sentiment I am definitely "left", but I believe that a writer can only remain honest if he keeps free of party labels.

The writers I care most about and never grow tired of are Shakespeare, Swift, Fielding, Dickens, Charles Reade, Samuel Butler, Zola, Flaubert and, among modern writers, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence. But I believe the modern writer who has influenced me most is Somerset Maugham, whom I admire immensely for his power of telling a story straightforwardly and without frills. Outside my work the thing I care most about is gardening, especially vegetable gardening. I like English cookery and English beer, French red wines, Spanish white wines, Indian tea, strong tobacco, coal fires, candlelight and comfortable chairs. I dislike big towns, noise, motor cars, the radio, tinned food, central heating and "modern" furniture. My wife's tastes fit in almost perfectly with my own. My health is wretched, but it has never prevented me from doing anything that I wanted to, except, so far, fight in the present war. I ought perhaps to mention that though this account that I have given of myself is true, George Orwell is not my real name.

I am not at the moment writing a novel, chiefly owing to upsets caused by the war. But I am projecting a long novel in three parts, to be called either *The Lion and the Unicorn* or *The Quick and the Dead,* and hope to produce the first part by some time in 1941.

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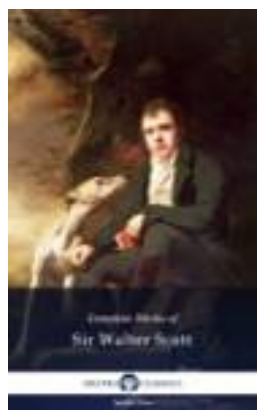

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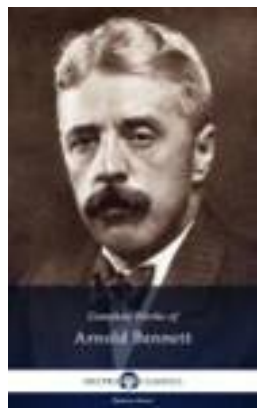

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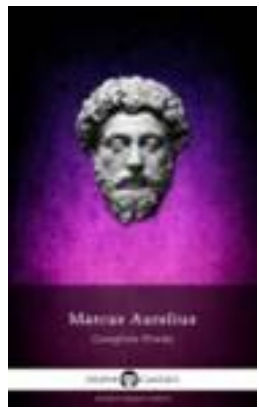

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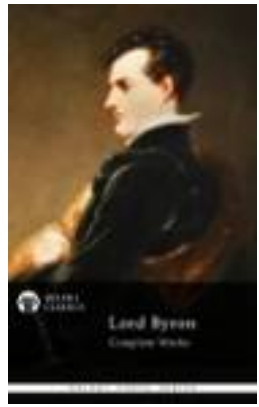

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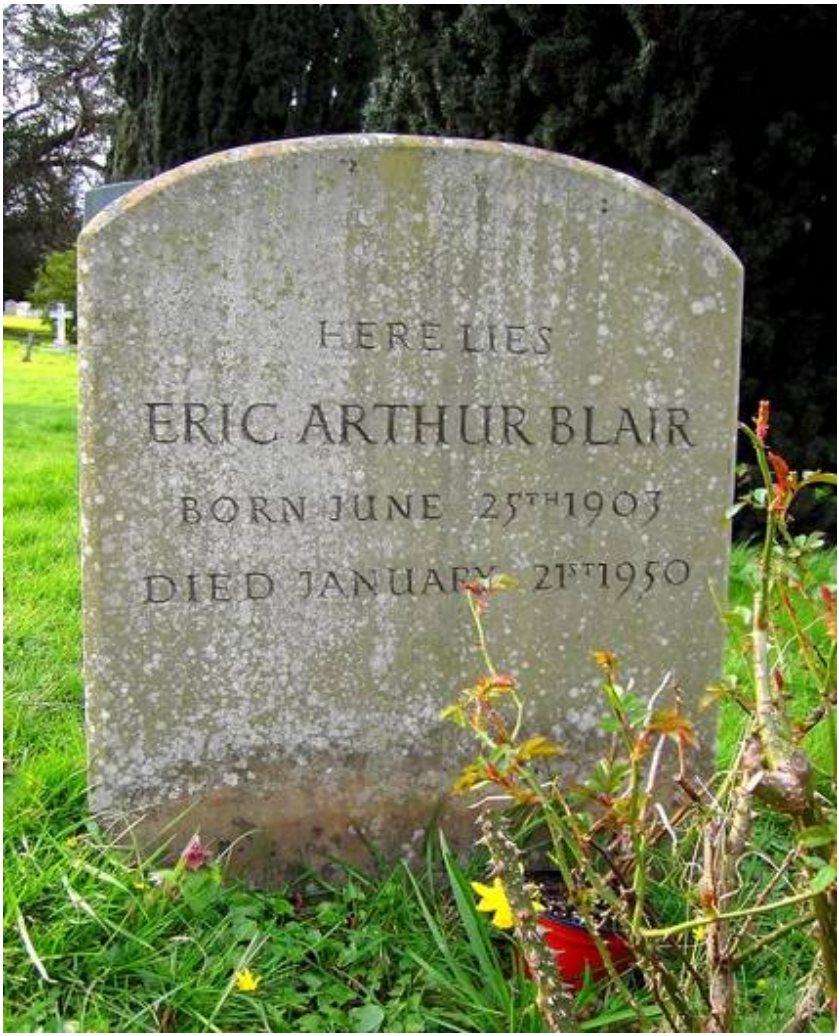
Sutton Courtenay Cemetery — Orwell's final resting place



George Orwell's grave